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Reading Jean Rhys
Empire, modernism and the politics of the visual

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READING JEAN RHYS: EMPIRE, MODERNISM AND THE POLITICS OF THE VISUAL

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Abstract

This thesis considers the relationship between literary modernism and visual culture in the work of Caribbean modernist Jean Rhys. Through analysis of a range of visual modes—theatre, fashion, visual art, cinema and exhibition culture—it examines the racialised sexual politics of Rhys's modernist aesthetics, as represented in her texts of the 1920s—30s.

I read Rhys's four interwar novels—*Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)—in the context of contemporary visual practices and the politics of empire. Rhys's descriptions of artistic practices, acts of viewing and interpreting art, and the identification of her protagonists as both objects and consumers of art are a crucial aspect of her anti-colonial feminism. The politics of vision and of empire are always intertwined for Rhys. Chapter One studies theatrical spectacle and everyday performances of the self. Chapter Two moves to the fashioning of female identities and sartorial constructions of Englishness. Chapter Three turns to Rhys's use of ekphrasis to question representational structures as they exist in the modernist, primitivist art context. Chapter Four reads Rhys and cinema, focusing on divided or fractured subjectivities as relayed through allusions to distorted mirrors. This conveys Rhys's powerful evocation of themes of alienation and dislocation. I conclude by analysing what 'exhibition' means for those occupying both subject and object visual positions within the imperial metropolis. Analysis is supported by readings of unpublished short stories, letters and poems, works that are relatively absent from current Rhys scholarship.

The conjunction of revolutions in the visual arts and the destabilization of the empire in the modernist period provides clear space for investigation into the creation of new ways of seeing that provided a degree of visual agency for those deemed incapable of aesthetic production. Crucial to this is Rhys's own Creolité. Situated within and outside of European visual subjectivity, Rhys's work becomes vital to any study of social acts of seeing, in terms of individual subjectivity and within the wider systems of vision produced through the arts.

Table of Contents

Abstract **2**

Table of Contents **3**

List of Illustrations **4**

Acknowledgements **5**

Introducing Jean Rhys: Mapping Modernism and the Visual **6**

Colonialism and Aesthetics 9
Caribbean Literature: Double Vision 14
Primitivism, Empire, and the Visual Cultures of Modernism 19
Reading Jean Rhys 30

1. From Stage to Page: The Alternative Performances of Jean Rhys's Modernist Fiction **40**

Alternative Modernisms 45
Smile Please 49
Colonial Interfolds: Girls on Stage 53
Thresholds 59
The Infinite Rehearsal 64

2. Fashioning-through-Fashion: The Public/Private Identities of the Rhys Woman **72**

From Stage to Store: Theatre and Fashion 77
The Sartorial City: Negotiating the Impasse 81
'It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat' 88
The Real Curse of Eve 91
Make-up and Masks 95

3. Beyond the Frame of Representation: Rhys at the Borders of Text/Image **105**

Framing the Model: The Ekphrastic Frame 108
Intertextuality: Primitivism and the Reclining Nude 117
Painted Love, Ekphrastic Fear 122
The Empire Paints Back: Recuperating Meaning, Framing Others 127

4. Mirrors and Movies: The Rhys Woman in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction **135**

The Cinematic City 145
Women Writing Film 154
The Empire on Screen 156

5. Conclusion **168**

'This Way to the Exhibition': Mapping Empire and the Visual

Bibliography **190**

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Paul Gauguin, *Poèmes Barbares* (1896), oil on canvas, 64.8 x 48.3cms, © Harvard Art Museums/ Fogg Museum. Bequest from the Collection of Maurice Wetheim, Class of 1906, 1951.49. **21**

Fig. 2: 'Cocoa Breaking in a Trinidad Plantation', in *Cocoa: The Story of its Cultivation* (Bournville: Cadbury Brothers, 1927). © British Library Board ((CB) DY 79 (C1) pg 14). **23**

Fig. 3: The Dreadnought Hoax, by Lafayette (Lafayette Ltd), 7 February 1910, matte bromide print, 176 x 223mm, photograph © National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased with help from Gift Aid visitor donations, NPG P1293. **48**

Fig. 4: The opening chorus of *Our Miss Gibbs*, Gaiety Theatre, 1909. **79**

Fig. 5: Sir William Orpen, *Nude Study* (1906), oil on canvas, 56.5 x 81.3cms, Leeds Museums & Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery) U.K. / Bridgeman Art Library. **110**

Fig. 6: Sir William Orpen, *The Studio* (c.1910), oil on canvas, 96.5 x 80cms, Leeds Museums & Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery) U.K. / Bridgeman Art Library. **112**

Fig. 7: Sir William Orpen, *The Model* (1911), pencil and watercolour on paper, support: 540 x 692 mm, photograph © Tate, London 2013. Presented by Sir Robert Witt through the Art Fund 1920. **112**

Fig. 8: Amedeo Modigliani, *Reclining Nude* (1917), oil on canvas, 60.6 x 92.7cms, image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls Collection, 1997 (1997.149.9). **118**

Fig. 9: Baulé Mask (early C20th), wood and metal, 30.48 x 20.32 x 11.43cms, photograph © Yale University Art Gallery, purchased with a gift from Steven M. Kossak, BA 1972, and with the Leonard C. Hanna, Jr, Class of 1913, Fund 1996.13.1. **120**

Fig. 10: *Contact* dir. By Paul Rotha (British Instructional Films and Imperial Airways, 1933) © British Airways. http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/442307/index.html. **158**

Fig. 11: Cover, *Vendre*, No.162 (May 1937) reproduced from James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, © Cornell University Press, 1998. **173**

Fig. 12: La Tour Eiffel de nuit, François Kollar, 1937 (71L02558), photograph © Donation François Kollar Ministère de la Culture (Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine) diffusion RMN. **174**

Fig. 13: Exposition Internationale; pavilion d'exposition. Baranger (c.1937?), photograph © Ministère de la Culture (France)—Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (EAT 637 N). **181**

Fig. 14: Monument de la Paix, vue de nuit, François Kollar, 1937 (71L02047), photograph © Donation François Kollar Ministère de la Culture (Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine) diffusion RMN. **182**

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Introducing Jean Rhys: Mapping Modernism and the Visual

The unfinished autobiography of Caribbean author Jean Rhys begins with a scene, remembered from early childhood in Dominica, of being photographed. Her subsequent narrative of this memory, written years later in Europe, serves as her first reflection on the gap between visual image and personal experience, a theme that also emerges in multiple forms throughout her body of fiction written and published in the 1920s and 30s.

"'Smile please," the man said'.[1] Instead of complying, Rhys's arm shoots up of its own accord, the involuntary movement described as 'a pity' as it disrupts the shot. But the image produced by the camera is still attractive to a young Rhys, who is impressed by its placement in a silver frame, standing out against the other family photographs. The photograph drifts into obscurity, only catching Rhys's eye again some years later. Looking back at the image, Rhys experiences a fracturing of subjectivity that becomes such a powerful motif in her writing, 'realising with dismay that I wasn't like it any longer' (19). Rhys cannot connect the image with her memory of posing for the photograph: the girl in the photograph is no longer her. 'She' may be wearing a recognisable dress, 'but the curls, the dimples surely belonged to somebody else. The eyes were a stranger's eyes. The forefinger of her right hand was raised as if in warning. She had moved after all. Why I didn't know, she wasn't me any longer' (20).

This fracturing of the self, experienced via the gap between the girl in the photograph and Rhys in the present context, is intensified as she then catches sight of herself in a looking-glass mirror. Dismay turns to despair, and another moment of displacement occurs. Rhys's gaze shifts from photograph to mirror, moving between two framed images of her self. The first, the young Rhys in the photograph, is too far removed, a past identity that no longer exists. But the image in the mirror is one that Rhys painfully identifies too closely with. 'She' becomes 'I' as Rhys's description of the looking-glass image ends with 'I hated myself' (20).

Obvious comparisons can be made here with Frantz Fanon's moment of 'crushing objecthood' in the 'Look, a Negro!' passages of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Rhys too

[1] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, foreword by Diana Athill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.19. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

becomes 'an object in the midst of other objects', the fragments of which are 'put together again by another self', but all of these fragmented images are hers and she is the one both being looked at and returning that gaze.[2] Fanon's description of the child's response to the sight of him as giving his body back 'sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day' serves well to bring forward the connections Rhys makes between the divided reflections of self created by the mirror and the photograph, and her self-positioning as outcast or outsider within the colonial context of her West Indian childhood.[3] Her inability to identify with the image in the photograph leads to an over-identification with the mirror image.

Part of Rhys's confession of self-hatred is an acknowledgement of her difference. In describing her relationship with another girl at school, Rhys writes: 'She tried to make friends with me, perhaps she thought that outcasts should stick together, but I preferred being an outcast myself' (21). Rhys's hatred of herself stems, by her own admission, from her paleness: 'My brothers and sisters all had brown eyes and hair, why was I singled out to be the only fair one, to be called Gwendolen which means 'white' in Welsh' (20). Rhys closes the passage by admitting she never looked at the photograph again, and yet thought of it often, the dress, the photograph's location at her father's estate in Bona Vista. Rhys associates the image with a location and a history she is no longer connected to, the estate now sold on. Past/present, photograph/mirror, and the writing of memories of the West Indies years later in Europe cannot be reconciled.

