

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of English Language and Literature

DIPLOMA THESIS

The Role of Women in the works of Jean Rhys

Supervisor: PhDr. Tereza Topolovská

Author: Bc. Petra Schnebergerová

Secondary School Teacher Education (EN-CZ)

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I worked on this thesis, titled “The Role of Women in the works of Jean Rhys” on my own and that I used only sources cited in the References section. I also declare that I have not previously used this work to gain any other academic degree than the one applied for.

Prague, 5th December 2014

Petra Schnebergerová

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Author:

Bc. Petra Schnebergerová

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze three female protagonists of Jean Rhys's novels and the role they play in the entirety of Rhys's work - Anna Morgan of *Voyage in the Dark*, Marya Zelli of *Quartet* and Antoinette Mason of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The thesis focuses on three topics connected with Rhys's heroines that recur in all the discussed novels: female passivity, objectification of women, and female escapism and self-destructive behaviour.

The analysis proves that there is a significant autobiographical input in all Rhys's main female characters which is manifested through the conformity of their depiction. It is found out that through the coherence of their portrayal, Rhys employed the autotherapeutic role of fiction and instinctively brought questions of race and female suffering in view. Although this thesis highlights the common features of Rhys's writing, it also observes the development of Rhys's approach to her topics throughout her life. The negativity with which Rhys constructs her female characters is ascribed to her lifelong dedication to maximal truthfulness of the representation of reality.

Keywords

Jean Rhys, autobiography, escapism, female characters, objectification, passivity, self-destructive behaviour, therapeutic writing

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Autor:

Bc. Petra Schnebergerová

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Abstrakt

Záměrem této práce je provést analýzu tří hlavních hrdinek románů Jean Rhys a role, kterou hrají v jejím díle jako celku. Jmenovitě Anny Morgan z románu *Voyage in the Dark*, Marye Zelli z románu *Quartet* a Antoinette Mason z románu *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Širé Sargasové moře). Práce je zaměřena na tři témata spojená s ženskými hrdinkami Jean Rhys, která se opakovaně objevují ve všech rozebíraných románech: ženskou pasivitu, objektivizaci žen, jejich eskapismus a sebedestruktivní tendence.

Provedená analýza dokazuje, že všechny hlavní ženské postavy nesou významné autobiografické rysy, což se projevuje jednotností jejich vyobrazení. Bylo zjištěno, že právě tato uniformita vyobrazení umožnila Rhys zapojit autoterapeutickou rovinu psaní a velmi instiktivně tak čtenáři přiblížit otázky rasy a utrpení žen. Přesto, že tato práce zdůrazňuje především styčné body tvorby Jean Rhys, sleduje také vývoj jejího postoje k jmenovaným tématům v průběhu jejího života. Negativnost, se kterou Rhys konstruuje své postavy, je připsána její celoživotní oddanosti maximálně pravdivému vyobrazení reality.

Klíčová slova

Jean Rhys, autobiograficita, eskapismus, ženské postavy, objektivizace, pasivita, sebedestruktivní tendence, terapeutická tvorba

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“I write to save someone’s life,
probably my own.”

- Clarice Lispector -

Introduction

Jean Rhys, as a writer, was literary active through 1930s and 1940s, became obscure and mostly forgotten after that, only to be rediscovered again in the 1970s after her most renowned novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published.

Hers is a women's fiction and it is aimed at depicting an experience of being a female in a world that is cruel and hostile to them. Portraying the female suffering as truthfully as possible had always been one of Rhys's main creative goals.

The main focus of this thesis will be an analysis of Rhys's female characters and the similarities and dissimilarities of their depiction in three novels written at a different stage of her literary career. Within the set of Rhys's characters, female sex predominates significantly. This thesis will focus on the protagonists – Anna, Marya and Antoinette of the novels *Voyage in the Dark*, *Quartet* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, respectively. All three bear striking resemblance to each other as far as character traits, mindset, disposition or background are concerned, and they ultimately share a tragic fate. They are weak willed, naïve and easily influenced by people around them. They tend to obsessive behaviour; let themselves be controlled by their fears, mood swings, or men. In the time of crisis they seek comfort in solitude, their inner self, memories, dreams or alcohol. Often, rather than facing their problems and taking responsibility for their own fate, they break down. All of them struggle with their self-esteem, self-image and their sexuality. They are alienated in their surroundings and they are unsure where they really belong.

This diploma thesis, in its theoretical part, will attempt to define the three predominant motifs: passivity, exploitation and objectification of women in the patriarchal society, and escapist and self-destructive tendencies.

As all of the discussed novels are autobiographical, the theoretical part will also include a chapter on Rhys's biography, possible sources of her inspiration and the significance of her colonial background. In many aspects, her main characters embody her own opinions, character traits, fears and flaws.

The practical part will attempt to examine how closely Rhys's characters copy her personality and fate, and what circumstances propelled her to portray them in this particular way through analysis and comparison of the three pivotal motifs of the novels. The depiction of passivity, objectification and escapism is such a stable element of Rhys's writing that it certainly serves a higher purpose and holds a deeper meaning in the bigger frame of her work. It will also be discussed whether there is any traceable development of her approach to these motifs. The negativity with which she portrays her female characters cannot be simply and end in itself and with that in mind it will be further analysed.

The importance of Rhys's contribution to the question of female autonomy lies in exposing the experience of a coloured woman in an environment that is predominantly white. (Tolan in Waugh, 2006, p. 331) In the period that witnessed increase in the attempts to promote the emancipation of women by "independent actions, assertiveness, and rejection of feminine passivity" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2009, p. 222), Rhys maintained her conservative views and continued to write tragic stories with the heroines unable to achieve liberty, autonomy, happiness, respect or equal treatment. It might be that she did not know anything else or it might be her pessimistic nature that prevented her from writing otherwise, however, there is a chance that it was a fully conscious choice of a professional author.

With regards to innumerable sources it may be stated that in order to relieve her neurotic mind, or simply in order to earn money, Rhys took her own extraordinary experience and instinctively turned it into the subject matter of her novels, thus providing a painfully private testimony of the unspoken issues of her era. Comparison of textual evidence with Rhys's biography will be carried out to verify the accuracy of this hypothesis.

1 Theoretical part

1.1 Jean Rhys - writing the self

All of Rhys's novels are considered autobiographical. When it comes to subject matter, she "clearly drew closely on an unusual life experience [...]" (Savory, 1999, p. 25). Throughout her work, she definitely managed to immortalize some of the most significant milestones of her life.

While Savory does not deny the autobiographicality of Rhys's work, she also warns that Rhys did not hesitate to fabricate and create her own extensively fictionalized version of her life¹. On the other hand, others, such as Lilian Pizzichini, the author of Rhys's latest biography *The Blue Hour*, adamantly fill in the white spots of Rhys's biography with the information taken from her fiction, thus providing an unusually coherent and almost suspiciously comprehensive account of Rhys's life.

Although, there is still an ongoing debate about the extent and credibility of the parts of Rhys's work inspired by her life, the fact that there is a great number of corresponding facts, events and attitudes is undeniable.

This chapter is aimed at presenting such biographical facts that are reflected in her novels and appear relevant to the attempted analysis.

Jean Rhys, born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams in 1890 in Dominica is considered one of the most significant literary figures of the 20th century, with a very harsh and turbulent life and greatly underrated creative achievements.

She was born to Minna Lockhart, a white Dominican Creole of Scottish and Irish descent, and William Rees Williams, a doctor of Welsh origin, and until the age of 16, she lived in Dominica, a British colony, as a member of the minor white population of the island. Growing up, however, she was surrounded by people of various ethnicities, and came in contact with different cultures and languages. Although she wanted to and tried to associate with coloured girls, she was most of the time forced by circumstances and prejudice to associate primarily with white girls at the Convent School, where she was educated.

¹ Most notably in her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please*.

In 1907, at the age of 16, she left Dominica to go to England with her father's sister to attend the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge. There she stayed for one term, before moving to the Academy of Dramatic Art, then also known as Tree's School. In 1908, after spending two terms there, she was forced to leave the academy, since her father had died and Rhys's mother could not afford to keep her there anymore.

After that, Rhys was encouraged by her mother to come back to Dominica. However, as Rhys says in her autobiography: "I was determined not to do that, and in any case I was sure that they didn't want me back." (Rhys, 1979, p. 105) and so she went to a theatrical agent in London, got a job as a chorus girl² and went on tour. According to Pizzichini, Rhys's mother had lost a cherished daughter, shortly before the birth of Jean, and never fully recovered from the loss. That left Rhys feeling overlooked, insubstantial, almost ghost-like and unwanted (p. 7). This early separation from her family may have led to her passivity, insecurity, cynicism, impracticality, poor communication skills and dysfunctional relationships later in life.

Rhys did not enjoy being a chorus girl. She was shy, frightened of the audience and she believed she did not really belong to the stage. She soon grew tired of all the pretence of stage life and she felt alienated by her foreign accent anyway. Thus her first love affair has been a welcomed opportunity to leave the chorus, which she eventually did³.

The man, whom she fell in love with and whose mistress she eventually became, was Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith. He was twenty years her senior and their affair lasted eighteen months. Partly, she became his lover for financial reasons, for she was vain and always dreamt of rising above her stature and becoming a lady. "All she knew was that she liked pretty things and handsome men, nice dinners and soppy songs." (Pizzichini, 2010, pp. 88-89)

Rhys herself, in her autobiography states: "He had money. I had none." (Rhys, 1979, p. 114), but eventually she came to worship him. "When I first met the

² According to Free Dictionary, 'chorus girl' is "a female dancer in a theatrical chorus", Rhys was a part of the chorus for a musical comedy *Our Miss Gibbs* for a year and a half, performing on winter and summer tours, and worked in choruses of music-hall sketches in the three-months gap between the tours, for she had nowhere to go and had nothing to live off.

³ Even though, as she states in her autobiography, she continued taking lessons for a while after that: "[M]y lover imagined that I could get on in the theatre and insisted that I should have singing and dancing lessons. Dutifully I attended them." (Rhys, 1979, p. 113)

man I rather disliked him, and why I came to worship him I don't quite know." (p. 114). She relied on him, almost naively and childishly; she willingly offered all of herself to him. "She idealised him, she gave him all the love she could not give herself." (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 97)

It was about that time when people started to perceive her as a 'tart'⁴. She was not welcomed in the boarding houses Lancelot paid for. Each landlady seemed to hate her. She became very self-conscious, which often left her ill and in fever and occasionally drove her to alcoholism. She anticipated that he would grow tired of her. Nevertheless, it left her devastated when he ended the affair. Although for some time after their break up, he continued to support Jean financially, she is believed to have engaged in prostitution for some time, and supposedly it was him who paid for a complicated abortion she went through after getting pregnant with another man.

Rhys eventually recovered and decided that she wanted to leave England. In 1917, while being engaged to another, she met Jean Lenglet, a Dutch-French poet, accepted his proposal and in 1919 went to Holland to marry him. In *Smile Please* she wrote about their engagement: "It came to me in a flash that here it was, what I had been waiting for, for so long. Now I could see escape." (Rhys, 1979, p. 112)

They went to live in Paris, where in 1920 Rhys gave birth to a boy, William, who died in infancy and in 1922 to a girl, Maryvonne⁵. In 1924 she met a writer Ford Madox Ford. Ford encouraged Rhys to start writing, became her patron and suggested the pen name Jean Rhys. The two became lovers. Under his mentorship, she published a short story collection *The Left Bank*, novels *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and few translations from French. Later, she got divorced and remarried Leslie Tilden Smith, an occasional literary agent.

Despite political and social changes of the 1920s and the rising of totalitarianism, Rhys chose retreat to "privacy over public activism [and] continued writing the same kinds of self-absorbed experimental fictions she had composed in the early twenties [...]" (Benstock, 1987, p. 424). Those were

⁴ a harlot, a prostitute, a paid female companion

⁵ The relationship between Rhys and her daughter was so complicated and unusual that another whole work could be written about it.

Voyage in the Dark and *Good Morning, Midnight*. It became hard for Rhys to find suitable readers, because her “fictions seemed to exploit an entirely private, even secret, female experience” (p. 424). She did not get acknowledged or paid properly for her works; she battled alcoholism, poverty, devastating depressions and paranoia. She felt herself a failure, became bitter, resentful and uninspired. In 1936 she returned to Dominica for a short visit⁶. Pizzichini notes:

Going home was a matter of urgency: she had to go home to keep writing. She had moved through scenes of Parisian and London life like a sponge, soaking up atmosphere and detail, yet so absorbed in her own travails that she was unable to connect with external reality. [...] She had been cut adrift from her roots, and had found no haven. (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 1)

Unfortunately, she had found most of her old acquaintances dead, most of the places of her childhood gone and most of the past forgotten, which only put another burden to her already troubled mind and deepened her loneliness. She believed that the age she lived in was terrible and that it ruined and corrupted people.

So, in the 1940s she retreated from publicity to seclusion. Nobody saw it fit to write about her, nobody knew where she went or what she did and she was as good as dead to the literary market. The critical acclaim she received for her writings was but a mild one.

With her second and then third husband she lived “somewhat obscurely in various cheap lodgings” across England (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 221). During that time, she started to write *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but she is believed to have burnt the manuscript, and it was not until 1966 that the book was published⁷. It immediately gained popularity. About her sudden fame, she commented “It has come too late.” She felt too old, unattractive, unhappy and angry. Jean Rhys died in 1979, her dying words being: “More rouge darling. Please apply more rouge.”

⁶ for the first and only time in her life

⁷Pizzichini notes that Rhys constructed the whole story all over again in her mind, perfected it and groomed it there until it was fully formed. However, after yet another drinking session, she forgot all of it and had to start all over again. (p. 222)

1.1.1 Writing postcolonialism

Rhys's work is most often categorized as modernist and postcolonial. Being born in West Indies, at that time an English colony, Rhys incorporated in her work the experience of colonial childhood. Boehmer (cf. Waugh, 2006) defines postcolonialism as follows: "[It] questions, overturns, and/or critically refracts colonial authority - its epistemologies and forms of violence, its claims to superiority." (p. 341)

In her correspondence and her autobiography, Rhys made it clear that in her mind, Caribbean spelled homely and idyllic, whereas European stood for hostile and unfriendly. Rhys never moved back to Dominica, even though she wished to die there one day. Her concept of the Caribbean thus remained an idealized child's perception, paradoxically making it the more ever-present and haunting.

Imperialism, among other things, seems to have been at the root of her wretched life. Both she and her heroines experience liminality and subalternity. It renders feelings of anxiety, out-of-placeness and inadequacy in them. Being coloured and female in a Eurocentric environment leaves them feeling doubly marginalized, voiceless, irrelevant and profoundly poor. They are inherently helpless, submissive and passive when faced with a stronger presence⁸. They indulge in a deeply rooted nostalgia for their paradise lost. They suffer profoundly and are unable to live properly in the world of capitalism. Cornered by pressures and violations of the greedy society, they find their only way out through escape.

Rhys did not protest against colonial oppression by ardent self-determination or passionate resistance. Her contribution to the postcolonial movement lies in depicting the female suffering and destitution in its harsh reality, seemingly devoid of empathy. Her raw writing style combined with techniques of psychoanalysis provides a very coarse, realistic and painful reading experience.

According to Saito, Rhys challenges "the homogenizing Western concept of women" (Saito, 2010, p. 13). She gives voice to the voiceless. She lays bare their fears, their vulnerability, their desires and ambitions that could never be

⁸ Historically represented by the English colonial oppressors, in Rhys's work represented by men.

fulfilled. “Rhys’s work demands that female suffering be witnessed.” (Maslen cf. Haliloğlu, p. 33)

Neither Rhys nor her protagonists ever felt at home. Everywhere, they were considered strangers, alienated by always being the Other. In Europe, they were judged for being coloured, with foreign accent and different mentality. In Caribbean, they were judged for being members of the white minority, descendants of the former slave masters. And in all of this, their only desire probably was to simply be “[a]n ant, just like all the other ants; not the sort of ant that has too long a head or a deformed body or anything like that.” (Rhys, 1975, p.91)

Where Rhys saved herself by writing which served her as a therapeutic tool, her heroines were hardly ever so fortunate.

Two of her three novels which will be discussed in this thesis show direct traces of postcolonial tuning. Huge part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place in the Caribbean and it presents many colonial issues and characters. *Voyage in the Dark* encompasses the Caribbean element through the main protagonist’s memories and daydreams. *Quartet* is the only novel of the three which does not depict Caribbean in any direct manner.

1.1.2 Autotherapeutic role of fiction

Rhys was a troubled and neurotic woman. She often felt lethargic, lonely, irrelevant, indifferent and depressed. She was lazy and often found it hard to find anything worthwhile. (Melly & Wyndham, 1984, p. 56)

Passive and impractical in her life, Rhys was preoccupied mostly by herself and her inner turmoil. She felt prisoner of the demanding society. She never got used to the conformities of life and remained childlike and difficult throughout her life. As Diana Athill, Rhys’s chief editor, admitted: “I feel a fraud when described as ‘Jean Rhys’s editor’, because in her writing she was such a perfectionist that she needed no editing. But she did need a nanny.” (Athill, 2000, para. 5)

So for Rhys, writing was the only sensible occupation considering her whimsicality, frequent mood swings and health problems. She, however, had an

ambiguous attitude towards writing. In one of her letters, she states: “I never wanted to write. I wished to be happy and peaceful and obscure. I was *dragged* into writing by a series of coincidences – Mrs Adam, Ford, Paris – need for money.” (Melly & Wyndham, 1984, p. 65)

Mrs Adams and Ford liked her writing and encouraged her to write more. Rhys used to write at difficult times of her life and she wrote out her own experience. She admitted that she wrote *Quartet* “in a rather horrid little rue” (p. 101) after her unfortunate affair ended. *Voyage in the Dark* was composed from her diary notes some time later possibly due to financial need, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* took shape as her husband was dying.

In her letters to Diana Athill Rhys admitted that although writing poetry eased her mind, writing fiction was the most horrible thing she ever had to do. She strived for perfection. Each line had to overflow with meaning. No word was left in that was not significant enough. She only desired to write true books. When she did not feel she could, she did not.

Rhys also stated that by writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she wanted to “hit back” (Melly & Wyndham, 1984, p. 64) for the lies that were being spread about her. However, in anticipation of a new writing, she felt her depression and lethargy lifted, she felt alive once more.

Whether or not she ever openly admitted that writing had therapeutic effects on her, it clearly served as a way to vent her hurt and rage and it had the power to take her mind off things and keep her neurosis at bay.

A quote by Carl G. Jung says: “Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible.” (Jung cf. Gaither, 2012, p. 1196) Rhys certainly felt lonely and certainly accumulated many a disagreeable topic throughout her life, always living on the margins.

Writing, apart from generating some income and keeping her sane, thus provided her with a chance to communicate and bring into view subjects fundamental to her experience and perception of the world - female passivity, objectification and escapism among them.

1.1.3 The Novels

1.1.3.1 *Voyage in the Dark*

Voyage in the Dark is Rhys's 1934 novel, written during her stay in Paris. Although it was published as her fourth book, it will be mentioned firstly here, because its theme seems to correspond with the early stages of Rhys's own life.

The story follows the current life of Anna Morgan, an 18 year-old girl born in West Indies, who came to live in London only two years before.

As the novel's back cover states, "the book is an account of Anna's fall". The reader joins in on Anna's journey as she finds herself falling from complete innocence to decline, corruption and unhappiness. Despite her best intentions, her first love is destined to end and it leaves her unprotected and devastated.

Her further attempts to find happiness and financial stability in the arms of men fail repeatedly. Her naivety, passivity, inexperience and poor choice of company leave her abandoned by all her acquaintances and facing madness. The story, according to Joannou (1999):

[e]ngages with love outside marriage and with abortion – and indeed with two clashing worlds, one the society in which Rhys's protagonist, Anna, lives, one the Caribbean world she keeps within her head. (p. 144)

Anna's tragic story elaborates on the notion of "entrapment, betrayal, and exclusion suffered by women in the first decades of the twentieth century" (Benstock, 1987, p. 6) and provides Rhys with a chance to revisit and recount her own life in London during the 20's, as well as her childhood in the West Indies from the distance of time, space and fiction.

1.1.3.2 *Quartet*

The novel *Quartet* was first published in 1928 as *Postures*. Although it was published as her third book, in this novel Rhys seems to creatively build upon her own life in her 30's after she got married and moved to Paris with her husband. That, considering autobiographical factors, places it thematically after *Voyage in the Dark*.

Marya Zelli, the main heroine of *Quartet*, has been living happily in Paris with her Polish husband for some time, when she learns that he was taken to jail for theft and will not be able to support her financially from now on. At first she

is very supportive, goes to visit him regularly and hopes for better future, but later on, in an attempt to keep her social status intact, she gets involved with a seductive married couple that offers her help.

From there her happiness plummets downhill as the relation becomes obsessive, oppressive, controlling and unstable.

Marya's failure to get clear of the relation in time and her irresoluteness about her own future eventually leads to her corruption.

The novel is a highly fictional account of Rhys's own affair with Ford Madox Ford and his companion Stella Bowden during Rhys's stay in Paris.⁹

1.1.3.3 *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The 1966 novel was published when Rhys was 76 years old. It was published 27 years after all of her other books at a time when no one was sure if she was even alive anymore.

Wide Sargasso Sea has come to be Rhys's most known work. It is intertextually tied to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, being "a kind of prequel" to the novel (Rhys, 2001, p. viii introduction). The book is considered to be "a rewriting of the classic text from the point of view of the most marginalized character in Brontë's novel: Bertha Mason" (Rhys, 2001, p.vii introduction).

Antoinette Mason, the protagonist of the novel, is a coloured woman from Jamaica, who is wedded to an English gentleman in an arranged marriage. The gentleman turns out to be Mr Rochester of *Jane Eyre*, while Antoinette turns out to be Bertha, Rochester's mad wife from the attic.

The novel depicts Antoinette's childhood, her journey into womanhood, her metamorphosis into Bertha and her unhappy union with Rochester. It also depicts Rochester's prejudice, superstition and hypocrisy as regards to Antoinette and her whole family, which, fuelled by the hatred of local Jamaican people towards the whites¹⁰, lead to a tragic end.

⁹ Together with *Good Morning Midnight* (1939) and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931), Rhys's four early novels [although all indisputably works of fiction] follow the most important milestones of Rhys's own life from 1910s to 1930s.

¹⁰ Antoinette's father was a white Englishman and a former slave owner, her mother was of mixed origin. However, both her mother and Antoinette look white in contrast to local people. Antoinette's father used to use local coloured people as slaves, thus Antoinette's mother and Antoinette herself are hated by locals not only for associating with white people, but also for being wealthy.

Apart from the setting, this novel has the most non-transparent autobiographical input of all her works, since Rhys's hands were tied by Brontë's model. However, she seemed to have embodied her late life opinions about love, marriage, fate and religion into it through the character of Christophine, an old Martinique woman, who practices obeah and who is Antoinette's closest friend. It is Christophine who is always present at times of crisis. It is her, who remains self-possessed, realistic, and almost cynical while everyone else around her faces chaos. Her attitude is shaped by years of experience and it is mostly her opinions the reader is presented with, not Antoinette's.

1.2 Passivity

Passivity in women belongs to predominant recurring character traits of Rhys's protagonists and it appears to be at the root of their relationship and life failures. To various degrees and in various forms, it can be detected in all the three discussed female protagonists. There is enough textual evidence to claim that Rhys's protagonists are passive, naive, weak-willed and easily influenced. They cannot communicate effectively and are unable to maintain healthy relationships, especially with men.

In the practical part of this thesis it will be discussed whether it was Rhys's creative intention to make her characters so, or whether it was brought about unintentionally by her own character traits, her heritage, or by the circumstances of her upbringing. It will also be discussed whether the notion of female passivity changes throughout the novels.

In the field of linguistics, pragmatics recognizes four different styles of communication: assertive, aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive.

Benedict provides a definition of passive communication as such:

Passive communication is a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs. Passive communication is usually born of low self-esteem. These individuals believe: "I'm not worth taking care of." (Benedict, n.d., para. 1)

As Benedict further summarizes, passive individuals are unable to fend for themselves and often have their rights infringed on. If hurt or angered, they will not react defensively, but bottle their frustration up. Thus, when the stress is built up and the tolerance threshold overstepped, they erupt out of proportion, often aggressively. Such individuals often cannot see their needs met, since they cannot express them properly. They have little respect for themselves, are prone to anxiety and depression and feel out of control all the time. They often ignore real issues and their feelings, thus they never mature. Their speaking is soft and apologetic with scarce eye contact.