The comparison with Fanon allows us to think about otherness and race in relation to Rhys. With Fanon the instance of objectification is used to theorise the 'epidermal schema' versus the 'corporeal schema'—skin versus body—for Rhys however, outsiderness is linked to whiteness, not blackness. Rhys also reads bodies differently. In the photograph/mirror section of *Smile Please*, the older Rhys is looking back on the moment from her childhood knowing how her body has been read in Europe. Rhys uses this knowledge to other and deconstruct whiteness. Rhys's portrayal of the gaps between visual image and personal experience continued to be a pressing preoccupation throughout her writing.

The visually divided subjectivity that returns time and again in Rhys's fictional works responds to the visual culture of England and Europe in the early decades of the twentieth century, cultures that expressed both a renewed imperialism as well as being representative of gender anxieties of the time. Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams was born in

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[2] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p.109.
[3] Fanon, p.113.

1890 to a white, Creole mother of Scottish descent and a Welsh father who had come to Dominica in the previous decade to practice medicine. By the time Rhys voyaged in to the heart of empire in 1907 aged sixteen, her family's wealth and social status (descending from sugar plantation owners) was in decline. Leaving behind a closed colonial community in the Caribbean, Rhys had to become self-sufficient in London, supporting herself financially first as a chorus girl on the West End stage, then in a series of low-paid jobs as artist's model, fashion mannequin, and film extra. Rhys's visual signification as a white woman of slave-owning descent positioned her at one end of the social spectrum in Dominica, but her movement into the metropolitan centre disrupted this identification, with her racial identity routinely questioned, including by her own biographer Carole Angier.

Later in *Smile Please*, as I describe more fully in my chapter on the sartorial fashioning of female identities, Rhys narrates an event shortly after arriving in London, where the worn gilt compact she uses for making-up can be refigured as her own 'blackness': her white European respectability apparently worn away by time spent in the colonies. This thesis will return frequently to Rhys's re-telling of moments of visual identification such as occur with the mirror, the photograph, and the compact, to analyse how the more complex voyaging in of the white Creole female to the imperial centre shifts racially coded, visual identifications. I argue that these moments of double-identification or 'in-betweenness' play out in her fictional narratives too, where her character's engagement with elements of metropolitan visual culture—theatre, fashion, visual arts, cinema and exhibitions—speak of more internalised responses to their visual mis-representation.

As a white West Indian in London, Rhys found herself dislocated from both the culture left behind and the one she moved in to. She descended from a class whose history was morally problematic, its status no longer relevant.[4] Despite returning only once to the island of her birth in 1936, Rhys felt a lingering attachment to Dominica and a black culture that she could never be part of. In the metropolitan heart of empire, Rhys was socially inferior: an unmarried female with a string of male companions, undertaking jobs that placed her clearly as an object of sexualised visual attention. But as a white West Indian, why should Rhys's writing be read in the context of black culture in Britain and its related issues of visuality? What can Rhys, a white woman who spent such little time in Dominica as an adult and an author, add to studies of Caribbean literature and its relationship to modernist visual culture?

In her interwar novels, Rhys's female protagonists are repeatedly cast in the image of colonial savage: impure, or 'other' than English as a result of their uncertain, ambiguous

[4] Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of a Colonial and Sexual Exile*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p.13.

cultural backgrounds. The circulation of racial tropes existing in London's interwar period through the mechanisms of visual culture allowed for such identification. The visual politics of Rhys's writing is articulated in the context of ways of seeing and being seen within the empire. I place her as an important literary figure in this moment, as a writer working within and between representational forms and conventions, whose fiction becomes integral to understanding the shifts in visual representation as directed by race, class and gender concerns during the modernist period.

Colonialism and Aesthetics

Establishing that the relationship between modernism and visual culture was one heavily influenced by empire opens up new avenues of investigation into those artists and authors who engaged with the creation of new ways of seeing. To clarify my use of 'ways of seeing' in this thesis, I build upon what Mary Lou Emery in *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature* (2007) argues was the 'project of transfiguring the sense of sight' that writers from the Caribbean participated in during the modernist period, this 'sight' being aesthetic agency or creative power.[5] This was a transfiguration of eighteenth-century aesthetics where, 'at the height of the slave trade, these categories denied Africans and indigenous peoples the capacity for contemplative sight that defined the free man of reason'.[6]

Early twentieth-century modernist movements in art often replicated, in different versions, eighteenth-century notions of seeing—the reliance on hierarchically organised sensory development whereby the 'European man [stood] as the universal modern Subject, imbued with reason and, most significantly, the capacity for sight'.[7] This relationship, established philosophically, was reinforced by European writers who travelled to the Caribbean, writers such as Edward Long, a Jamaican plantation owner who testified to the artistic incapacities of enslaved Africans in his *History of Jamaica* (1774): 'In general, they are void of genius, and seem almost incapable of making progress in civility or science. They have no plan or system of morality among them'.[8] But as Emery contends, artists and authors from the colonies played a crucial role in these modernist movements. As they engaged 'vision as a transforming element in the process of cultural decolonization', they contributed to a contestation of mainstream philosophical notions of seeing and in the process achieved 'visual subjecthood and creative agency' by claiming authority over their

[5] Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.242.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Emery, *Modernism*, p.2.
[8] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London: Cass, 1970), p.353.

own perceptions.[9] Yet in doing so, they faced a number of obstacles concerning their capability to engage in the artistic practice of seeing.

As Emery notes, postcolonial critics such as Simon Gikandi frequently turn to the connection between the height of the slave trade in the eighteenth century and the contemporaneous development of philosophies of the aesthetic to understand how the cultural legacies that constructed the modern subject continued to linger in the twentieth century.[10] In his 2001 essay 'Race and the Idea of the Aesthetic' Gikandi has argued that the representation of black people within the realm of modern art created a potential space for their participation as subjects within it. For him, the very nature of art, with its constant evolution of representational tropes, provides space for the possibility of visual agency. Using the 1740 portrait of black Jamaican poet Francis Williams as an example, Gikandi notes that even as the picture depicts Williams as a caricature, the painting 'presented a sign of belonging within the economies of the eighteenth century; for black subjects art enabled modes of self-presentation that were not possible in the domain of social life'.[11] Gikandi notes that the anxieties of the colonial classes in the eighteenth century produced an aesthetic relationship with their colonised subjects that identified the most obvious sign of savagery as being the inability to make aesthetic judgement or produce fine art. Gikandi follows Peter Fryer (*Staying Power*, 1984) in documenting David Hume's now infamous footnote from his 1748 essay 'Of National Characters' which presents Francis Williams as an embodiment of the threat to the claim that the black subject was incapable of artistic genius. Hume's footnote in the 1776 edition of his *Philosophical Works* reads thus:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences … Not to mention our colonies, there are negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.[12]

Hume fails to name Williams here, it left to Edward Long to act as native informant, and who turned the footnote into a full-length chapter of *The History of Jamaica*. He too followed

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[9] Emery, *Modernism*, pp.2-3.
[10] Emery, *Modernism*, p.4.
[11] Simon Gikandi, 'Race and the Idea of the Aesthetic', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XL.2 (2001), 318-50 (p.345).
[12] *The Philosophical Works of David Hume: Including all the essays, and exhibiting the more important alterations and corrections in the successive editions published by the author* (Edinburgh: Printed for Adam Black and William Tate; and Charles Tate, 63 Fleet Street, London, MDCCCXXVI), Vol.3, p.236. See also for slightly different edit of the footnote: *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. by TH Green and TH Grose (London, 1882), Vol. III, p.252, n.1.

Hume's rhetoric though, confirming Williams' poetry as the product of the imitative result of a colonial education rather than natural abilities. But even while the artistic abilities of men such as Williams were labelled a mere parroting of European styles, aesthetic philosophies depended on the figure of the black person, even if they were relegated to the footnotes.

Gikandi writes that within this relationship between the colonial classes and their colonised subjects, 'the sphere of the aesthetic is clearly defined as that of ontological purity, while race has become one of the most powerful representations of conceptual and social impurity'.[13] Placed in a relationship of supposed incommensurability, race and aesthetics 'are part of a hierarchy defined by radical conceptual difference', with Gikandi continuing that 'to understand the pure, we must confront it with what it considers to be the source of contamination and danger'.[14] Race lay at the centre of debates about art and aesthetics in the modern period, and to 'remove the figure of the black from theories of modernity in general, and the aesthetic in particular, you would deprive Eurocentricism of one of its constitutive elements', with this double-play of the presence and absence of blackness an integral part of understanding the relationship between race and aesthetics in enlightenment philosophy.[15] While aesthetic ideals relied on the figure of the black person as a marker of that which the European subject was not, Gikandi identifies art's importance within the study of colonial society as functioning as a space in which racialised others could be represented, and represent themselves, as modern subjects, 'even when the aesthetic ideology seemed to imprison the other in its non-native economies'.[16] Thus the ideology of the aesthetic is caught between the notion that it is in 'the universal realm of art and aesthetic judgement that we come to a sense of ourselves as free, self-reflective subjects' whilst at the same time 'we are trapped in the powerful modern claim that […] the terms of our identity depend on our recognition of the other'.[17] Moving forward from this rather condensed analysis of Gikandi's reading of eighteenth-century aesthetic reasoning and the potential for visual agency, it is necessary to keep at the forefront the risk of imitation, the perception of a mimicking of the European Subject who holds the capacity for 'true vision'. It is in the space between visibility and invisibility, absence and presence, and aesthetic capability and imitation, that a reading of the white Creole in the context of colonialism and aesthetics reveals its critical worth.

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[13] Gikandi, p.324.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Gikandi, p.331.
[16] Gikandi, p.333.
[17] Gikandi, p.334.