According to Jung's theory, passive style of communication is a common characteristic of introverted people. Galen's typology of temperaments claims

that passivity designates individuals with melancholic temperament. They are often described as self-conscious, timid, compliant, reserved, sensitive, moody, slow, or irresolute. (Ekstrand, 2013, pp. 4-6)

Melancholics' reactions to stimuli are weak; they do not get excited easily. However, according to Kant's typology of temperament, "slow, long-lasting and deep emotional reactions" are typical for melancholics (Strelau, 2002, p. 4). Being in a crowd or talking before a large group of people drain their energy. They prefer retirement and seclusion; few friends to many acquaintances. They are reflective, preoccupied by the past, given to brooding and daydreaming, prone to neurosis. They long for the ultimate good and eternity, and ordinary everyday struggles leave them with deeply imbedded feelings of sadness and disillusion. They are despondent and without courage, afraid of disgrace and humiliation. (Ekstrand, 2013, pp. 4-6)

In the field of sexual ethics, within his theory of sexual types, Otto Weininger quite radically claims that: "All the spiritual and material riches of humanity had been created by males; woman was negative and passive, whereas man was positive and active." (Weininger, 2005, p. 142)

Rephrasing Aristotle, he also states that: "in the process of procreation the male principle is the formative, active element, *logos*, while the female element represents passive matter" (p. 142).

Further, he claims that women tend to cling to men, passively adopting men's views, preferences and dislikes. They are unable and unwilling to make their own decisions or escape from the domination. That they perceive "every word that he utters as an exciting event" and do "not perceive this influence of Man as a diversion from the course of [their] own development". That they love to follow, be lead and thus be completely passive. (p. 237)

Concerning the sexual act a woman only wishes to play the passive part, never the active one. Her ego is undermined, she chooses to be submissive. According to this theory, she is "matter, which passively assumes any form" (Weininger, p. 289) shaping herself in accordance to the will of men. She looks up to them in an almost God-like fashion.

He goes so far as to define a term *the hysterical woman*. According to him it is

a woman who has simply accepted the complex of male and social valuations in passive obedience, instead of wishing to give free rein to her sensual nature in the highest possible degree (p. 246).

1.3 Objectification

In the discussed novels, there are many instances of women being objectified by men or otherwise exploited. Each of the protagonists faces humiliation, degradation and harsh treatment by men to a certain degree. Rhys incorporates in her writing topics such as strong man versus weak woman opposition, the concept of a woman as men's property, sex as commerce, or the autonomy and self-image of women irrevocably dependent on men.

Objectification theory was first proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997. As a term it means to see something animate, usually a person, as an object. Objectification as a psychological and social phenomenon often figures in feminist theories or sexism. It is mostly connected to sexual objectification of women; objectification of women by men, or by women themselves. It is recognized by radical feminism, together with exploitation of women, as prevalent and standard practice in patriarchal society, where women's rights and their sexual liberties are continuously oppressed by men. Women are considered subordinate to men, who are in turn considered inherently abusive. Sexual violence and harassment against women occur regularly and men show no respect or regard for women.

According to LeMoncheck (1997):

[i]t is argued that male-dominated societies establish and perpetuate themselves by legitimizing the sexual intimidation of women in order to keep women in a state of dependency, wariness, and fear (p. 4).

Sexual objectification "occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire" (Bartky, 1990 cf. Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 8).

Objectified, a woman is stripped of her personal or intellectual traits and her individuality, and only the extent of her physical attractiveness and her

ability to provide pleasure to men are considered important. A woman becomes an instrument, expendable and replaceable. She is degraded and reduced to an object of pleasure and as such is often disposed of accordingly afterwards.

Otto Weininger, in his radical theory, claims that “The desire to be the object of sexual intercourse is the strongest desire of woman[.]” (p. 234) and he further elaborates:

[i]n sexual intercourse Woman wants to become an object, a thing, and Man really does her the favor of regarding her as a thing and not as a living human being with internal psychic processes. That is why Man despises Woman as soon as he has possessed her, and Woman feels that she is now despised, even though two minutes earlier she was idolized. (p. 312)

What he proposes is that prostitution is the only sensible occupation for a woman and a normal outcome. A woman desires to be raped, not to be respected or treated gently. She, in fact, seeks to be desired merely as a body and possession of someone else.

In opposition to Weininger, LeMoncheck (1997) claims that: “[...] for a woman, truly satisfying sex is monogamous sex with a single, loving, committed partner” (p. 41).

Women want to feel loved and cared for, safe to expose their vulnerability. They value intimacy, romance and emotional closeness as opposed to objectification, emotional distance and “the divorce of *eros* from romance” (p. 41) promoted by patriarchal society.

Gender-based oppression and sexism impacts all women, however “the *experience* of oppression varies qualitatively and quantitatively with class” (Szymanski et al., p. 8). Working-class women are the most affected ones, since sex is often the only way to insure some financial security, especially outside marriage.

Historically, *coverture*¹¹ guaranteed that the wife, together with all her material possessions, became part of her husband’s property upon marriage. Thus, women were reduced not only to sexual objects, but also to the necessary makeweight to a good bargain made between their family and a husband.

¹¹ “In law, the inclusion of a woman in the legal person of her husband upon marriage.” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary)

Female needs were overlooked and other than martial, heterosexual, or monogamous sexual needs had to be repressed.

Objectification can lead to frustration, depression, distorted self-image, sexual dysfunction, hopelessness or mental illness in women. It makes women feel undervalued, mistreated and exploited, which often leads to self-objectification and internalization of the concept (Szymanski et al., 2011). In men, it can lead to losing respect for women, perceiving them as burden, or developing feelings of hate towards them.

1.4 Escapism; self-destructive behaviour

Rhys's heroines employ various degrees and forms of escapism in the discussed novels, such as regressing to childhood, escaping into dreams or daydreams, retreating to alcoholism or shutting themselves off into closed rooms. This chapter aims at setting a theoretical framework for a further analysis of ways Rhys's protagonists escape reality and what it tells us about the author.

According to a theory of coping, escape-avoidance behaviour is one of the most common ways human organism responds to shock, distress, difficult life situations or emotional pain. Whether by regression to childhood or illness, escape to an alternative reality, self-isolation from a community, escape to drugs, alcohol or promiscuous behaviour or, in extreme cases, by self-harming or suicide attempts, a distressed person will try to avoid the stressor at all costs. The affected person usually wishes "that the situation would go away or somehow be over with" (Lazarus, 2013, p. 373) as they escape from it or avoid it. It is an irrational and often destructive way of relieving organism.

Usually, resorting to escape-avoidance behaviour indicates that the person trying to cope is lacking other, healthier ways of expressing and regulating their emotions, such as creative work, outdoor activities or therapy. They suffer from long-term depression, go through a physical or mental trauma or they simply do not feel relevant anymore, so they form a habit of escaping the situation. Hectic character of life, anxiety brought about by a capitalist society and the

uncertainties of the market arouse tendencies to escape and regression, especially among the middle and lower strata.

Successful life is viewed as a series of pre-planned events. We pursue education, leisure, career, marriage, and active retirement. Stanley Cohen & Laurie Taylor (1992) propose that although we usually accept the identities we gain by belonging to a particular part of the social world¹², sometimes even normal, everyday life with its habitual routine can be too difficult to bear. “We are all prey to a recurrent sense of dissatisfaction. We are all intermittently bored, frustrated and neurotic. Life is only occasionally there to be simply lived.” (p. 41)

Oftentimes, to escape from the despair of the ordinary and to keep the self-consciousness suspended, a person will go to great lengths. They will resort to various strategies to distance themselves from the ever-pressing reality and the “patterned way of existence” (p. 46). They fear that the automated, unreflective way of life hinder the formation of a unique identity. They feel prisoners in their own lives. (Cohen & Taylor, 1992)

To put up resistance to reality and to “evade its clutches” (p. 43), people will obsessively immerse in work or an activity; slip away into fantasies; rely on astrology or self-improvement classes; resort to detachment and cynicism; chase new experiences; create alternative identities or otherwise actively search for an alternative reality. As John Barth once nicely put it: “reality is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to live there” (Barth cf. Cohen & Taylor, 1992, p. 43).

Escape-avoidance tactics works well as a temporary way of relieving negative feelings and emotions but it is by no means a permanent solution. It can lead to breakdown of relationships and inability to survive in the real world.

In some cases, as the person cannot deal with feelings of guilt, shame or self-hatred, they resort to self-harm as a way of self-punishment. It does not always need to manifest in the direct form. Every choice we make, that affects our life negatively, is a form of self-harm, even when indirect. (Healey, 2012)

To situations resulting in escape-avoidance or self-destructive behaviour belong: experience of abuse in childhood or adolescence, loss of a parent in

¹² The social roles we take on as part of the life plan.

childhood due to death or separation, poor body image and low self-esteem, peer isolation and alienation, relationship break-up and many others. (Healey, 2012, pp. 24-25)

2 Practical part

2.1 *Voyage in the Dark* – Anna Morgan

2.1.1 Passivity - The misled youth

The melancholia of Anna Morgan, the female protagonist of *The Voyage in the Dark* is most distinctively represented by her ever-present feelings of sadness and coldness; she often shivers, cannot get warm and is disillusioned by her surroundings. England seems gloomy and cold to her and she feels deep nostalgia about her childhood and her homeland which were to her colourful, warm and full of exotic tastes and smells. English towns, to her, have

[...] always a little grey street leading to the stage-door of the theatre, another little grey street where your lodgings were; rows of little houses with chimneys like the funnels of dummy steamers and smoke the same colour as the sky: and a grey stone promenade running hard, naked and straight by the side of the grey-brown or grey-green sea [...] ¹³ (VG, p. 8).

They are all repetitive, suffocating, grey and dull and the whole of England as well. It is as if all her life energy evaporated at the moment of moving there.¹⁴ Her preoccupation with the past is traceable in long mental excursions to her childhood in the Caribbean. The central place, the truly genuine place is always the Caribbean. It evokes happier times, childhood, activity, bright colours and life energy. Rhys herself never got used to England, and English people terrified her, she expected to be judged for her slightly different appearance and her foreign accent.

It is Anna's sensitivity that causes her mood to be influenced by such seemingly insignificant stimulus as weather. She feels like crying just from hearing a piece of music, "a tinkling sound like water running" (VG, p. 10). She is passive, quiet, languid, insecure about her looks, her intelligence and deeply ashamed of her poverty and origins. She is aware of her insignificance and out-

¹³ Rhys, J. (1975). *Voyage in the Dark*. Reprinted. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. [Subsequent page references preceded with (VG) are given in parentheses in the text.]

¹⁴ For further reading on the symbolism of colours in Rhys's writing see Savory (1998), chapter 4: Writing colour, writing Caribbean: *Voyage in the Dark* and politics of colour (pp. 85-108)

of-placeness. Rhys herself stated in her autobiography “[...] I realise I was also a passive, dull girl.” (Rhys, 1979, p. 92) and she acknowledges it as her character trait in her correspondence as well, it is not surprising then, that she embeds the same characteristics in her heroines.

Subconsciously, Anna understands that she is ill-fitted for life, she expects to be let down by people. She feels like an outsider. She fears everybody can see she does not belong in England. That she is neither black nor fully white. Her passivity, in this case, might stem from an inherent subservience to everything European, brought forth by being in the oppressor’s environment, something that Rhys herself had to go through every day.

She is always self-conscious, fearing people are sneering at her. Once, she is even perceived as “[c]old and rather clammy” (VG, p. 12), which is then further explained:

‘She’s always cold¹⁵,’ Maudie said. ‘She can’t help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren’t you, kid? The girls call her the Hottentot. Isn’t it a shame?’ (VG, p. 12)

Somehow, Anna does not say anything in her own defence. It is almost as if she was only observing other people talking about her without any willingness to take part. Her presence is vague, almost phantom-like. This motif is very distinctive in *Voyage in the Dark* since Rhys aimed at depicting the present time of Anna’s life as a hazy, dream-like, vague state of being as opposed to the lushness of her memories of the West Indies. Although Rhys wrote *Voyage* many years apart from the actual events, the intensity of Anna’s passivity and her feelings is depicted with an outstanding sincerity and accuracy, because Rhys wrote from her own experience with the use of her personal diaries and notes from that time.

As the story progresses, Anna becomes more and more indifferent about what happens to her. In the words of Anne B. Simpson (2005),

¹⁵ Coldness, darkness and emptiness - most often cold, empty and shabby rooms - are recurring motifs of Rhys’s writing. It is either mirroring a deeply rooted nostalgia for her bright, hot and colourful homeland or it is a manifestation of her inherent inclination to depression and melancholy.

Anna's diction as she narrates is simple and understated, with a reliance on descriptions of physical sensation and minimal self-awareness about what is happening to her. (p. 22)

Anna hardly ever fends for herself; she hardly ever does anything by herself at all. She depends on her wittier, 'bitchier', extraverted and emancipated¹⁶ girlfriends to take her out or introduce her to people¹⁷. She depends on them for advice on clothes or men. To them she is merely "a worshipful page" (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 101), her passivity ensuring that she does not present a threat.

Eventually, Anna meets a much older, but rich man, who seems genuinely interested in her. Naive, young and inexperienced, she does not put up much fight, before she becomes his lover.

Pizzichini relates that Rhys might have been seduced by an old man when she was twelve years old, the man teaching her that love is a punishment, a constant "tension between violence and submission" (p. 35) and Rhys was thus made to believe that to love was "to give herself up entirely and hopelessly" (p. 34). This belief can be detected in Anna's later conduct towards Walter.

Vainly, Anna enjoys his attentions and his money. When he offers a payment for her company for the first time, she feels hurt, but does not try to stop him: "All right, if you like – anything you like, any way you like." (VG, pp. 33-34) She kisses his hand and begs him to write to her again tomorrow. Her desire to be loved properly remains overlooked for in her passivity; she cannot express it in any efficient way. Either she is unsure what she really wants – money and stature or real love – or she fears rejection.

She soon becomes overly attached and dependent. When Walter asks her, what she really wants to do, she replies: "I want to be with you. That's all I want." (VG, p. 44) That gives him a tremendous amount of power over her.

She spends most of her time in the flat Walter pays for; she gets up late, goes for an aimless walk, and then waits patiently and obediently for the rest of the day for him or his letter to arrive. In the presence of the Man in her life she has lost all her interest in cultivating her own self. "Everybody says the man's

¹⁶ but hardly beneficial or supportive

¹⁷ often secretly thinking she is better than them

bound to get tired and you read it all in books. But I never read now, so they can't get at me like that, anyway." (VG, p. 64)

She seems to exist solely for those flickering bits of attention and occasional nights he grants her. At night, she stays up composing in her mind letters to him she will never write or send. Considering Weininger's theory, she is passively depending on the man to lead her and complete her through the sexual act. She reincarnates his ideas, tastes and opinions into her own. Her sole purpose is to have sex with him, and thus become the passive part of the whole.

Anna's whole mental balance seems to depend on his presence. She feels empowered by the relation to the point where she finds her former friends irrelevant, strange and useless. It is as if her life as an independent human being had ended and being with Walter became the single purpose of it. "Sunday was the worst day, because he was never in London and there wasn't any hope he would send for me." (VG, p. 34)

However, she finds herself irrelevant and in no way an equal match for him. Her low self-esteem and insecurity sometimes generate in her states close to paranoia. Rhys suffered from paranoia herself, she was convinced that everywhere she went, people knew she was 'the foreigner'. (Pizzichini, 2010, pp. 228-229)

Walter sums up Anna's inaction and passivity perfectly in the following sequence: "Don't be like that," he said. "Don't be like a stone that I try to roll uphill and that always rolls down again." (VG, p. 44) His analogy hurts her deeply, but she is incapable to react properly. She drowns her embarrassment in alcohol.

When Walter announces that he is going to New York for a few months, it is an anticipated outcome. Anna does not say anything. When they part, she stays put and ladylike, she imagines herself saying:

The thing is that you don't understand. You think I want more than I do. I only want to see you sometimes, but if I never see you again I'll die. I'm dying now really, and I'm too young to die. (VG, p. 83)

But she remains silent. She rather bottles up all the pain and misery inside. She imagines herself dropping on her knees and begging him to stay, but instead she falls into a stupor and lethargy.

If there are any signs of resistance in Anna to her situation, they are only few and fleeting ones. Anna's behaviour is even less justifiable as, throughout the book, Rhys presents the reader with the exact opposite type of women. There are Maudie, Germaine or Ethel, who are playful, cheeky, witty and emancipated. They are not afraid to stand up for themselves against men. They are aware of the power that being a woman gives them and they beware of giving their heart to men fully. They manage their own income¹⁸ and live their lives boldly. However, it is important to keep in mind that in Rhys's time the most common standard of women conduct was the Victorian ideal of an obedient, subdued woman and from this point of view, Anna is in no way special.

Anna stays in this kind of feverish daze for the rest of the story. She is heartbroken, broke, desperate and lost. She likens her despair to drowning. "I'm nineteen and I've got to go on living and living and living." (VG, p. 94)

Now, she feels empty, abandoned and forlorn. Passively, she gets picked up by and involved in the wrong company. Since she lacks the drive and energy to do any better, she sinks into active prostitution. When she finds out she is pregnant, she is in such a state that she does not care what happens to her anymore as she wishes to die anyway. She becomes so sick, absent-minded and irrational that her acquaintances turn away from her. "If you knew the sort of girl she is I do not think you would have anything to do with her. She is not the sort of girl who will ever do anything for herself." (VG, p. 143)

By the time she undergoes a dubious abortion which may turn out fatal for her; she is fully self-consumed and resigned.

Anna's passivity, inaction, her complete devotion to Walter and resignation on herself contribute a great deal to her downfall. Her naivety and inexperience in combination with a hurry to break free from her former life as a chorus girl throw her in a whirlwind of events she is not yet prepared to manage. By her own lack of respect for herself and incapability to take her life in her own hands,

¹⁸ However, it is mostly by prostitution or companionship.

she is forcefully marched out of her childish naivety by the circumstances and it brings her on the brink of madness and death.

2.1.2 Objectification - The corrupted innocence

On their way from the theatre, Anna and her friend Maudie, make acquaintance with two men, Walter Jeffries and his friend. Jeffries is attentive towards Anna; he pays for her purchase and seems genuinely interested in her. Anna is flattered by his attentions and she believes him a gentleman, she gives him her address when he asks for it:

He spoke very quickly, but with each word separated from the other. He didn't look at my breasts or my legs, as they usually do [...] He looked straight at me and listened to everything I said with a polite and attentive expression[.] (VG, p. 12)

Maudie, who is older and more experienced, lectures Anna on rich men and advises her to utilize the opportunity as much as possible. Anna reminisces about her time as a chorus girl and some of the products the other girls talked about that could make you more charming. "No fascination without curves. Ladies, realize your charms." (VG, p. 15)

She is however too poor to buy such things. She is concerned by her looks. She loves pretty clothes and tries to look decent and ladylike, even though the need to be beautiful and have pretty clothes seems hateful to her. Her shabby clothes make her self-conscious, but her choice was purposeful: "She wore black. Men delighted in that sable colour, or lack of colour." (VG, p. 20) The importance of having nice clothes is repeatedly stressed in *Voyage in the Dark* but also in other Rhys's novels. Rhys believed in the power of beautiful dresses and wearing black was almost iconic to her. According to the theory of objectification: "[s]elf-objectification manifests in a greater emphasis placed on one's appearance" (Szymanski et al., p. 8). Rhys, same as her heroines, thus consciously or subconsciously encouraged their objectification.

Walter's intentions become clear as he starts to kiss her and she feels stupid and ashamed when he stops after she makes objections. It is expected that he will become mad. It was expected from her to sleep with him. He pays

for her taxi and sends her home. With the money he sends her, she buys new clothes and feels invigorated. However, she is confronted by her landlady and asked to move out: “I don’t hold with the way you go on [...] Crawling up the stairs at three o’clock in the morning. [...] I don’t want no tarts in my house, so now you know.” (VG, p. 26)

At the beginning of 20th century, women were still expected to meet the standards of the Victorian ideals of womanhood by aiming for a good marriage and domesticated life. Women were not encouraged to work, travel or hold property. Any woman, who did not meet these requirements – as in case of Anna (and Rhys) by dressing nicely, drinking and staying out late – was in the danger of facing criticism and being judged as a tart, or a woman without morals.

Anna does not ask Jeffries any questions when he goes out of town, she appears content with his visits and attentions, she thinks of love.

When he brings her to his house, she gives in to him. She knows she is not expected to stay the night and prepares to leave. “My handbag was on a table. He took it up and put some money into it.” (VG, p. 33) Thus sending a clear signal as to what type of relation he intends to maintain with her. It makes her feel miserable, ashamed and out of control, but she assumes her role. “Of course, you get used to things, you get used to anything. It was as if I had always lived like that.” (VG, p. 35)

Jeffries provides better flat for her and takes her out regularly keeping her like a proper mistress. Visited by Maudie, Anna dismisses her advice not to invest herself too much into it, as a sign of envy and jealousy.

‘Only, don’t get sappy about him,’ she said. ‘That’s fatal. The thing with men is to get everything you can out of them and not care a damn. You ask any girl in London – or any girl in the whole world if it comes to that – who really knows, and she’ll tell you the same thing.’ (VG, pp. 38-39)

To Maudie, it is perfectly acceptable to exploit men financially as they exploit women sexually so that they at least have something when the man tires of them. A man once told Maudie that girl’s clothes are more expensive than the girl inside them.

You can get a very nice girl for five pounds, a very nice girl indeed; you can even get a very nice girl for nothing if you know how to go about it. But you can't get a very nice costume for her for five pounds. (VG, p. 40)

Prostitution and female companionship are considered a normal practice. People are cheap. Men have the money and the power and women need to get by somehow anyway. Despite pretending interest, Jeffries remains untouched when Anna tries to relate her past, which is precious to her, to him. He only keeps buying her more drinks and when intoxicated, leads her upstairs. She is too hopelessly in love to defy him.

Meanwhile, Anna's only remaining immediate family disowns her. They fight among themselves for money and to them; she is a burden they are unwilling to carry. Taking care of her means expenditures they cannot be bothered to pay. All financial help from them is being withheld, partly because they know about Anna's affair and disapprove. Anna is not troubled: "I can get all the money I want and so that's all right. Is everybody happy? Yes, everybody's happy." (VG, p. 58)

The motif of money is ever-present in Rhys's writings and it is mostly due to money - or the lack of it - that Rhys's heroines are forced to maintain unequal or harmful relations. Rhys struggled with finances throughout her life and through her work; she criticizes the impossibility of women to achieve financial independence without a man.

The relation with Walter becomes a routine. However much Anna lives for it she is haunted, for she knows he will get tired of her eventually and there is nothing she can do. He will move on to another mistress as is the common practice of the era. "Everybody says, 'Get on.' [...] Get on or get out, they say. Get on or get out." (VG, p. 64)

It is also a common practice to bring the mistresses together, so Anna is acquainted to Germaine, a French woman, mistress of Walter's friend Vincent who is fully complacent with her role. She mocks Vincent and makes demands, she gets cross when he does not provide as much money as she expected. She also comments that English women are ugly and awful, because English men "don't care a damn" about them (VG, p. 71).

When he ends the affair, she is left broken and abandoned. She falls into a deep stupor from which she is disturbed by meeting Ethel Matthews, who offers Anna a job and a cheap living. However, her manicure and massage business is rather unsuccessful, for it is often judged as simply being a guise for providing paid sexual services and because Anna is a very indifferent and inefficient help. She does not like to work, so instead, she rejoins Laurie, her former friend, in accompanying men to fancy dinners and parties. Laurie lectures her: “Why worry about a man who’s well in bed with somebody else by this time? It’s sappy.” (VG, p. 100)

Anna does not resist when Laurie dresses her up nicely and offers her to her companions almost as if she was goods to sell. When asked why she associates with Laurie who is a known tart, she replies: “‘Well,’ I said, ‘why shouldn’t she be a tart? It’s just as good as anything else, as far as I can see.’” (VG, p. 109)

Lead by this attitude, suicidal and with no better idea what to do with herself Anna starts to take on lovers. When she finds out she is pregnant, she does not have the slightest idea whose it might be. Corrupted, sick and helpless, she does not care what happens to her anymore.

2.1.3 Escapism - The rediscovered childhood

From the very beginning of the novel, Anna consults everything she sees around herself with the memories of her homeland. As she comes to England, she cannot help but compare everything to it. She refers to it as somewhere exotic, hot, sunny, and full of floral scents mixed with the smell “of niggers and wood-smoke” (VG, p. 7) and breeze from the sea. Only later on, it is uncovered that she comes from the Caribbean. To get used to her new surrounding which is cold, alien and unwelcoming, she sometimes pretends that she is back home again:

[S]ometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of fire, or the bed clothes drawn up round me, was sun-heat; or I would pretend I was standing outside the house at home, looking down Market Street at the Bay.” (VG, p. 7)

Daydreaming about her island home and her childhood takes her away from the harsh realities of her new life in England which to her lacks diversity and colour. In her mind, England and the place where she grew up stand as separate entities, almost binary opposites that can never intersect. Anna's escapes to her memories of the Caribbean in *Voyage in the Dark* provided Rhys with a lot of space in which she could introduce the reality of her homeland to the European readers. "[S]he does not care for a European topography or description of places. The only place she cares to describe thoroughly is the Caribbean (in her escapes) – for her it is the centre of everything." (Savory, 1998, p. 41)

Later on, Anna gets involved with an Englishman, who takes her out, pays for her lodgings and meals and she does not have to worry about anything. She chooses to abandon her former life as a chorus girl for she now feels secure and taken care of enough financially, unwilling to admit that anything could go wrong.