Paul Gilroy's introduction to the catalogue for the 1996 Tate exhibition *Picturing Blackness in British Art 1700s—1990s* calls for 'a more exhaustive account of how slavery, imperialism and colonialism contributed to the formation of modern British cultural styles and aesthetic tastes', for a consideration of 'how the relationship between Britain's colonial outside and its national inside was constantly negotiated and presented in artistic form'.[18] Gilroy places this call in the context of the contrasting meanings given to the signs of 'race' across the centuries, covering the scientific definitions of racial difference in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century where the figure of the black degenerated into the primitive, moving into the twentieth century, where transatlantic crossings created new artistic representational contexts and where the modernism of 'painters such as Edward Burra [perhaps best known for his depictions of black culture and scenes of the Harlem Renaissance] celebrated, and perhaps envied, what was perceived as the primitive vitality of blacks'.[19]

And yet in those first years of the twentieth century, works by black artists were still very much absent from view in England's art exhibitions and galleries. Roger Fry's landmark exhibition 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' held at the Grafton Galleries in London between November 1910 and January 1911 has often been championed as signalling a move from Victorian notions of aestheticism to new forms of modern art, and yet no works by black or non-Western artists were shown (although later Fry did include 'thirty chosen specimens of negro sculpture' at his 1920 exhibition at the Chelsea Book Club).[20] Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush in their introduction to *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism* identify 1907—the year Rhys arrived in London—as a moment when the distinctions between ethnographic artefact and art object had become provisionally established, when some African sculpture had achieved the status of high art, yet this still functioned 'as part of an ideologically charged and conflicted European representation'.[21]

As the following quotation from Marianna Torgovnick suggests of the early years of the twentieth century, the shadow of colonialism's power structures continued even as artists and writers from Africa and the Caribbean were granted artistic status:

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[18] Paul Gilroy, 'Picturing Blackness in British Art', *Picturing Blackness in British Art 1700s—1990s, Exhibition Catalogue, November 28, 1995—March 10, 1996, Tate Gallery,* Tate Gallery Library, no pagination.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Roger Fry, 'Negro Sculpture at Chelsea Book Club, 1920', in *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art: A Documentary History*, ed. by Jack Flam with Miriam Deutch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.145-147 (p.145).
[21] Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, 'Introduction', in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. by Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp.9-10.

> Within the dominant narrative as told by art historians, the "elevation" of primitive objects into art is often implicitly seen as the aesthetic equivalent of decolonization, as bringing Others into the "mainstream". […] Yet that "elevation" in a sense reproduces, in the aesthetic realm, the dynamics of colonialism, since Western standards control the flow of the "mainstream" and can bestow or withhold the label "art".[22]

In a section of this introduction titled 'Primitivism, Empire, and the Visual Cultures of Modernism' I will look at primitivism and the modern art context in finer detail, but it is sufficient to note at this point that with art critics such as Roger Fry appreciating the stylistic qualities of 'Negro' art whilst simultaneously denying black artists the capacity for formalised vision, artistic media in the opening decades of the twentieth century still relied on imperial, racialised dynamics of colonialism. If we take the colonial relationship as being reliant on modes of seeing, a paradox is created for the colonised artist as s/he is 'positioned within this visual ontology as lacking the capacity to see […] yet this position presumably grants the potential of sensory development that culminates in acquiring the full capacity of sight'.[23] This turns us back once more to issues of imitation: '[t]o become fully human, the colonized person must demonstrate this development by entering the realm of art; such entry, however, threatens the entire system and must be perceived as mere imitation, a perception that again insists on the colonized person as object, rather than subject, of visual contemplation and aesthetic judgement'.[24] Thus the space of representation for colonised people of colour becomes one in which they are imprisoned in the role of imitators.

Mary Lou Emery's *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature* stands as the first sustained analysis of the visual in the work of Caribbean modernists. As Emery foregrounds the problem of colonial imitation through acts of vision, and the appropriation of modernist visual aesthetics in the production of new ways of seeing, her work provides the basis for attention to be redirected towards the more complex position of the female Creole author, who sits somewhere between Western aesthetic standards and 'the primitive' of Torgovnick's analysis. Taking Emery's monograph as my departure point, I aim to follow her deployment of theories of imitation and mimicry to explore the complexity of the Creole position in the formation of modernist countervisions. Working through dual issues of race and gender, I will then turn my attention to vision itself, asking how Rhys's apparent placelessness within the coloniser/colonised binary affects her ability to see, and thus create, alternate subjectivities for her protagonists.

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[22] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p.82.
[23] Emery, *Modernism*, p.15.
[24] Emery, *Modernism*, pp.15-16.

Emery uses Rhys's novels as support for her analysis of the work of authors and artists from the Anglophone Caribbean such as Edna Manley, Una Marson and George Lamming, looking at how they addressed colonial relations that they recognised were inextricably linked to the concept and act of seeing. Emery's text proves to be the most influential work to date on the relationship between modernism and the visual in Jean Rhys's interwar fiction. But there is significant scope to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the politics of vision created by Rhys in her short stories and novels of the 1920s and 30s, working through the visual media to interrogate more fully Rhys's critique of modernist representational forms.

Caribbean Literature: Double Vision

Throughout her study Emery returns to the confrontation of the double-bind of colonial imitation. She contends that to confront the risk of imitation—to be seen as mimicking rather than creating within the realm of aesthetics—authors and artists from the Caribbean work through this problem as being one of vision itself, turning mimicry into a more self-reflexive modernist aesthetic. Emery argues that 'Caribbean artists and writers have thus contributed to a reformulation of vision that often anticipates, re-contextualises, and frequently contests mainstream and theoretical investigations into visuality'.[25] Emery, like Gikandi, does not attend to the position of the white Creole Caribbean artist. My thesis aims to reframe this in order to produce a more detailed analysis of Jean Rhys's use of the visual, focusing specifically on how her Creole identity makes complex visual identifications structured through class and race. Emery succinctly highlights how the artists and authors of the Anglophone Caribbean who are preoccupied with vision create a '*contra-modernism*', an alterity that places them as simultaneously within and outwith modernism by nature of the 'simultaneous participation in and sometimes resistant transformation of the tenets of modernist aesthetics'.[26] But for an author such as Rhys, viewed as 'not-quite-white' as a result of her Creolité, the position of being both within and outside of European visual subjectivity becomes even more complex. Her work has much to offer analysis of the social act of seeing and its political implications.

The ambivalence, 'doubling', or 'in-betweenness' of identity as exemplified by the writings of Jean Rhys finds some comparison to that analysed by Homi Bhabha as constituting the subjectivity of the colonised person. Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry refers to the colonised person of colour who acquires the mannerisms and education of the

[25] Emery, *Modernism*, p.3.
[26] Emery, *Modernism*, p.100.

colonising society. Though never granted the full status of that society, the mere act of mimicry exposes that this identity is a constructed one, a knowledge possessed by both the colonised person and the coloniser: '[s]uch mimicry subverts the rationale for imperialism based on a natural hierarchy of authentic and natural differences between coloniser and colonised'.[27] The oppressed person who imitates the stereotypes of his colonial master exposes such differences as constructed.

In his 1994 essay 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' Bhabha describes mimicry as a trope of '"partial" presence' that in its attempt to mask a threatening racial difference instead reveals the slippages of colonial power.[28] Mimicry as Bhabha sees it is not connected to dependent colonial relations through 'narcissistic' identification, for the colonised has agency within this process: 'The *menace* of mimicry', he explains, 'is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority'.[29] Thus mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable other, but this desire stands as an act of repeating rather than re-presenting. In seeing the colonised mimicking him, the coloniser sees both himself and not himself. This is Bhabha's 'double vision' because the coloniser becomes both subject and object: 'mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire … [but] raises the question of the authorisation of colonial representations'; mimicry reinforces ambivalence within both the coloniser and colonised as neither can say who is Self and who is Other.[30]

The power of 'Of Mimicry and Man' as a theory exemplifying the strategies of resistance against colonial (mis-)identification cannot be ignored. But I propose two problems with the theory of imitation that Bhabha posits, problems that arise as a product of the 'excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*)'.[31] The first concerns the problematics of gender within colonial discourse, which I will return to later in this introduction. The second concern, which I take as the frame of my thesis, is that Bhabha overlooks the truly ambivalent nature of the Creole who—like Rhys—inhabits a metaphorical space between metropole and colony, and as such a space between subject and object of vision. This is a gap in his thinking that is replicated more widely in work on modernism, empire and visual culture, an absence that this thesis attempts to readdress. When deployed within the frame of the visual in Rhys's fiction, Bhabha's observation that there is a need 'to focus on the moments or processes that are

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[27] Emery, *Modernism*, p.56.
[28] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.86.
[29] Bhabha, p.88.
[30] Bhabha, p.90.
[31] Bhabha, p.86.

produced in the articulation of cultural differences' also more specifically identifies a gap in current Rhys criticism: the lack of attention to vision as it is used by Rhys to critique the power structures operating within modern imperial urban space.[32]

The combination of these two absences within Bhabha's theory can be exemplified by a passage within Emery's study of modernism and the visual. Emery picks up on a metaphor used by Trinidadian/Canadian writer and filmmaker Dionne Brand who declares in her essay 'Seeing' that '[t]he eye has citizenship and possessions'.[33] Emery reads this metaphor as one that recognises the 'imagined community of an imperial nation as also an *imagined* nation, an entity made possible through the creation of images that interpellate, through various angles of vision, its citizens and its colonial, racialized other', and further, that the metaphor can also be interpreted 'to read the eye itself as exercising the powers of empire'. [34] In this context, Emery turns her analysis to issues of gender within the discourse of vision, exposing the complexities of race, gender and colonial relations. In a section titled 'The Look and Location of 'Elsewhere'' Emery notes the association—established in Victorian England—of colonised lands as being feminised in a discourse that places them as opposed to an active, masculinised imperial power. For male Caribbean authors and artists the active|male/passive|female paradigm of seeing is disrupted, for he at once becomes a feminised Other through the colonial gaze. Emery then questions what happens '[i]f, like Una Marson, the black intellectual is a woman, from a place coded both 'elsewhere' and feminine, how much stronger is the sense of displacement following on mis-identification?'[35] I aim to take this further by paying specific attention to what happens when the author is a white intellectual woman, from a place coded elsewhere and feminine, but lacking the important marker of difference that is colour. How does the lack of the visual signifier of blackness make complex her representational ability, and how is her perspective, her angle of vision, distorted by her Creole, female identity?