When he is away, her days are uneventful, boring and long. To escape boredom and feelings of loneliness, she often recollects home or her childhood. The most ordinary things around her have the power to transport her back in space and time. From the point of her limited experience, they are tightly interwoven with memories of the Caribbean. Any proper bond or experience connected to England not yet created.

Upon hearing church bells, she recollects going to church on Sundays and sweating uncontrollably in the hot climate:

(While you are carefully putting on your gloves you begin to perspire and you feel the perspiration trickling down under your arms. The thought of having a wet patch underneath your arms – a disgusting and a disgraceful thing to happen to a lady – makes you very miserable.) (VG, p. 36)

However, even recollections of unpleasant things she seems to hold dear for they are from happier and safer times. It brings to her the feelings of peace and tranquillity: "Walking through the still palms in the churchyard. The light is gold and when you shut your eyes you see fire-colour." (VG, pp. 37-38)

As she continues her relation with Jeffries, going to his house at nights, she understands that she is doing a condemnable thing, she understands that people

might judge her and disapprove, but whether for his attentions or for the benefits of the relation, she chooses to ignore these instincts. Other time, after she confesses that all she wants is to be with him, he counters: “Oh, you’ll soon get sick of me.” (VG, p. 44)

Again, she instinctively understands that even at this point, Jeffries knows he will grow tired of her and leave, but she is unable to let go. She chooses to numb the hurt and fend off the premonition by alcohol. Even Jeffries thinks she is too young to drink whiskey, but she replies: “‘It’s in my blood,’ I said. ‘All my family drink too much. You should see my Uncle Ramsay – Uncle Bo. He can drink if you like.’” (VG, p. 44)

When drunk, her memories of the Caribbean are even more vivid and pressing; she wants to make Jeffries see the magic of the place so she recounts her childhood in West Indies. Her love for the place is evident, but he remains unimpressed. For him, it is England that is home. She continues:

Sometimes the earth trembles; sometimes you can feel it breathe. The colours are red, purple, blue, gold, all shades of green. The colours here are black, brown, grey, dim-green, pale blue, the white of people’s faces – like woodlice.

‘My father was a fine man,’ I said, feeling rather drunk. ‘He had a red moustache and he had a most terrible temper.’

‘I’m a real West Indian,’ I kept saying. ‘I’m the fifth generation on my mother’s side.’ (VG, p. 47)

Even later, when he is asleep, she lays awake, her memories coming back to her and it makes her sad, for yet again she was forced to realize the impossibility of relating any of it to anyone truly.

Anna’s perception of her homeland and her family is idealized for it was through child’s senses that it was formed. Her life values and goals are still naive and impractical; she places love and adventure above responsibility. When she meets Hester, her English step-mother who originally brought her to England, and who provided Anna with money, a different story is uncovered. Anna has no remaining relatives in the West Indies that would want to take care of her and there is also no chance that she would ever find a decent job upon returning there. Anna’s favourite uncle is self-centred, unwilling to spend any money

anywhere besides on his own illegitimate children and his still mostly rustic way of life. Hester emphasizes that she brought Anna to England to give her a chance at life:

[...] nothing but rocks and stones and heat and those awful doves cooing all the time. And never seeing a white face from one week's end to the other and you growing up more like a nigger every day. Enough to drive anybody mad. (VG, p. 54)

Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking. (VG, p. 57)

However, Anna dismisses it. Hester wants the best – the English – for her, simply because she is English and always hated everything about Caribbean anyway - the fact that Anna was happy around Francine and did not desire to become a lady, most of all. They part coldly, never to see each other again.

When Jeffries informs Anna that he is headed to New York for a few months, she knows it means the end of their relation and is devastated. Like a wounded animal, she retreats to the isolation of her room to die out of sight.

When Mrs Dawes came in with breakfast I was lying on the bed with all my clothes on. I hadn't even taken off my shoes. She didn't say anything, she didn't look surprised, and when she looked at me I knew she was thinking, 'There you are. I always knew this would happen.' I imagined I saw her smile as she turned away. (VG, p. 85)

To escape the pain, the shame and insecurities connected to his departure, she relocates and hides away in another room: "Anywhere will do, so long as it's somewhere that nobody knows." (VG, p. 86) The way Rhys portrays female characters makes them seem incredibly weak and it seems to fully justify their inability to survive in their contemporary society ruled by men.

She is no longer hungry, she stays in her room whole day, drinking wine and frantically scribbling letters to Walter, desperate to write her feelings out, but failing at it. She cannot find another way of dealing with her pain. She finds solace in solitude, inaction and gloom; she keeps her curtains drawn all the time and stays in bed.

Against her better judgement, Anna lets herself be lured into a bad society after she accidentally meets her old friend Laurie, who quite openly admits to being a female companion, and acquaint Anna with her current male friends. At this point, Anna feels like she does not have much to lose and she prefers life in luxury¹⁹ to life in poverty. Her life is an undirected stream of accidents, she does not assume control. She floats where the current takes her.

It's funny when you feel as if you don't want anything more in your life except to sleep, or else lie without moving. That's when you can hear time sliding past you, like water running." (VG, p. 97)

She repeatedly makes self-destructive choices. Even when she starts to be sick, dizzy and tired every day, she decides to be in denial and does not seek medical assistance. People ask her if she is pregnant and need help, but she is not alarmed. She actively engages in prostitution and she no longer cares, for she does not see any easier way out of her situation.

Her health declines rapidly. She cannot get out of bed any more. But in the dark and safety of her room, she thinks of back home. Seemingly unrelated scenes and images mix together in her head. Her mind jumps randomly from one memory to another. The heaving of sickness blends with dreams of ships and sea.

Self-destructively, she tries to self-induce an abortion by various amateur methods instead of seeking help:

And all the time thinking round and round in a circle that it is there inside me, and about all the things I had taken so that if I had it, it would be a monster. The Abbé Sebastian's Pills, primrose label, one guinea a box, daffodil label, two guineas, orange label, three guineas. No eyes, perhaps. ... No arms, perhaps. ... Pull yourself together. (VG, p. 143)

In the end, with the help of Laurie and money from Walter, Anna undergoes an abortion. It is a dubious operation, Anna is numbed with gin, somewhere in a flat and sent away immediately afterwards. She is hurt, feverish and drunk. Back in her room, during the night, she miscarries. Nobody is there with her; she is

¹⁹ being taken to dinners and being paid for sex

left bleeding for six hours before she is found. It is as if she was left alone to die. No one around her cares enough to keep an eye on her. Like a wounded animal, she is left to die, not to be a burden to the pack anymore.

When found later, instead of calling the doctor, Laurie gives her more gin. Anna is engulfed by hallucinations of her homeland. Even at the brink of death, she is reaching out to her memories to help her calm down and get through²⁰. The harsh reality is drowned in fond memories of her Father. Reality mixes with delirious visions of flying beds and Caribbean Masquerade. Anna feels giddy, the Masquerade crowd dances “forwards and backwards backwards and forwards whirling round and round” (VG, p. 158) in accordance with her nausea. Her visions of riding to Constance Estate on a horseback are becoming a metaphor of her clinging to her life:

I thought I'm going to fall nothing can save me now but I still clung desperately with my knees feeling very sick. [...] 'I fell,' I said. 'I fell for a hell of a long time then.' [...] the bed had gone down to earth again. (VG, p. 158)

In the end, a doctor comes and reassures Anna that she is going to be alright. As he leaves, he says: “You girls are too naive to live, aren't you?” (VG, p. 159) and through his character, it is definitely Rhys herself voicing her opinion about the young women of her generation.

2.2 *Quartet* – Marya Zelli

2.2.1 Passivity - The seduced wife

Marya Zelli, the protagonist of *Quartet*, is a married woman living in Paris with her Polish husband. Through an acquaintance, she is introduced to the Heidlers. Although Marya in *Quartet* has no connection to the Caribbean, she has the same attitude towards Paris and life in general as Rhys had towards Europe. The scenes seem dull, gloomy and repetitive to her and she feels alienated among the local people.

²⁰ Originally, Rhys let Anna die at the end of the story, bleeding to death after the amateurish abortion, which is much more in accordance with her creative goals and personal tuning. But she was asked to edit it.

After Stephan is mysteriously arrested, Marya is left shocked, helpless and alone.

She spent the foggy day in endless, aimless walking, for it seemed to her that if she moved quickly enough she would escape the fear that haunted her. It was a vague and shadowy fear of something cruel and stupid that had caught her and would never let her go. She had always known that it was there – hidden under the more or less pleasant surface of things. Always. Ever since she was a child. (*QT*, p. 28)²¹

She realizes that with “some guts” (*QT*, p. 28) and sensibility, she can get through, but nevertheless feels “as though an iron band were encircling her head tightly, as though she were sinking slowly down into deep water” (*QT*, p. 30). Rhys wrote *Quartet* later in life and as opposed to *Voyage in the Dark*, there are traces of life experience and more realistic view of life. Marya’s reactions are much more controlled and rational than Anna’s and her perception of things is much more adult-like.

Marya visits Stephan in prison and tries to be supportive, but she is so preoccupied by her fears and insecurities that she barely hears what he says. Her misery makes her ill and desperate. It is in such state that she receives an invitation to a dinner from the Heidlrs. The presence of Heidler, the man, makes her feel safe and secure; she finds solace in him, her optimism renewed for the time being.

Despite the fact that Rhys was probably more phlegmatic and not as emotionally tense as her heroines, there is a chance that she suffered from a father complex²², which then manifested in her heroines becoming so obsessively dependent on their much older lovers. “I probably romanticised my father, perhaps because I saw very little of him.” (Rhys, 1979, p. 57) “I can only remember my father in little things.” (p. 58) Rhys loved her father, but was quite young when he died. That might have left her yearning for the presence of a powerful, protective and wise mentor figure in her life, somebody to guide and motivate her.

²¹ Rhys, J. (1973). *Quartet*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. [Subsequent page references preceded with (*QT*) are given in parentheses in the text.]

²² Electra complex in Neo-Freudian psychology

Following the lead of a powerful man helps Marya to find her lost peace of mind. Mrs Heidler observes about Marya:

She was very pale, her eyes were shadowed, her lips hastily and inadequately rouged. She was wearing a black dress under her coat, a sleeveless, shapeless, sack-like garment, and she appeared frail, childish, and extraordinarily shabby. (QT, pp. 38-39)

When Heidlers offer Marya that she can move in with them, she is too shy to accept. Mrs Heidler further observes about Marya: “The poor little devil has got no harm in her and I shouldn’t mind doing her a good turn. She won’t be much trouble.” (QT, p. 41)

To her Marya does not pose any significant threat at that moment, for it is apparent that Marya struggles to decide and voice what she wants in life

In a low voice, Marya expresses her gratitude, but refuses. It does not feel right to her and she fears becoming a burden. She also fears becoming soft and unable to fend for herself. Making decisions for herself and facing such unfortunate situation wipes Marya out, she feels weary, giddy and melancholic. She understands that she does not have enough control over her own life.

You see, I’m afraid the trouble with me is that I’m not hard enough. I’m a soft, thin-skinned sort of person and I’ve been frightened to death these last days. [...] ‘I’ve realized , you see, that life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people. I think life is cruel. I think people are cruel. [...] You’re wonderfully kind, but if I come to stay with you it’ll only make me soft and timid and I’ll have to start getting hard all over afterwards. (QT, p. 41)

Rhys herself often felt tired of life and overwhelmed by it. To her, it was a constant and fruitless struggle against the countless hardships coming her way. She felt everybody conspiring against her and sneering at her. “Close proximity to other people wiped her out, erased her” (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 2) and thus Marya seems to be the impersonation of Rhys’s own traits in the form of fiction.

Marya’s resolution, however, soon fades as Stephan urges her to accept the offer and so she becomes entangled with the Heidlers.

As she continues to visit Stephan in prison, she starts to feel embarrassment, pity and even disgust. By being in prison, he lost the power to

lead her and provide for her, suddenly, by his carelessness, he put her in a position, where she is pushed to assume the active role. However, her only wish is to remain passive. He stopped representing the male God-like figure to her. She feels betrayed by his irresponsibility and wonders how she could have ever relied on him for advice or help.

From now on, Heidler and his wife²³ become the leading figures to Marya. She looks up to them and longs to please them, even though she can see their weaknesses. She adopts their views and demeanour, even though she feels out of place and at loss at the parties they hold to scout talents among young artists. She obeys when Lois (Mrs Heidler) tells her to “put the whole thing behind and start again” (*QT*, p. 51) and cut loose from Stephan, even though she does not fully agree. She does not speak her mind; she does not want to offend their hospitality.