The validity of research and pedagogy into writing from the neither/nor territory of the white Creole author, from one determined to be 'the same, *but not quite*', can perhaps be highlighted by recent theoretical work on white settler-colonial writing.[36] Although I am

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[32] In his Introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha identifies a need to 'focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (p.2).

[33] Emery, *Modernism*, p.37.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Emery, *Modernism*, p.45.

[36] '[Settler-invader colony writers (especially if they are women), are…] hampered—or perhaps energized—by their ambivalent positions within their own systems of colonialist oppression [and] have found difficulty in constructing a stable—or even unstable—identity.' Helen Tiffin, 'The Body in the Library: Identity, Opposition and the Settler-Invader Woman', in *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed.

conscious to acknowledge that in Rhys's instance I am not dealing with a settler colony history, I see some usefulness in drawing comparison with Stephen Slemon's call for the inclusion of ex-colonial settler literature to be placed under the rubric 'postcolonial'. Slemon's argument is built around the consideration that resistance is not simply embedded within a text but is also produced through interactions that occur between readers and the 'structures of their own culturally specific histories'.[37] His case for including ex-colonial settler literature as part of the postcolonial is founded on the basis that 'literary resistance is necessarily in a place of ambivalence: between systems, between discursive worlds, implicit and complicit in both of them', foregrounding the problematic tendency of postcolonial criticism 'to blur when it tries to focus upon ambiguously placed material'.[38]

Slemon calls for a re-addressing of the idea that 'the most important forms of resistance to any form of social power will necessarily be produced from within the communities that are most immediately and visibly subordinated by that power structure'.[39] He offers three main concerns with this notion: first, that the centre/periphery resistance binary can re-inscribe the same political split; second, that representational purity (the assumption that literary resistance is intentionally within a text) can be contested; and third, that power itself inscribes its resistances and so in the process seeks to contain them. Thus—and as Bhabha's theory of ambivalence supports—sites of anti-colonialist resistance are never easily located because there is never a simple reversal of power. From this we can begin to recognise that resistance is never purely resistance, 'but is always necessarily complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress'.[40]

Anuradha Dingwaney Needham has argued exactly this, and her analysis in *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas* is perhaps particularly pertinent when aligned with the context of Rhys's slave-owning family history. Her inquiry emerges from a sense of unease at the recognition that most discussions of resistance, in the process of validating their own views, seem framed to exclude those conceptions of resistance that run counter to their own emphases; a desire for purity within resistance that remains uncontaminated or uncompromised by (or despite) its encounter with the west. Yet, as she clearly identifies, no modes of resistance 'are completely free of their implication in the domination they resist'.[41] Integral to this is the use of inversion: 'a

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by Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.374-88 (p.377).

[37] Stephen Slemon, 'Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World' (1990), in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 72-83 (p.73).

[38] Slemon, p.79.

[39] Slemon, p.75.

[40] Slemon, p.78.

[41] Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp.10.

favoured strategy in the arsenal of this form of resistance, [which] would not be possible without the terms and evaluations embodied in and by the dominant, which the inversion then attempts to devalue (and revalue) through a process of transvaluation'.[42] The effect of this inversion, according to Needham, is produced 'not only by the way in which a given form of resistance is enacted and described but also by the fact that this enactment and description are themselves products of specific circumstances—historical, political, cultural and social—and assumptions regarding the resisting subject's "subjectivity, identity and agency"'.[43] This sets up writing such as Rhys's, which inhabits the space *between* binaries such as coloniser and colonised, foreign and native, as vital material for further analysis of critiques of power structures existing in colonial visual hierarchies. Rhys's position both within and outside of European subjectivity as a white female of Creole descent enables her to interrogate the 'simple' binaries of Europe and its Others from a unique vantage point.

Like Slemon, Alan Lawson has called for the recognition of Second World literature as the place where the processes of colonial power as negotiation are most visible, arguing for an acknowledgement that as postcolonial theory articulates itself through an insistence on that which is not the same, it overlooks the importance of the settler site as a space of ambivalence. Lawson returns us to Bhabha's observations that 'the colonial text occupies [a] space of double inscription'—split between originality and difference—to highlight the problematic double inscription within the Second World Subject of authority and authenticity.[44] Lawson writes:

> If we put [the] double inscription of authority and authenticity together with the notion that the cultures of the Second World are both colonizing and colonized, we can see that there are always two kinds of authority and always two kinds of authenticity that the settler subject is *con/signed* to desire and disavow. The settler subject is signed, then, in a language of authority and in a language of resistance. The settler subject enunciates the authority that is in colonial discourse on behalf of the imperial enterprise that he—and sometimes she—represents. The settler subject represents, but also mimics, the authentic imperial culture from which he—and, more problematically, she—is separated. This is mimicry in Bhabha's special sense since that authority is enunciated on behalf of, but never quite as, the imperium: that authority is always incomplete.[45]

Thus out of that which is '*almost the same but not quite*'—in the context of this thesis, the duplicitous status of authors such as Rhys—emerges the menace of 'the repetitious slippage

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[42] Needham, p.11.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Alan Lawson, 'Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject' (1995), in *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, ed. by Cynthia Sugars (Peterborough, Ont.; Plymouth: Broadview, 2004), pp.151-164 (p.156).
[45] Ibid.

of difference and desire'.[46] The refiguration of hierarchies of sight and vision in literature that distorts the coloniser/colonised binary is therefore necessarily tied to mimicry, for it is used as a means to interrogate structures of power from both within and without. In this context, the usefulness of detailed study into the literary creation of new ways of seeing that act against traditional visual relationships is more strikingly apparent. There is clear scope for discussion of the 'in-between' status of literature from Creole authors like Rhys as this writing highlights the slippage of identification between European subject and colonial object.

Primitivism, Empire, and the Visual Cultures of Modernism

This thesis will, in turn, attend to the various visual media that are referenced in Rhys's interwar writing. Rhys's early novels, beginning with the publication of *Quartet* in 1928, followed by *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and finally *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), as well as short stories and unpublished notebook material and manuscript drafts sourced from the Jean Rhys Archive, reveal a close engagement with the social and cultural contexts in which they were written. The works include detailed reference to shops, films, theatre shows, books, paintings and exhibitions, along with the naming of specific locations within Paris and London. This careful attention to detail enables close contextualised readings of Rhys's texts, helping to draw out some of the more theoretical issues of racial ventriloquism and the assignation of identities through the visual, specific to the period in question.

My engagement with the production of the new ways of seeing in London and Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century as related to Rhys's early writing can be split into three strands. The first is the context of primitivist modern art, the relationship between race and visual art in London and Paris. Second is the sight of colonial peoples in the metropolis, and the anxieties caused by the movement of imperial subjects into the centre. Third is the altered position of the female in public life. Delving into these contexts brings to the fore the dominance of the image in modern social life, and how its close relation to imperial concerns helped shape these new visual processes that questioned traditional structures of vision that themselves held colonial connotations. Such contexts deserve far more detailed attention than this thesis can afford, and I am limited to discussion only insofar as they relate to specific motifs within Rhys's fiction, or the context of her own experiences with the varying aspects of modern visual culture.

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[46] Bhabha, pp.89-90.

Roger Fry's 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' exhibition of 1910 began the process of introducing the British public to the artistic developments of the Parisian avant-garde. Despite omitting work by non-Western artists, the exhibition can be read as the introduction of the 'primitive' to English high culture. As I elaborate in Chapter Three, three of the most famous artists of the show—Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso—were already heavily invested in primitivism as a mode of modern art, Picasso having shocked Paris with his *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, painted in the same year that Rhys arrived in London. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* Rhys references Amedeo Modigliani's 1917 *Reclining Nude* in an ekphrastic writing of the racialised, sexualised objectivity of the female body. Her allusions to primitivist debates of the time are part of a commentary on the merging of European realist representations of the female and associations to exotic otherness.