When Heidler professes an undying love and desire for Marya, seemingly out of nowhere, she is shocked. It offends her, for she is still naive and mostly ignorant of what seems to be the progressive Parisian lifestyle of the artistic circles. His advances frustrate her: “When he touched her she felt warm and secure, then weak and so desolate that tears came into her eyes.” (*QT*, p. 57)

However, she is in need of strong presence in her life, a lighthouse to guide her through difficult times. She realizes that she is not strong enough to resist, for he is a hunter and he gets what he wants. There were many men in Rhys’s life and hardly a time without one, so it appears safe to assume that as her heroines she preferred to play the passive role in her life, leaving the active, leading role, to the man.

Marya succumbs to Heidler sexually, for she needs someone to complete her. She finds her lost self-confidence next to him and she does not take notice of the looks their strange trio get everywhere they go.

She was absorbed, happy, without thought for perhaps the first time in her life. No past. No future. [...] She glanced at the rough texture of Heidler’s coatsleeve and longed to lay her face against it.” (*QT*, p. 67)

²³ Mrs Heidler is depicted as a very emancipated, almost man-like woman. She is intelligent, well-read and self-assured with progressive views, which makes her seem insensitive, “hard as nails” (p. 49) and remote.

She is under Heidler's influence, only wants to be near him and fights constantly with Lois for his attentions and approval. It is only through Heidler's acclaim that she feels worthy.

To please him, she does whatever he wants; she sacrifices her former friends that he does not approve of. There ceases to be any life for her outside the one with Heidler. "His hand was over hers. Peace had descended on her and to that peace she was ready to sacrifice Cairn or anybody or anything." (*QT*, p. 75)

However, this state of affairs tires her; she understands that it is absurd for her to live between Heidler and Lois like this. To be with Heidler secretly while pretending to people. She understands that she cannot separate them, the "naïve sinner that she was." (*QT*, p. 79) for they stick together through everything.

Lois can see that Marya is becoming a nuisance to Heidler. Her love, obedience and unhealthy devotion are too intense for him. The jealous fights of the two women are becoming too frequent. "It was comical, of course, and degrading. They were like two members of a harem who didn't get on." (*QT*, p. 79)

The relation does not make Marya happy anymore either, she feels a prisoner of their arrangement, and the impossibility of explaining to them how much it tortures her, frustrates her deeply. They are too modern and snobbish to understand that being mocked and ridiculed like this drives her mad. In her naivety, she still hopes that she can have a normal, loving relationship with Heidler. She only wants to lay her head on his knees and: "Stop the little wheels in her head that worked incessantly. To give in and have a little peace. The unutterably sweet peace of giving in." (*QT*, p. 84)

Her ideal is that everything will resolve itself on its own. That the situation will simply go away if she waits or runs away. She is not willing to take any active part in her liberation from the Heidlers. In her mind, Heidler is the one, who can save her. To her, only he can provide the protection and reassurance she needs. She cannot find it in herself.

The way she fights against the reality seems childish to Heidler and he lectures her, for she cannot change it no matter how much it frustrates her:

[Y]our whole point of view and your whole attitude to life is impossible and wrong and you've got to change it for everybody's sake [...] He went on to explain that one had to keep up appearances. That everybody had to. [...] 'You've got to play the game.' (QT, p. 89)

And over and over again, she obeys him for her ego is shattered, she loves him and to her, he is formidable and convincing and offers the decisions she cannot make herself.

In the end, she gives up, she ceases to care, becomes lethargic and unmoved, she hands out all the control of her life to Heidler. It makes her feel even more irrelevant and helpless for Heidler puts a great amount of pressure on her to keep 'playing the game' and not to let anyone know²⁴, because his reputation is at stake, so she becomes a ghost. Ashamed, she avoids people, goes out at night and only to unfrequented places or stays in bed altogether, unable to face people. At Lois's parties, which Heidler still forces her to attend, she is only a phantom of her former self. When Lois sneers at her and insults her, she remains silent, acknowledging her defeat, inside contemplating murder.

But she is impotent, for Lois is under Heidler's protection and he would sooner abandon Marya than let anyone hurt Lois. And Marya fears abandonment desperately. Heidler can sense her weakness and pities her.

Stephan's release from prison complicates things. He prepares for leaving France with Marya, but her obsession with Heidler prevents her from going with him. After he leaves, it is as if he never existed in the first place, as his letters come, she is indifferent to them. When he finally summons her, it is to break their relation and send her away from Paris, for he cannot handle her utter submission; he is burdened by her devotion. But even away, all she does is to lie down, walk lifelessly and obsess about Heidler. She writes desperate letters to him, begging he sends for her and lets her come back to him. She is absolutely unable to manage her own life without a man. There is no pride in her – lovelorn and disposed of – she still yearns to go back to Heidler. But he would not have her back with the excuse that he will not have the hand in her getting back to Stephan.

²⁴ What they all already know.

She read this letter indifferently. Nothing mattered just then. It was extraordinary that anything had ever mattered at all. Extraordinary and unbelievable that anything had ever mattered. (*QT*, p. 127)

However, it is Stephan, who arranges her return to Paris, to meet her once more before he moves to Argentina. She feels terribly tired and unable to think clearly, people around her perceive her as a neurasthenic. Being unable to make her own decision what to do, she goes to Stephan and tells him everything, hoping that he would resolve her situation for her. She admits she is broken, unhappy and helpless and begs him to help her:

How can I help you? What fools women are! It isn't only that they're beasts and traitors, but they're above all such fools. Of course, that's how they get caught. Unhappy. Of course you're unhappy. (*QT*, p. 141)

As he brings out a revolver and offers to go after Heidler, Marya makes a terrible scene, blocks his way screaming she loves Heidler. As she starts to threaten that she will give him up to the police, he swings her aside with all his force and leaves her in the flat unconscious or even dead.

2.2.2 Objectification - The lost dignity

Marya Zelli is a woman prone to melancholy, fatigue and disillusion but she is quite happy and content with her life at the time she is introduced to the Heidlers, prominent patrons of young artists in Paris.

She is impressed by both of them, for they impersonate everything that she and her husband are not. They both have an air of confidence, sharp intelligence, sturdiness and sophistication. Marya has a feeling that they must be cold and brutish sometimes: "And as she thought it, she felt his hand lying heavily on her knee." (*QT*, p. 13)

She finds this display of the male assuredness more ridiculous than disturbing as she pushes him away decidedly. Although not so much in the rest of Europe, in Paris of the 1930s, the morals are quite relaxed. Rhys, possibly encouraged by Parisian positive attitude towards racial integration, joins the local bohemian artistic circles, where extramarital affairs, prostitution and female

objectification appears to be part of the modern, progressive way of life. Her experience of Parisian life is captured in Marya's story.

When Stephan is arrested her first concern, apart from his safety, is money. They never got much and certainly did not save them. Stephan curses himself for getting in trouble and leaving Marya without resources for they both know how difficult it is for a woman to live on her own. Most women in such circumstances out of despair turn to prostitution.

However, the Heidlers single Marya out and take it upon themselves to save her at this unfortunate time and invite her to come live with them. Lois, as a woman to woman, even talks to Marya about the possibility of finding another man with money for herself. "It's appalling, perfectly appalling," continued the other [Lois] in a complacent voice, 'to think of the difference that money makes to a woman's life.'" (*QT*, p. 44)

Again, Rhys criticizes the limited possibilities of a woman of her era to become independent and earn her own money. Paradoxically, it is mostly prostitutes, who are able to make and keep a steady income.

It soon turns out that the whole arrangement was agreed on between Heidler and his wife so that he can get his hands on Marya, who attracts him. Lois, who is a woman with progressive views consents for she knows Heidler will get what he wants whether she likes it or not. "D'you suppose that I care what you are, or think or feel? I'm talking about the man, the male, the important person, the only person who matters." (*QT*, p. 64)

And in order to feel more empowered and secure, Marya lets him seduce her, not giving a second thought to possible consequences.

Heidler assumes control over her, she is taken everywhere with them, almost like an accessory. They ignore it when people start to stare and gossip and they ignore Marya's feelings. Putting her through degrading situations, where she is forced to pretend friendliness towards Lois to 'play the game' and keep their reputation intact, they dismiss her every attempt to break free by reminding her of her dependency on them. Lois talks about keeping Marya pretty and well-dressed, so that she will not throw a bad light on them, as she accompanies them: "She might have been discussing the dressing of a doll." (*QT*,

p. 67) As Heidler comes to her for sex in the night, she experiences a “Fright of an animal caught in a trap.” (*QT*, p. 71) for she knows she lost her freedom.

When Marya’s revolt, emotional outbursts and demands for more attention and understanding become too irritating to Heidler, he plants her into a hotel room and every time he visits, he leaves her some money and reminds her that nobody is to know, as he goes back to Lois. “He wasn’t a good lover, of course. He didn’t really like women. [...] No, not a lover of women [...] He despised love.” (*QT*, p. 92)

However, almost masochistically, all Rhys’s heroines are drawn to strong, powerful and cruel men, who cannot treat them right. They maintain the hurtful relations to the point of self-tormenting. Again, it might have to do with Rhys’s complicated relationship to her parents and with her distorted idea of self-worth, or with her innate subservience.

Heidler is protective of Lois and reminds Marya of her duty towards her and their game. She is reduced to his plaything, a puppet in his and his wife’s play, to a prostitute. When she tries to talk to him about her feelings, he does not take her seriously. “He was still watching the shape of her breasts under the thin silk dress she wore – a dark-coloured, closely fitting dress that suited her.” (*QT*, p. 101)

In the end, Heidler gets tired of her and summons her to break up with her. “I have a horror of you. When I think of you I feel sick.” (*QT*, p. 115) As a piece of furniture he no longer needs, he puts her away by sending her to the South to avoid any inconvenience she might cause by being too wild about the break up.

Strangely enough, as a dog loyal to her master, chucked and disregarded, Marya is in the end still willing to sacrifice everything to protect Heidler from Stephan. As he was leaving behind his ungrateful, undignified wife unconscious on the floor of an empty flat “women seemed to him loathsome, horrible – soft and disgusting weights suspended round the necks of men, dragging them downwards.” (*QT*, p. 144)

2.2.3 Escapism – The fatal indecisiveness

As Marya's husband Stephan gets arrested, she is left unprovided for and when offered help by the Heidlrs, she is faced with a lot of decisions to make. She feels that it might not be best for her to trust a couple she barely knows.

If you really mean that you're afraid of being a bother, put that right out of your head. I'm used to it. H.J.'s always rescuing some young genius or the other and installing him into the spare bedroom [...] Many's the one we've pulled out of a hole since we've been in Montparnesse, I can tell you.' (QT, p. 41)

However, encouraged by her worried, imprisoned husband and Heidlrs' persuasive skills, she consents. Without fully realizing it, she thus makes the first of many choices that lead her to ruin.

To escape poverty and helplessness, she comes to reside with the Heidlrs in their studio, unsuspecting, glad that somebody wishes to help her, glad that she does not have to worry about her existence. She quite enjoys going to parties with them, although she does not approve of all the gossip, hypocrisy and snobbery, but she drowns the feelings of inadequacy and doubt in alcohol.

How terrifying human beings were, Marya thought. But she had drunk two fines and a half-bottle of something which the patron of the Bal du Printemps called champagne, and after all it was a lovely party. (QT, p. 56)

She decides to ignore the strange little peculiarities she sometimes notices about Heidler or his wife, strange looks, silent whispers. Lois lures her in by evoking a feeling of intimacy and feminine union between them. So Marya places herself fully in their care, she goes everywhere with them and they start to be perceived as "the trio". Marya's former acquaintances turn away from her.

Marya decides to leave immediately, after Heidler confesses his love and desire for her. However, Lois talks to her, assuring that she knows about Heidler's feelings and gives them her blessing; that there is no need for drama or unnecessary virtuousness, and no good in Marya leaving. Then Lois goes out for the night. "Lois was a shadow, less than a shadow. Lois had simply ceased to exist. The front door banged." (QT, p. 65)

When Heidler comes, Marya makes the second self-destructive decision, for she gives in to him. “How gentle he is. I was lost before I knew him. All my life before I knew him was like being lost on a cold, dark night.” (QT, p. 66)

Being with him is like a drug to her. She craves his presence and she exhibits withdrawal symptoms when he is away. Although Lois is maintaining to keep her face on the outside, she hates Marya and insults her at every occasion. For the third time Marya decides to leave, for she cannot stand “this appalling muddle” (QT, p. 71) her life has become. And yet again, Heidler talks her out of it with his authoritarian arguments: “You will persist in judging us by the standards of the awful life you’ve lived. Can’t you understand that you are in a different world now?” (QT, p. 70)

He assures her that they are her friends and will not let her down. Marya feels trapped like an animal, unable to break free. She is too far gone to protest when he enforces that she shall not go see Stephan in prison anymore or meet her friend Cairn, who even offered to borrow some money for her, so that she can get away from Heidlers, but she refuses his help: “He only added a sharp edge to her obsession.” (QT, p. 74)

The Heidlers keep putting her in most uncomfortable situations, taking her with them to their cottage, making her act like everything is perfectly alright. She sees no other escape than making a row or a scene so bad that they would let her leave. All invigorated by alcohol, they have a terrible quarrel which leaves Heidler in tears and everybody feeling ridiculous. They agree to find a hotel room for her in Paris. Strangely enough, when Heidler offers to break away from Lois and come live with Marya, she declines out of a newly found sympathy for Lois, burying herself even deeper in this mess.

Marya lives in a hotel now, separately from the Heidlers, but she is still too obsessed to let go of Heidler. She self-destructively assumes the role of ‘*a petite femme*’. She is torn to pieces, envious of Lois; feeling betrayed and sickened by this way of life.

Then her obsession gripped her, arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her as utterly as the longing for water possesses someone who is dying of thirst. She had made an utter mess of her love affair, and that was that. She had made an utter mess of her existence. And that was that, too. (QT, p. 91)

Her hellish existence crushes her down, but she has given up on saving herself, she drinks until she is numb and cannot think straight, unable to sleep without the help of sleeping pills. She accepts the kind of love she thinks she deserves.

Feelings of love and hate, desire and repulsion mix together in her mind and she cannot decide what to do. After Heidler breaks their relation and sends her away just when Stephan is being released from the prison²⁵ with not enough money to get back to Paris, she attempts suicide by overdosing on pills and alcohol unsuccessfully and she hurts herself, biting her arm.

If you had any guts; if you were anything else but a tired-out coward, you'd swim out into the blue and never come back. A good way to finish if you'd made a mess of your life. (*QT*, p. 127)

One last time, she tries to save herself, as Stephan pays for her return to Paris and she begs him to take her to Argentina with him. This time the odds are against her, because he cannot take her as the arrangement is too uncertain even for him alone. She cannot be saved.

In a final attempt to free herself of her pain, she tells him everything about the Heidlers trying to put the blame on him.

She began to laugh insultingly. Suddenly he had become the symbol of everything that all her life had baffled and tortured her. Her only idea was to find words that would hurt him – vile words to scream at him. (*QT*, p. 143)

After a scuffle, she is left unconscious or maybe dead on the floor of the apartment, while Stephan leaves, convinced that she got what she deserved. Thus her inability to break free from the unhealthy relationship by making the right decision at the right time proves destructive and fatal to her.

²⁵ under the pretence that countryside will do her good

2.3 *Wide Sargasso Sea* – Antoinette Mason

2.3.1 Passivity - The tamed mulatto²⁶

Antoinette, even as a child, is quite perceptive of the hatred of the Jamaican locals towards her white family. She does not feel safe anymore, where she felt perfectly happy when her father lived. She notices the loneliness and fear they live in, but gets used to the solitary life, she keeps to herself, because the local children avoid her or bully her.

As a child, Rhys was already “strangely languid” (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 8) and often remained inactive. About that Pizzichini further observes:

Perhaps she was gathering her energy for the long journey ahead that would take her from the Caribbean, across the Sargasso Sea, into the cold, grey stretches of the North Atlantic and deep into Europe’s capital cities. (p. 8)

For Rhys, it was only natural to build up her heroines on the basis of her own life, and even though she felt reluctant to share the autobiographical in her last novel, it was a great opportunity for her to revisit her childhood in Caribbean for one last time.

Antoinette worries about her mother, and she longs for her love. She sometimes tries to comfort her when she feels down: “But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her.”²⁷ (WSS, p. 5)

Antoinette is left to do what she wants and to take care of herself; however she is not to misbehave in front of her mother’s friends and cause her shame. She grows up thinking her mother hates her. Her mother’s depressions, pessimism and anxieties take a toll on Antoinette and she feels a phantom, burden to her mother. The gossip and prejudice she witnesses every day leave her feeling self-conscious and out of place. “As for those children – the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind and the girl going the same way in my opinion – a *lowering* expression.” (WSS, p. 12)

²⁶ The term is taken from Haliloğlu.

²⁷ Rhys, J. (2001). *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: Penguin Books, Penguin Student Edition. [Subsequent page references preceded with (WSS) are given in parentheses in the text.]

All Antoinette's fears come alive when they are driven from their home, her brother dies, her step-father moves away and her mother is pronounced mad. That is a lot to take for a young girl, she is shaken and helpless.

Nevertheless, despite all former misfortune, Antoinette grows up to be courageous, curious, free-spirited and proud. About her stay in a convent she thinks: "I felt bolder, happier, more free." (WSS, p. 32)

There is still a feeling of impending danger, though and as her step-father, Mr Mason comes to her with the news that he will bring friends from England for her to meet, she is frightened:

It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me. This time I did not let him see it. [...] Say nothing and it may not be true." (WSS, pp. 33-34)

She, however, chooses not to share her doubts, for she knows she would not be understood. She resents the way the other nuns are cheerful about her leaving, because she would rather stay, hidden from the dangers of the outside world, which is hostile to her and to which she does not belong.

It is with calm and composure, almost lethargy that she receives the news of her mother's death.

She died last year, no one told me how, and I didn't ask. Mr Mason was there and Christophine, no one else. Christophine cried bitterly but I could not. I prayed, but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing. (WSS, p. 35)

Rhys openly acknowledged her laziness and indifference in her correspondence and later in life she took pride in not worrying about things. Part of this attitude might be mirrored in Antoinette's behaviour and her reaction to such situation.

From the point of Rochester, an English gentleman, to whom Antoinette is later wedded, Antoinette, even though melancholic, silent and shy with "[l]ong, sad, dark alien eyes" (WSS, p. 37) at first, later appears carefree, exotic, active and at home in her habitat – all traits considered savage, unsafe and disturbing by Rochester. "This was Antoinette. She spoke hesitatingly as if she expected me to refuse, so it was easy to do so." (WSS, p. 37)

On the other hand, he is bewitched by her innocence, her naive enthusiasm to share the beauty of the place with him and her childish curiosity about England. He feels protective of her when faced with her loneliness and vulnerability.

Her behaviour towards him is subservient: “I felt sweat on my forehead and sat down, she knelt near me and wiped my face with her handkerchief.” (WSS, p. 42)

She goes out of her way to please him, because she is in love with him and wants it to be mutual. She admits that before meeting him, she wanted to die – her life being only a prolonged waiting for death.

In any case she had given way, but coldly, unwillingly, trying to protect herself with silence and blank face. Poor weapons and they had not served her well or lasted long. If I have forgotten my caution, she has forgotten silence and coldness.” (WSS, p. 54)

However, as the enchantment fades, Rochester’s prejudice grows stronger²⁸ and he detaches himself, Antoinette becomes frustrated and helpless. More so, because her only companion Christophine leaves her too. “I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all.” (WSS, p. 63)

As all her attempts to talk to Rochester calmly and sensibly and make him understand her and love her fail and he only grows more remote, hateful and disgusted, Antoinette gives up and deteriorates. “I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate.” (WSS, p. 95)

Interestingly enough, Rhys stays consistent with depicting her heroine’s reactions to hurtful situations, even when writing from male perspective, which might be a further proof that she sculpted her heroines solely based on her own characteristic traits.

She becomes unwilling and unable to react to her situation; to others she resembles a zombie. She accepts her fate, because after all, she loves Rochester and does not want to part with him. “You fool the girl. You make her think you

²⁸ fuelled by a hateful letter from Antoinette’s vindictive half-brother

can't see the sun for looking at her. [...] It's *she* can't see the sun any more. Only you she see." (WSS, pp. 98-99)

She stays away and is fully resigned when he decides to relocate to England. She does not plead, she does not cry, her expression is blank and emotionless and she remains silent, like a ghost. She has become indifferent to what happens to her. And by that she makes it that much more easy for Rochester to denounce her. "I too can wait – for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie..." (WSS, p. 113)

2.3.2 Objectification - The sold life

At the age of eighteen, Antoinette is wedded to Rochester, a rich English gentleman. It was a common practice among Englishmen to marry women from the colonies to gain money and property, but it is also a necessary step for the local women to keep the property from going to ruin, something Rhys often witnessed during her colonial childhood.

Antoinette and Mr Rochester barely know each other when they are married. Even though she hesitates, for she is afraid of unhappiness, Rochester, in order to keep to the agreement²⁹, promises safety and love to her, which in the end convinces her. "So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubt and hesitations. Everything finished, for better or for worse." (WSS, p. 36)

Rhys chooses to be sympathetic towards Rochester and with a same vigour she criticizes the way women are treated as a property in marriage, the way men are also expected to marry conveniently by their relatives.

The marriage was conducted hastily, without unnecessary formalities, with everybody realizing it is merely an exchange, a trade – the selling of lives and souls. Both sides were left feeling comparably exploited.

And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks. [...] The thirty thousand pounds

²⁹ and to please his father, who arranged the marriage

have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to)³⁰. (WSS, p. 39)

Getting to know each other as they set out for their honeymoon is inevitably awkward as their cultural and life views constantly clash. Antoinette does not mean anything to Rochester; she is only another part of the deal. They play the parts they are expected to play and Rochester is unwilling to invest himself in any other way. Talking about the wedding day, he says:

She never had anything to do with me at all. Every movement I made was an effort of will and sometimes I wondered that no one noticed this. I would listen to my own voice and marvel at it, calm, correct but toneless, surely. But I must have given a faultless performance. (WSS, p. 44)

In the end, in the jungle, he comes to appreciate Antoinette's beauty and her exotic side. They become intimate and he almost feels at peace with her. However, one revengeful letter³¹ is enough to remind him that Antoinette is only a commodity, a side-product of the arranged deal, and damaged one on top of that. He accepts her as a sexual object, but otherwise she is too different from a proper English lady for him to accept.

I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did. (WSS, p. 56)

He cannot be moved by her tears or her happiness which is more her own construct that something he gives. He does not believe her capable of understanding him and he will not try to understand her. Her exotic nature is desirable to him, but nothing more. "Money is good but no money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed. Crazy and worse besides." (WSS, p. 60)

As it affirms his original prejudice, he chooses to believe the rumour that madness runs in Antoinette's family, that he was not her first partner and that he was "shamefully deceived" (WSS, p. 58) by her and all her relatives, which makes him treat Antoinette with even more disrespect and contempt. Even

³⁰ which makes it impossible for Antoinette to leave Rochester later, when he casts her off

³¹ Even though it is written by an unreliable person with obvious aim to cause harm.

though she hates it, he only calls her Bertha now to manifest his power over her and to disclaim the fate connected to her mother, who had a similar name.

Christophine advises Antoinette to leave Rochester and hide somewhere, but she cannot. Not only because she loves him, but also because he controls her money now, and he would not be parted with it. Her brother handed all her property to Rochester, a total stranger, and failed to ensure any legal protection to her. It was an exchange between two men and neither Antoinette, nor her aunt had any say in it. And again, through Antoinette Rhys explores the masochistic tendencies of women to linger in destructive relations.

A love powder given from Christophine makes Rochester sick and he is convinced they attempted to poison him. It only adds fuel to his distrust and hate for Antoinette. It enrages him when Christophine asks him to leave half of Antoinette's dowry to her and go back to England without her. She belongs to him and he will not see her happy with anybody else. He will not be jilted by a Creole girl; he will not have his reputation tarnished. "She's mad but mine, mine. [...] My lunatic. My mad girl." (WSS, p. 108)

Proclaiming Antoinette mad, he brings her to England and without scruples, banishes her to a room in the attic as you would an item that is no longer useful. Objectified, treated merely as a part of property, Antoinette is left to her fate as Rochester pursues a new life.

Although Rhys felt it was not her place to temper with Brontë's work, the idea of a Creole woman being thus wrongly treated, exploited, objectified and disposed of was so unacceptable to her that she felt it was her duty to do the character of Bertha justice and give her a voice.

2.3.3 Escapism - The soothing madness

Already as a child, Antoinette often retreats to the jungle near Coulibri, her family's estate to have some calm and privacy. She grew up near jungle and it is friendly to her.

It's better than people. Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people. Better. Better, better than people. (WSS, p. 11)

It is her way to get away from people, who are all hypocritical and fake and whom she can hear gossiping about her mother, when they think no one is listening. Also from the local black people who hates her and her family for being white and rich. To her, the nature is a different plane of reality, where she no longer has to be herself. She is almost animally drawn into the jungle.