Fry's exhibition aimed to demonstrate there was a universal principle operating within both modern and African art, presenting artists who appropriated representational methods from African art to promote Post-Impressionism as a valid and original avant-garde art form. But not everyone was impressed by the progressive nature of the movement, nor the paintings included in the exhibition (see fig.1, Gauguin's *Poèmes Barbares* from 1896, which was used as the exhibition poster). Below reads the *Daily Express*' furious review:

> In a typical [Gauguin] hideous brown women, with purple hair and vitriolic faces, squat in the midst of a nightmare landscape of drunken palm trees, crude green grass, vermilion rocks, and numerous glaringly coloured excrescences impossible to identify […] but, undeniably clever as they often are, the Catherine-wheel antics of the Post-Impressionists are not likely to wake many responsive chords in British breasts.[47]

The Post-Impressionists were avant-garde artists introducing new concepts to the public, but at the same time as being perceived as progressive and 'modern', their work was also seen as a return to primitive, almost barbaric art. For Fry, "primitive" drawings and sculpture were the future, as he announced both through his exhibitions and essays, they offered models of what art could be. In the same year as the 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' exhibition he published an essay titled 'The Art of the Bushman', following this with 'Negro Sculpture' in 1920, essays that were collected together in his major work of the same year, *Vision and Design*. But even as Fry aimed to assert African sculpture and bushman drawings as art, their elevation into high culture was difficult to sustain even for those like Fry who held revisionist, progressive views. As Marianna Torgovnick points out, most early writers on primitive masks and sculpture discussed them only in the context of

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[47] *Post-Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception*, ed. by J. B. Bullen (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.105-6.

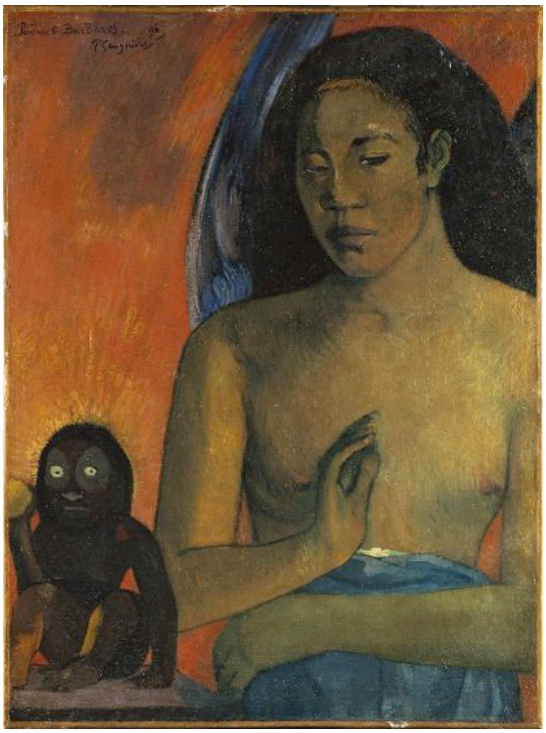

Fig. 1: Paul Gauguin, *Poèmes Barbares*, 1896. © Harvard Art Museums.
www.harvardartmuseums.org

modern art; primitive objects were only interesting insofar as they influenced Western artists. According to Torgovnick, for Fry, 'both "art" and a guiding "aesthetics" were required for a society to be a "culture".[48] Even as Fry appreciated the form and stylistic features of 'Negro sculpture', he stated that 'it is for want of a conscious critical sense and the intellectual powers of comparison and classification that the negro has failed to create one of the great cultures of the world'.[49] It is pertinent to point out that this method of thinking was for the most part limited to African and Afro-Caribbean art, with art from India and China, for example, held in much higher regard.

Indeed, throughout *Vision and Design* Fry maintains a distinct ambivalence about the value of African art even as he uses it to test his wider aesthetic theories. Despite frequently using the terms 'art' and 'artist'—thus acknowledging a degree of aesthetic capability—the rhetoric of colonialism, the legacy of Hume and Long, overrides the power of their use: 'we have the habit of thinking that the power to create expressive plastic form is one of the greatest of human achievements, […] it seems unfair to be forced to admit that certain nameless savages have possessed this power not only in a higher degree than we at this moment, but than we as a nation have ever possessed it'.[50] The irony of Fry's use of 'savage'

[48] Torgovnick, pp.83.
[49] Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), pp.103.
[50] Fry, p.103.

is evident; the lack of individual attribution, merging the 'nameless' artists into one mass, serves to highlight their complex status as creators of art, a status that is defined via the very Western aesthetic cultural ideals from which they were excluded.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century bore witness to an increasing interest in 'primitive' art from colonial lands, appropriated and sent home to Europe through military and scientific expeditions for anthropological examination. Most materials and artefacts that returning explorers brought back found their way into ethnographic museums, which were themselves expanding as the century progressed. The African sculptures and masks returned to European cities had spent years neglected in museums such as the Trocadéro in Paris and the British Museum in London, only to be redefined as sources for inspiration at the beginning of the twentieth century. But as Barkan and Bush note, 'both the objectivity of the representation and the question of who controlled the discourse turn out to be quite complex. Take the case of museum exhibitions. In the 1890s, European museums reclassified primitive artefacts from curiosities to objects of either art or ethnography. Yet the fin-de-siècle distinguished between the two only with difficulty'.[51]

Primitivism as a concept was produced by European sensibilities to supply a necessary 'other' against which Victorian society could reinforce itself. Application of the term can be found from the mid-1800s onward, and was directly related to an intellectual interest in racial difference, standing as part of a hierarchy that placed European civilisation at its pinnacle. To paraphrase Archer-Straw, primitivism was thus a label that was adopted by Europeans in an act of self-definition, constructed to act as oppositional to the Western rational 'I', and part of the process by which Europeans could suggest their own authority and superiority by placing inferior status on their imperial subjects.[52] Importantly for modernists, the co-option of the primitive was a way of foregrounding their own avant-gardism, their outsiderness, and this applies to Rhys too. But this is not without its own ambiguities. Helen Carr writes of the close links between Rhys's portrayal of the Caribbean and forms of modernist primitivism at the time, describing their construction of 'a reverse discourse out of nineteenth-century racial assumptions'.[53] Carr usefully recognises Rhys's fascination with blackness and her 'inversion of the usual assumptions of white superiority' as 'a significant political statement, even if [it was] made without challenging' the problematic colonial paradigm of primitivism that it was located within.[54]

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[51] Barkan and Bush, pp.9-10.
[52] Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp.11-12.
[53] Helen Carr, "Intemperate and Unchaste': Jean Rhys and Caribbean Creole Identity', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 14.1 (2003), 38-62 (p.55).
[54] Ibid.

Modernist primitivism took many forms. Indeed, as my thesis will suggest, there was a significant interplay between various visual media, reinforcing my argument that the relationship between modernism and its multiple strands of visual culture was one heavily influenced by empire. Africa and the Caribbean became popular sources for a host of visual arts, the interwar generation lured by the seductive quality of the primitive and exotic within popular culture. Advertising and product packaging also used imperial images to sell products. Images of colonial subjects were regularly used to promote items that came from places considered exciting and original, including the European-owned plantations of the Caribbean. Emphasis was placed on the difference and newness to the European palate of such exotic products. But these items—and the imagery of the colonial subjects used to sell them—also needed refining, purified for the metropolitan consumer after being obtained through imperialist exploitation in the colonies, as the advertisement in *Voyage in the Dark* reveals: 'What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa'.[55] A copy of this image has proved impossible to locate, however the British Library does hold an advertising pamphlet produced by Bournville (Cadbury's) from 1927 titled 'Cocoa: the Story of its Cultivation'.[56] Documents of this kind, along with extensive advertising and

Fig. 2: 'Cocoa Breaking in a Trinidad Plantation' © British Library Board ((CB) DY 79 (C1) pg 14).

[55] Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.50. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.
[56] *Cocoa: The Story of its Cultivation* (Bournville: Cadbury Brothers, 1927).

poster campaigns by organisations such as the Empire Marketing Board, would have been a familiar sight in Britain and most certainly would have resonated with Rhys.[57] This pamphlet is part history textbook, part geographical survey, and includes sanitised paintings and photographs of cocoa production in the Caribbean: colourful, clean depictions of a colonised labour force (fig.2). Rhys mimics its formal presentation in various sections of *Voyage in the Dark*, from her reference to sanitised images of industrial production in the colonies as per the advert above, to cartographical descriptions of Dominica remembered by Anna Morgan from childhood.

The relationship between empire and modernist visual arts can be extended to include the response to the increased presence of colonial peoples in the centres of Paris and London. As Barbara Bush acknowledges of interwar popular culture in *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, 'Africa continued to provide a 'colonial spectacle' to titillate the popular gaze' not just through representations of race in the visual arts, but on the stage, the cinema screen, and in specially constructed displays within imperial exhibitions and world fairs.[58] Since the mid-nineteenth century colonial peoples themselves—as well as their images—had become sites of visual representation. The artistic forms that Europeans fetishised, the wood and stone carvings and masks that were trophies from African expeditions, were expanded to include 'live' models performing within so-called exhibition narratives, or performing on stage and screen. This thesis identifies Rhys's commentary on the spectacle of colonial subjects via her representation of the chorus girl in popular music hall theatre, her depictions of artist's model experiences, her characters' engagement with the spectacle of cinema, and her references to the imperial exhibitions of the 1920s and 30s. In Rhys's context, the circulation of racial tropes is disrupted by the ambiguity of visual signification for her female characters.

Rhys portrays her characters finding themselves caught within the same objectifying structures of vision as colonial subjects. This confronts the relationship between empire and vision in its disruption of the racially coded representations of metropolitan visual culture. Key to this is the concept of performance, as I will demonstrate in Chapter One: 'From Stage to Page: The Alternative Performances of Jean Rhys's Modernist Fiction'. To quote Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina:

> While the authenticity of African art was celebrated in Roger Fry's work, the far more widely disseminated popular images of the performance of

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[57] A wide selection of these posters can be found on the Manchester Art Gallery website as part of their 'Collections in Focus: Posters from the Empire Marketing Board' catalogue. http://www.manchestergalleries.org/the-collections/revealing-histories/propaganda-pride-and-prejudice-posters-from-the-empire-marketing-board/

[58] Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.31.