Almost as instinctively, her curiosity brings Antoinette closer to Christophine, who has always been close to the family and who is known for practicing obeah. Obeah fascinates and scares Antoinette at the same time. And it is often Christophine and her obeah that she escapes to, when she is scared, hurt or feels lost.

After Coulibri is burnt down by the hateful locals, Antoinette's family is driven out and Antoinette becomes sick for six weeks. In the meantime, her mother grows remote, indifferent and mad while mourning the loss of Antoinette's ill brother Pierre, who dies during the attack. Antoinette is aware of everything, but chooses to escape to illness and the peace only sleep can provide.

What was the use of telling her that I'd been awake before and heard my mother screaming '*Qui est là? Qui est là?*' then 'Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you.' I'd put my hands over my ears, her screams were so loud and terrible. I slept and when I woke up everything was quiet." (WSS, p. 24)

For some time, she finds calm and peace in a convent school. It is a religious place isolated from the reality and in complete contrast to the dangerous outside world. "This convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death where very early in the morning the clap of wooden signal woke the nine of us who slept in the long dormitory." (WSS, p. 31)

She does not have to worry about anything in there, she feels free, but soon, she is taken out.

Mr Mason, the husband of Antoinette's mother³², came back and arranged for Antoinette to meet a rich English gentleman Rochester. And it is her marriage to Rochester that becomes the catalyst of Antoinette's tragic fate. The whole story is framed by three nightmares about a man full of hatred, dark

³² Originally from England and often spending whole months there after Antoinette's mother goes mad.

forest, stone house and upward steps. They become more urgent, specific and terrifying as the story progresses and only at the very end, it is revealed that they were premonitions of Rochester and the impending doom he brings upon her.

She falls in love with him desperately and he becomes enchanted by her, but later prejudice, fear and superstition drive him away from her.

Few times, she tries to save their love by means of obeah. In her desperation, she sees obeah as the only way out of her misery. She believes it to be powerful enough to make people love, hate or even die. She comes to Christophine for help, but is refused:

‘Hush up,’ she said. ‘If the man don’t love you, I can’t make him love you.’ [...] ‘You talk foolishness. Even if I can make him come to your bed, I cannot make him love you. Afterward he hate you.’ (WSS, p. 70)

Christophine advises Antoinette to leave Rochester and move away, somewhere so that he would not feel intimidated by her, but Antoinette is convinced he would not let her do that for he fears scandal. In the end, Christophine succumbs to Antoinette’s pleas and prepare a magic powder for her.

The escapes of Antoinette to obeah presented Rhys with the opportunity to bring forth one of the most distinctive features of her culture and to give more space to the character of Christophine, who seem to represent herself.

However, instead of helping, it only makes things worse for Rochester gets very sick and he is sure Antoinette tried to drug him or poison him. He falls out of love, starts to detest everything about Antoinette. He laughs at her, judges her otherness and openly cheats on her with a servant girl. To endure all her pain and humiliation, Antoinette numbs herself by alcohol and sleep medicine from Christophine. She barricades herself in her room and continues drinking uncontrollably. She cannot find any healthier way of dealing with her situation. Even Christophine becomes worried: “There are mornings when she can’t wake, or when she wake it’s as if she still sleeping. I don’t want to give her any more of – of what I give.” (WSS, p. 100) Rochester simply laughs it away. “You seem to

have made her dead drunk on bad rum and she's a wreck. I scarcely recognize her." (*WSS*, p. 101)

To take revenge, he decides that he will go back to England and Antoinette is not allowed to stay behind. Everybody knows that they can never fix the relationship and that he only drags her with him to hide her away so that no one can bear witness to his worst failure. At this point, he is sure that Antoinette went mad beyond repair, same as her mother did. When he asks Christophine to say her final goodbyes to Antoinette, she refuses: "I give her something to sleep – nothing to hurt her. I don't wake her up to misery. I leave that for you." (*WSS*, p. 105)

In England, Antoinette feels lost. She is confused and does not understand why she was brought there: "For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it that I must do?" (*WSS*, p. 115) She cannot understand why Rochester does not come to see her anymore. "Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (*WSS*, p. 116)

She is stripped of everything - her freedom, her name, her family, her homeland, her free will. She is kept prisoner without identity. Her sense of time and place becomes distorted and confused. She has to be tied up, when she attacks Jane in the corridor and later her own brother with a knife. Moreover, she is haunted by the recurring nightmare, which is now gaining much more concrete shape. Finally, she knows what she has to do; she understands why she was brought here. She sneaks out of her room one night, led by the third and final dream:

I saw the sunlight coming through the window, the tree outside and the shadows of the leaves on the floor, but I saw the wax candles too and I hated them. So I knocked them all down. (*WSS*, p. 122)

In her final act, she chooses her ultimate form of escape, a descent into the soothing madness and the welcoming embrace of death.

Conclusion

While Rhys's writing is extraordinary – certainly also thanks to her hypersensitivity – her presence of mind, grasp of the practical and her relationships were disastrous, which is often reflected in her female protagonists.

Anna and Marya both fall in love with much older men and eventually become obsessed with them. They suffer from a Father complex, same as Rhys did. Other undoubtedly autobiographical features which reappear in each of the discussed novels in more or less the same form and can be supported by extensive biographical evidence are: passivity, inclination to melancholy, depression and inaction of Rhys's female characters. Anna and Antoinette share Rhys's own deeply rooted dislike for England and even Marya, who does not come from the colonial background, feels alienated and brought down by Paris. The feelings of not belonging change into states of paranoia and desire to escape. Same as Rhys, her female characters are impractical and easily overwhelmed by reality.

Rhys excelled as an author, but failed as a wife, a mother and in extension as a responsible adult. Unlike her, who was lucky enough to win a 'support team' (Athill, 2010, para. 9) of people admiring her writing and willing to help her through the practicalities of life, her heroines mostly meet misunderstanding and people with ill intentions, which ultimately leads to their demise. Because they are so ill-fitted for life and unable to actively accept responsibility and take action, the hostile and greedy society destroys them.

There is not much action in the novels. The plotlines are in fact quite simple ones. Rhys uses ellipses and condensation extensively for a more poignant expression³³. The passivity of her characters allows her to concentrate on their inner self and their psychology. We spend most of the time in her characters' minds, witnessing their every whim, every mood-swing and their every thought³⁴.

³³ Thus leaving enough white spots for the reader to fill in.

³⁴ A trait which places Rhys among the modernist writers, her writing style best fitting in the category of literary impressionism (Haliloğlu, p. 7)

The fact that in her writing Rhys preferred to cut than add and we barely get detailed descriptions of spaces and situations³⁵ makes the physical presence of her characters even more elusive and vague. On the outside, they all seem almost ghost-like, hardly ever making a presence as though they are only “phantom[s] watching from the shadows” (Pizzichini, 2010, p. 89).

While Anna’s naivety, passivity, obsession with her man and incapability to take care of herself are as palpable and uncontrolled as to be painful, Marya’s passivity and obsession in *Quartet* is subtler, more mature and repressed, accompanied with feelings of guilt. The protagonist attempts to resist and rebel occasionally, but circumstances are always against her. Marya appears to be an older version of Anna (and Rhys), still susceptible to melancholia, inertia and manipulation, but trying to defy it. Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* appears to be both an exception and a culmination of this motif in Rhys’s works. Antoinette is by nature a happy and curious girl, her passivity and helplessness developing mostly as a side product of a heart-break. Firstly, inflicted during her childhood, when she is cast away by her mother and secondly, caused by an unrequited love of a man. Her case stands out as the most tragic since it is the least self-induced one.

As captured in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the passivity and feelings of inadequacy stem from an unbalanced childhood and growing up with feelings of liminality and subalternity – of not belonging and being hated. The forced alienation of youth resulted in automatic self-alienation later in life. Hurt from the childhood, Rhys later expected only negativity from people.

It might stem from an inherent subservience of the colonial to the European, intensified by entering the former oppressor’s environment. Although not ready to share it in *Quartet* - or maybe advised against it - Rhys puts her colonial background to the fore in both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rhys knew the concept of passivity well, using it quite unconsciously, but she also consciously chose, escalated and utilized its characteristics to make her

³⁵ With the exception of scenes connected to the Caribbean, which to her were worth every detail, and European room interiors, which helped her emphasize the overall oppressive atmosphere.

criticism of the greedy European society destroying innocent individuals that much more apparent.

The origins of the motif of objectification and exploitation of women were harder to pinpoint in Rhys's biography. She had many men in her life, was surrounded by lovers and admirers and she had loving relations with them, especially later in life. In one of her letters, she wrote about the character of Rochester: "Dreadful man, but I tried to be fair and all that." (Melly & Wyndham, 1984, p. 233), so she does not appear to be biased against men. The topic of objectification, however, is ever-present in her novels. On many occasions, it is intertwined with the motif of money – or the lack of it – so the depiction of objectification might be a co-product of her more universal criticism of the way the capitalist society maintain its marginalization of women. Anna and Marya are reduced to prostitutes and Antoinette, in extremity, to an item of property. However, Rhys certainly endows her protagonists with a tendency to masochism and excessive subjugation, so they themselves play a part in their own victimization. Rhys admits vanity and a desire to be a lady, and her protagonists share this trait.

Rhys was no stranger to escapism and self-destructive behaviour. She believed she should have died at the age of thirty and that all women live way too long. Many times, in her letters, she emphasized that she did not like living in such a horrible age, in which it was so difficult to achieve anything, all odds conspiring against her. She was not satisfied with her living conditions, with her health, with the weather in England, with the feedback on her work and many other little things. "I am utterly completely and for ever *Fed UP* with the country – soon I shall hate it as fiercely as any Mr Rochester hated any Antoinette." (p. 267)

She felt she would do well in the past or possibly in the future, but she was not fitted for the present.

Not unlike Rhys, her heroines cornered by the demands of the society and by their own wrong decisions, seek ways of escape, for they are unable to face the overwhelming reality in any healthy way. What the female protagonists share with Rhys autobiographically is the abuse of alcohol in situations that are

uncomfortable or hurtful to them, daydreaming of the past and retreating to the safety of their rooms or even to magic.

As the comparison of the discussed novels reveals, Rhys is not a writer of happy endings. All her heroines go through many difficult life trials and hardships throughout the stories and not even at the end of the novels are they given much hope for better future.

Rhys, from this point of view, appears to despise her heroines. She tried to end *Voyage in the Dark* with Anna dying, but was asked to edit it, Marya's fate at the end of *Quartet* is left open, but there is a possibility she dies from the blow in her head. And it was only through Antoinette and *Wide Sargasso Sea* that Rhys finally managed to let her heroine die at the end.

However, again, it is not merely a whimsical decision on Rhys's side. By letting her heroines die in the end, she would have managed to make the message of her work more imperative. Rhys might have been too negativistic at times, but she understood that a society that marginalizes gender and race; supports male domination, prostitution, exploitation and objectification of women and does not provide enough rights for women to live comfortably without the necessity of subjugation, is not a place a woman should be forced to live in.

By writing happy ends for her heroines, she would have considerably blunted the edge of her criticism. Her message is not a positive one, for she proclaims that for a sensitive woman there is no escape from the clutches of the corrupted and oppressive society except by continuous suffering, humiliation and destitution, or by the liberating death, as presented in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In one of her last letters to her daughter, Rhys writes: "I've always had 'Give me Liberty or give me Death' as my slogan" (Melly & Wyndham, 1984, p. 290) and as she chooses not to give her protagonist Liberty, she tries to give them Death.

Rhys is known for facing misery and despair throughout her life. She later depicted many of those situations and events in her work. It is possible that, for her, it was writing that provided the much needed escape from everyday realities. It gave her a goal and a purpose in what she otherwise considered a failed life. It was one of the few things that she felt passionate about. "For I know that to write as well as I can is my truth and why I was born." (p. 173)

Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys's *magnum opus*, which significantly contributed to the enrichment of the scope of feminism by bringing the question of race into view, is more than sufficient evidence of the truthfulness of her words.

Although each of the discussed novels was written at different points in Rhys's life - which gives it its specific feeling - the subject matter and Rhys's attitudes remain unchanged and authentic, for they stem from her own experience and beliefs. Thus, *Quartet*, an impressionistic and formally professional debut of a young author, *Voyage in the Dark*, a raw, truthful, deeply personal and therapeutic novel and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an immensely tragic and climatic work of an experienced writer, present the reader with the same type of sensitive women struggling to find their voice and place in an immensely hostile society, and eventually beaten to the ground by it, giving up on life.

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