> race became the recognised representations of people of colour themselves. On stage and screen the preponderant image was of white actors and musicians pretending to be non-white; this image was so prevalent that even if one had visited the exhibition villages and actually seen people of colour, they likely did not see the falseness of the more familiar imitations.[59]

This degree of falsification, of the individual 'performing' racial otherness for visual entertainment (found in popular minstrel shows and music hall performances too), finds its history in the imperial exhibitions of Europe from 1851 onwards. Gerzina continues by noting that '[e]ven the exhibition villages themselves presented the layers of performativity: black British people pretending to be Africans; Londoners pretending to be villagers; simulated tableaux and work scenes pretending to be of daily life in the colonies'.[60] Imperial exhibitions created performances of race and empire, so that 'primitive' people, in conjunction with their images, were used for cultural representation. Since the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851, exhibitions had included the presentation of colonial peoples. So too in Paris, where, from the closing decades of the nineteenth century, 'native villages' were erected to present exotic peoples in what amounted to zoological exhibits.[61]

In my concluding chapter I produce a detailed commentary on the exhibition and world fairs of the early twentieth century, viewing them as displays of imperial might designed not only to increase global trade but to propagate the message of empire. I argue that the presentation of colonial subjects in exhibition spaces such as at the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Modern* which is referenced at the close of *Good Morning, Midnight*, spill out into the rest of the city and that by extension the modern city in its entirety becomes the exhibition. Imperial exhibitions such as the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, which I also connect to Rhys's final novel, were part of government drives to promote imperial activity and reinforce a sense of national identity. This propagandist promotion occurred in other forms of visual spectacle too, most notably in the cinema, which is the subject of my fourth chapter: 'Mirrors and Movies: The Rhys Woman in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Much of my focus in this chapter is a reading of the presentation of the colonies through the documentary films of the Empire Marketing Board, and I relate this highly constructed performance of 'otherness' to fictional film narratives as well. In *Voyage in the Dark*, protagonist Anna Morgan goes to the cinema to watch an episode of *The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate* films. Anna's friend's distaste for

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[59] Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, 'Virginia Woolf: Performing Race', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. by Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2010), pp.74-87 (p.77).
[60] Gerzina, p.77.
[61] Barkan and Bush, p.8.

the 'dirty foreigner' playing the lead speaks of a familiar portrayal of non-English women as being 'tainted', contrasted with the purity of Anglo-Saxon femininity.

But while representations of racial and cultural otherness were often deemed to be a return to primitive, savage times, with the related imagery requiring a purifying before presentation to the imperial centre, contradictory attitudes determined that interest in black culture was simultaneously a sign of being modern. Rhys was undoubtedly influenced by the culture of negrophilia she encountered in 1920s Paris, where she resided for most of the decade. In 1925 Josephine Baker's '*Danse Sauvage*' at *la Revue nègre* was causing waves across the city and beyond. Baker was a young mixed race dancer who, through a reinforcement and reworking of racial stereotypes, was transformed by Parisian audiences into a mythical 'black Venus'.[62] Her performances played with the conventions of the black exotic in the context of white colonialism, but she was left uneasily occupying space as both of the agent and victim of gendered primitivist stereotyping.[63] In 1934, the same year as *Voyage in the Dark*'s publication, famous negrophile Nancy Cunard published her edited anthology *Negro*. Working to document the achievements of black culture, *Negro* was, in her words, a 'dedication', an 'inclusive' act that sought to collate the perspectives of the black diaspora.[64] In 1928 Cunard left her lover Louis Aragon for an African-American musician named Henry Crowder. As Archer-Straw relates, 'for negrophiles like Cunard, Crowder's presumed racial purity was important to reinforce her own identity as a radical'.[65] Cunard's relationships caused huge controversy, and her trip to the Caribbean to research for *Negro* had to be called off due to unwanted attention. Like Cunard, many European artists and authors fraternised with migrants from Africa, the Caribbean and beyond as a promotion and romantic exoticising of black culture. And yet the ability to adopt black style and reappropriate it in the name of art was only made possible due to the denial of agency and cultural identity to black people themselves.[66]

The visual sight of black people in Europe's metropolitan centres also led to a co-option of identity for whites and blacks. While black culture was often seen as a conceptual tool for transgression towards avant-garde sensibilities, imitation of white culture by those deemed racially 'other' was necessary for social acceptance. As I relate more closely in the make-up section of Chapter Two: 'Fashioning-through-Fashion: The Public/Private

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[62] Archer-Straw, pp.117.
[63] For more on Baker see Archer-Straw, pp.116-133.
[64] Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro: An Anthology* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p.ii.
[65] Archer-Straw, pp.163.
[66] This exoticising becomes particularly interesting in light of Rhys's relationship to Ford Madox Ford, his influence over her as both romantic lover and mentor. Ford wrote of the importance of her West Indian origins in his preface to *The Left Bank* collection of short stories in 1927. Rhys's exoticism was however, also a source of personal fascination during their love affair, and both Ford and his wife Stella Bowen claimed Rhys was passing as white. Angier, p.656.

Identities of the Rhys Woman', skin bleaching, hair straightening and accent manipulation were all used as assimilation techniques. The ability to 'pass', to imitate whiteness through dress and action in a denial of true identity, was a mark of survival. Black Jamaican poet Una Marson details the hierarchy of colour in the colony in her poem 'Kinky Hair Blues' from her 1937 anthology *The Moth and the Star*:

> I hate dat ironed hair
> And dat bleaching skin.
> Hate dat ironed hair
> And dat bleaching skin.
> But I'll be all alone
> If I don't fall in.[67]

But those who were already situated at once within and external to white imperial culture—like Rhys as a white Creole—were left sceptical about the possibility of achieving a fixed identity in the urban spaces of Europe.

The processes of identity reappraisal for colonial subjects in the early decades of the twentieth century find comparison with the expanding role of women within society; they too had experienced significant changes of circumstance. The New Woman of the 1890s was a central figure in debates about the progress of modernity, and changes in gender relations ran parallel to the artistic developments of modernism. Women were central figures in the modern urban city through shopping and consumerism with the rise of the department store, new forms of employment, and—in Britain—through suffrage campaigns. As Petrine Archer-Straw notes in her succinct account of Parisian society in the 1920s, the transition undertaken by women in modern European society was difficult 'for the white male artist to come to terms with, caught as he was between seeing the female as subject of erotic fantasy or as idealistic muse. This ambivalence towards women, combined with those about race, added to the collage of images produced during the 1920s'.[68]

The familiar civilised/primitive binary became the conventional discourse of otherness that included gender, and fears about women's social empowerment figured alongside the racism of primitivism.[69] Rhys alludes to this in *Voyage in the Dark*, with Anna named as 'Hottentot' by her fellow chorus members. This is a reference to the exhibition of black women such as Saartjie 'Sarah' Baartman—'the Hottentot Venus'—in early

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[67] Una Marson, 'Kinky Hair Blues', *The Moth and the Star* (Jamaica: The Gleaner, 1937), p.91. Rhys also wrote a poem (undated) that displays similarities to the tone and form of Marson's work, titled 'Negress in Bloomsbury': 'They say night/ But they got no night, / They say "Trees"/ They don't see no trees/ They don't hear no rivers running/ They ain't got no ease'. *The Jean Rhys Archive, 1920-1982, Coll. No. 1976.011. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa. Tulsa, Oklahoma.* Series 1, Box 3, Folder 9. All subsequent references will be referenced as from the JRA within the main body of the text by Series, Box, Folder.

[68] Archer-Straw, pp.17-8.

[69] Urmila Seshagiri, *Race and the Modernist Imagination* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp.108-112.

nineteenth century Paris and London, where audiences would pay to see her steatopygia, or protruding buttocks.[70] The presentation of Anna's descent into prostitution connects to the wider adoption of 'primitive' language for descriptions of sexually deviant woman, with Judith Walkowitz noting how so-called 'fallen sisters' were viewed as 'members of the "residuum" […] This social underworld was the focus of deep-seated social fears and insecurities, most vividly expressed in the images of filth and contagion associated with the "Great Unwashed"'.[71] For Rhys, with her female protagonists repeatedly cast in the image of colonial savage, impure or 'other' than English, gender issues as related to notions of primitiveness gain her interwar texts further critical currency.

The suffrage campaigns of the 1900s and the resultant climate of political unrest provide a context in which to acknowledge the intertwined nature of shifts in the visual politics of gender and empire. Jane Goldman's reading of Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibition includes a reading of the suffrage movement and its adoption of colourful spectacle for political impact on London's streets. Goldman discusses in length suffrage artist Mary Lowndes, who in September 1910, just before Fry's exhibition, published a manifesto-style essay entitled 'On Banners and Banner Making', where she spoke of the feminist appropriation of the heroines and goddesses of classical mythology for political, avant-garde activism in the public sphere.[72] The press' demonisation of acts of suffrage as hysterical or futile were pitted against the adoption by the suffrage movement of personified virtues such as Justice and Fortitude, and female figures like Athena and Boadicea, that were to assert the possibility of female collectivity within the political struggle. As Lisa Tickner discusses in *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*, Joan of Arc and Britannia (as an armoured maiden) were often held as archetypal patriots and woman, as imperial tropes were reappropriated and adapted for the purposes of the suffrage movement.[73]

Yet as Goldman relates, however effective the use of these women of power and virtue were, such allegorical tactics were unsettling in their contradictory positioning of women as being in opposition to, yet struggling for better representation within, empire.[74] Goldman turns to the Women's Coronation Procession of 1911, describing it is a 'colourful

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[70] Sander Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1, "Race," Writing, and Difference (1985), 204-242 (p.213).
[71] Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.3-4.
[72] Jane Goldman, *Modernism 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.157.
[73] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), p.209-211.
[74] Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.195.

"counter-hegemonic" pageantry' that stood in opposition to the official celebrations of renewed male sovereignty. Central to this was the suffragists' 'Pageant of Empire', with Tickner describing the tableau as 'intend[ing] to symbolise the unity of the British Empire, a reinhabiting by women of the allegorical female figures by which such sentiments were conventionally expressed'.[75] Part of suffrage discourse was the duty of British women to 'rescue' their colonial sisters (this was particularly in relation to India, but can be acknowledged in respect to Caribbean women also). As Philippa Levine addresses, many colonial women were coming to London for suffrage purposes as well.[76] Figures such as Boadicea were thus not the embodiment of British nationalism but a type of effective female militancy, even as they lay within the rhetoric of national identity. The adoption of historical components of imperial strength had to be just as selective as those discourses to which they were opposed, producing a complex mix of (re)presentations from within imperial ideology.

The artistic changes of the early decades of the twentieth century were inextricably linked to socio-cultural developments that impacted upon all aspects of life. Developments in communications technology, photography and advertising, and the continued popularity of imperial exhibitions and emergence of cinema as a propagandist tool were but some of the ways in which otherness was diagnosed, isolated and regulated.[77] The representational projects of the era linked optical empiricism with the discernment of 'truth': the production and circulation of images of otherness functioned as sites where contemporary anthropology, popular culture and nationalistic/imperial ideologies could intersect.[78] New visual positions produced new kinds of observers at a time saturated by imperial and spectacle-driven ideologies. Modernist arts repeated the encounter with otherness in its ugliness and terror, then purified it to be acceptable to European sensibilities. Non-Western art was appropriated and contained, while its influence—and artistic merit—was denied. But the emergence of new ways of seeing that acted against a visual epistemology of modernity that privileged imperial structures of race/gender power simultaneously enabled space for resistance from within. It is this complex and contradictory intersection that paves the way for a detailed study of the re-utilisation of visual culture by authors and artists straddling the colonial divide.

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[75] Tickner, p.126.

[76] See *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race*, ed. by Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall and Philippa Levine (London: Routledge, 2000); and *Gender and Empire*, ed. by Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[77] Archer-Straw, pp.179-80.

[78] See Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p.22. See also Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996), p.9.

Reading Jean Rhys

In attempting to answer why Rhys should be read in the context of black culture in Britain, and what Rhys's literature can add to studies of Caribbean modernism, we must also acknowledge the reception of her final novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. Until its publication, few thought of Rhys as a Caribbean author (although Ford does include in his preface to *The Left Bank* short story collection of 1927 the pronouncement of her 'coming from the Antilles, with a terrifying insight, and a terrific—an almost lurid!—passion for stating the case of the underdog').[79] V.S. Naipaul in 1972 was one of the first to suggest that Rhys's work ought to be understood in the context of her colonial origins.[80] But as Helen Carr notes, her inclusion in West Indian literature was fiercely rejected by Kamau Brathwaite not two years later.[81] Even as Brathwaite acknowledged Rhys's interest in the relationship between creole and metropole, in the context of *Wide Sargasso Sea* he wrote that:

> White creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a **group**, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea.[82]

Carr continues that one could perhaps argue Rhys's gender did not help her, with studies of West Indian literature dominated by the work of Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, and Brathwaite himself.[83] Four years after Brathwaite's dismissal, Helen Tiffin brought together the colonial and feminist perspectives of Rhys's work as she stated: 'The parallel between male/female relationships and imperial nation and underdog are obvious'.[84] After Rhys's death in 1979 three main strands of criticism emerged, with critics from feminist, modernist and Caribbean perspectives all laying claim to her. Detailed analysis of Rhys's literature has, and continues to be, heavily influenced by its labelling within these strands of critical thinking.[85]

In recent decades criticism has increasingly foregrounded the importance of Rhys's Creolité, although more often this was located within readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, with the effects of a colonial identity in metropolitan Europe overlooked. Veronica Gregg and

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[79] Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, with a preface by Ford Madox Ford (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p.24.
[80] V.S. Naipaul, 'Without a Dog's Chance', *New York Review of Books*, May 1972.
[81] Carr, pp.40-41.
[82] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou Publications, 1974), p.38. Brathwaite does not mention Rhys by name, only referring to her as a 'white creole expatriate West Indian-born novelist' (p.34).
[83] Carr, p.41.
[84] Helen Tiffin, 'Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys', *World Literature Written in English*, 17 (April 1978), 328-341, p.329.
[85] Lengthy discussions of the history of Rhys criticism have been covered by Helen Carr and Elaine Savory, amongst others. See Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys*, 2nd edn (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2012), and Elaine Savory, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Elaine Savory both began the exploration of Rhys's Caribbean, creole identity across all of her writing, including the interwar fiction, but it is only within more recent additions to Rhys criticism that a focused attention to the traces of black Atlantic culture in London and Paris have emerged. The urban setting of Rhys's fiction has long been an integral aspect of her criticism, with Emery (1990), Gregg (1995), Judith Raiskin (1996), Elaine Savory (1998), and most recently Mary Wilson's edited collection *Rhys Matters* (2013), all considering the significance of geography and place to the interwar fiction. There is limited acknowledgement of the distinct visual inflection to Rhys's descriptions of urban space, although Christina Britzolakis provides an informative reading of spectacle within exhibition space in "This Way to the Exhibition': Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction' (2007), and articles within the 2012 Jean Rhys special edition of *Women: A Cultural Review* begin to more fully address the connection between Rhys's urbanism and the visual.[86] I argue that the two are closely connected, for it is the imperial metropole that enables an interrogation and critique of race, class and gender issues as related to sight.[87] Perhaps most successfully, Mary Lou Emery braids Rhys's multiple identities together to construct her as a writer of 'plural and often conflicting outsider identities as West Indian writer, European modernist and woman writer at the closing of the era of empire'.[88] For the purpose of this thesis such a model, combining her feminism, her modernism and her Caribbean identity within the context of the urban landscape of her novels, will prove invaluable.

Biographically, Rhys's Caribbean Creolité determines her vision and the complexity of such a position cannot be ignored. Rhys's identity—visually and aurally—was an ambiguous subject as she relates in a letter to Phyllis Shand Allfrey, another Dominican Creole writer:

> I can assure you that I have had lots of people here who are utterly astonished that I am not black as coal – in fact they don't believe it. I don't know whether it's more funny or sad.[89]

Rhys also wrote in her unpublished Black Exercise book that 'I'm not like an English girl a bit I'm a West Indian girl with a drawling voice' (*JRA* 1.1:1).[90] According to Gregg, the

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[86] Christina Britzolakis, "This Way to the Exhibition': Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 21 (2007), 457-482.

[87] Regarding resistance writing, Dingwaney Needham's inquiry notes the importance of the metropole as an enabling condition: 'the metropole is the site that has generated not only Western/metropolitan knowledge(s) about the colonial others, but also, as I seek to demonstrate, the negotiations – including overt contestations and acute modifications – of these knowledge(s) by these writers from the so-called colonial peripheries, now situated "at the heart … of [a former colonial] empire"' (p.2).

[88] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.8.

[89] Anna Snaith, "A Savage from the Cannibal islands': Jean Rhys and London', in *Geographies of Modernism: Literature, Cultures, Spaces* ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.76-85 (p.78).

term Creole (referring to a person) 'is a descendant of European settlers either born or living in the West Indies or Central or South America'.[91] But to be born Creole is to be displaced, and the Creole subject's multiplicity defies an exact point of origin, geographically and genealogically because, as Judith Raiskin notes, Creole identity encompasses 'the white native who lives in a cultural space between the European and black Caribbean societies and the native of mixed racial ancestry living in the islands and in England after World War II'.[92] Creole as a term of reference for those of European origin naturalised in the West Indies allowed for a racial ambiguity that erased the possibility of fixed (national) identity, which Rhys herself discussed: 'as far as I know I am white—but I have no country really now'.[93] Raiskin argues that shifts in meaning, whereby the term 'had also come to define the "coloured" native of mixed racial origin and, more generally West Indian culture itself' can serve as a template for analysis of Rhys's fiction, which 'calls particular attention to the social and psychological disruptions wrought by colonialism and, more specifically, by its dismantling'.[94]

Like Rhys, who spoke of the possibility of black blood through her Cuban great-grandmother, the protagonists of the four interwar novels are of uncertain heritage. Julia Martin's mother, described in animalistic terms, is afforded a Brazilian heritage, while Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* comes from a seemingly invisible place—as her friend Maudie puts it: 'she was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere' (12). Similar ignorance is expressed by the white narrator towards the 'Little Brown Girl' of Una Marson's poem, written in 1932 shortly after her arrival in London: 'I guess Africa, or India/ Ah no, from some island / In the West Indies / But isn't that India / All the same?' and I return to Marson frequently in this thesis, finding affinities with Rhys as their work attends to the visual.[95]

Rhys spent the first years of her life in the isolated enclave of white Anglican Roseau, a small town sitting between the forested interior of Dominica and the Atlantic.

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[90] Mary Lou Emery has transcribed the following from Rhys's Black Exercise Book about her ambivalence towards an English identity: 'That is she told them she was English they said No, you're a colonial, my mother says colonials never are ladies and gentlemen—an inferior being. If, on the other hand she said she wasn't English but she'd rather be French or Spanish anyway, they were even more annoyed—a traitor. "You're British. Neither one thing nor the other. Heads you win tails I lose. And I never liked their voices any better than they liked mine—"' (*Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.1:1a.).

[91] Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) p.ix.

[92] Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.98. Raiskin notes that 'during the half-century that Rhys wrote, the term "Creole," by which she identified herself, came to connote less an attachment to Europe than an active identification with indigenous cultural forms' (p.97).

[93] Jean Rhys, *Letters, 1931-1966*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.172.

[94] Raiskin, p.98

[95] Marson, *The Moth and the Star*, p.13.

Elaine Savory in 'Living on Both Sides, living to write' (1998), and Anna Snaith in "A Savage from the Cannibal Islands': Jean Rhys and London' (2005), provide concise histories of Dominica as it moved from slavery towards a modern state at the turn of the century, particularly foregrounding the tensions which dominated the island in the years leading up to Rhys's childhood between the white, mixed race and black populations.[96] With a hostile interior that hindered agricultural production Dominica lacked a significant sugar-producing industry and as Snaith notes, as such was home to a large community of free blacks and 'mulattos'.[97] According to Snaith, coloured Dominicans, or the 'Mulatto Ascendancy' as they were known, formed the majority of the national assembly by 1838, four years after slavery was abolished, and 'this situation made the position of Creole [families like Rhys's] more precarious than on other [British-owned Caribbean] islands'.[98] Further, the island's resistance to colonial authority as it was exercised through slavery, governance and industrial development—exemplified by 'the incomplete Imperial Road [project], meant to bisect the island and facilitate industrial advance' and colonial plantation development—gave Rhys, as Snaith relates, connection to a unique history of resistance, one which must be taken into context when reading her modernist fiction.[99] From the existing body of criticism Rhys's writing can be firmly placed as modernist. But to turn back to the model Emery constructs in her reading of Rhys in the context of plantation modernism—'The Poetics of Labor in Jean Rhys's Caribbean Modernism' (2012)—as well as Leah Rosenberg's argument for the same context in *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007), is to situate her more concretely in the Caribbean tradition that she has been relatively excluded from.

It is important to acknowledge here that contemporary analysis on visual culture and Caribbean literature has predominantly focused on *racial* difference, but the importance of *cultural* difference in this context should not be ignored. Sound becomes an integral aspect of such studies, as the following commentary from Emery attends:

> The Eurocentric approach to visuality neglects well-known studies by, for example, Houston Baker, who emphasizes the "blues geographies of the New World" and "the *sound* and *soundings* of Afro-American modernism," or Paul Gilroy, who stresses cross-Atlantic flows of music as constitutive of black Atlantic modernity.[100]

What Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz describe in 'The New Modernist Studies' (2008) as the temporal, spatial and vertical expansion of modernism, is the extension of the historical period from the core 1890 to 1945 that reveals a spatial widening, which in turn

[96] Savory, pp.1-3, p.9 and Snaith, pp.76-85.
[97] Snaith, p77.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Emery, *Modernism*, p.19.

produces 'geomodernisms' that disrupt the standard dynamic of high vs. low culture.[101] The 'transnational turn' of modernism serves to make modernism less Eurocentric, with some critics going as far to view postcolonialism as either a form of or an heir to modernist literature; Urmila Seshagiri writes of *Voyage in the Dark* as a 'fulcrum between experimental modernism and postcolonial literature'.[102]

In light of this expansion, Emery continues by stating that the recentering of modernity 'gives to the black Atlantic a central and definitive role in forging the epistemological breaks with the "ocularcentrism" attributed to modernity […] these breaks do not just occur in the realm of sound, orality, and music; they also involve direct encounters with visuality as developed in Western philosophy and aesthetics to offer trans-figurative countervisions in the twentieth century'.[103] These new strands of modernist thinking, still in their infancy, highlight the need for criticism not bounded by discipline, nation, or period. As Gilroy writes, 'the specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity'.[104] Rhys's importance to Caribbean literature, studies of visuality and modernist thought cannot be overlooked.

As I related earlier, Emery contends that a focus on sound over vision in critical discussions of the arts of the Caribbean diaspora 'risks reproducing the hierarchical sensory divisions of eighteenth-century aesthetics' that 'denied Africans and indigenous people the capacity for contemplative sight that defined the free man of reason'.[105] I turn to Rhys's 1962 short story 'Let Them Call it Jazz'—a story containing her only black West Indian protagonist and written with what Savory terms a 'remarkable and convincing [West Indian] dialogue'—to exemplify the importance of the varying, interweaving strands of critical thought to Rhys's work.[106] For Rhys, who was without the visual signifier of blackness, sound was a way to be seen, while the gaze, both directed against her protagonists and used by them, became a method of silencing. Personally, Rhys's Creolité was her betrayal. As Carole Angier points out in her biography of Rhys, she was told from her childhood that

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[101] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA*, 123.3 (2008), 737-748 (pp.739-40).
[102] Urmila Seshagiri, 'Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century', *Modernism/Modernity*, 13 (2006), 487-506, (p.489).
[103] Emery, *Modernism*, p.19.
[104] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.19.
[105] Emery, *Modernism*, p.242.
[106] Savory, p.166. The carbon copy draft at the *Jean Rhys Archive* tells us that Selina's mother was from Venezuela. 'Let Them Call it Jazz', alternately titled 'Black Castle' or 'Holloway Song', *Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.5:4, p.32.

she had an accent, 'a nasty, sing-song nigger's voice'.[107] Perhaps one reason she chose to train as an actress was to learn to change her accent, to become 'more English', yet it was also one of the reasons she left RADA (then named Tree's School), where she studied briefly.[108] Rhys felt socially unacceptable in England as a result of her voice and trained herself to speak in a whisper, a practice she continued for most of her life. Selina Davis, protagonist of 'Let Them Call it Jazz' may have been Rhys's only black narrator, speaking in West Indian Patois, but Coral Ann Howells' description of Selina's story as 'emblematic of the immigrant woman's position in urban culture where every effort is made to marginalise and silence her' could indeed stand to describe of any one of Rhys's heroines.[109]

After problems with her previous landlord, Selina Davis moves to suburban London, to a house empty of noise and full of shadows. Selina finds comfort in a metaphorical return to the Caribbean through singing: 'when I sing all the misery goes from my heart. Sometimes I make up songs … other times I sing the old ones like *Tantalizin'* or *Don't Trouble Me Now*'.[110] Selina is an unwelcome sight in suburbia, stared at by her neighbours as if she were a wild animal let loose—malicious hatred disguised in the polite tones of genteel Englishness. In the story, being black is to be seen, but also to be alienated and ostracised by those Selina encounters in London. The gaze here is silencing, for it is through sound, as well as vision, that Selina is clearly marked as Other.

Singing becomes Selina's resistance to the hostility of her white neighbours, she sings so they can understand she is unafraid. But sound is also that which alienates her most strongly from social acceptance, as she is brought before the courts for the disturbance she causes. Walking the streets Selina feels the eyes of the law on her—'They don't look at me, but they see me all right' (15)—aware that while her blackness gives her concrete identification, it is also a clear marker of her difference; she is 'seen' as a construct of their intolerance, not as an individual. Here Selina becomes *too* visible, a problematic position that is replicated uneasily by the white heroines in Rhys's interwar novels. Selina once more turns to singing as her escape from the physical and mental confines of the house, standing in the street singing 'the best tune that has ever come to me in all my life' (16). The freedom that her own song grants her is only momentary, and after smashing her neighbours' window she is again sent to court.

Racial and cultural distinctions, and how they work to inhibit social communication and marginalise Selina, are made apparent in her silencing by a judicial system that fails to

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[107] Angier, p.46
[108] Ibid.
[109] Coral Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.127.
[110] Jean Rhys, *Let Them Call it Jazz and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 5. All subsequent references are from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

recognise her. Selina is unable to communicate in a manner acceptable to the authorities of the court and is thus rendered mute:

> I want to say all I do is sing in that old garden, and I want to say this in a decent quiet voice. But I hear myself talking loud and I see my hands wave in the air. Too besides it's no use, they won't believe me, so I don't finish. I stop, and I feel the tears on my face. 'Prove it.' That's all they will say. They whisper, they whisper. They nod, they nod. (22)

Once in prison a degree of resistance is granted to Selina as she obtains affirmation from the other women. Hearing another inmate singing the 'Holloway' song makes Selina feel as though the tune can escape the prison walls, awakening in her a desire to continue living. However even as she manifests some form of resistance, the social system continues to work against her. Released from prison and living with a light coloured woman and friends, Selina turns back to the Holloway song, whistling the tune for her new audience. With a similar conclusion to Sam Selvon's short story 'Calypso in London' (perhaps a hint at Rhys's engagement with her Caribbean literary contemporaries), Selina has her song 'stolen' from her, the tune sold to another musician.[111] The song, an aspect of a marginalised culture, can become mainstream even as that culture remains marginalised. Selina decides never to sing again, and yet acknowledges that the song's meaning has not been lost to her: "So let them call it jazz,' I think, and let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard' (33).

'Let Them Call it Jazz' was published in *The London Magazine* in February 1962, one of four short stories Rhys published in magazines in the first half of the decade. The publication history of the story within a modernist magazine, Rhys's re-emergence in the 1960s after an absence of more than twenty years, as well as her supposed awkward placement as a postcolonial and/or Caribbean author, exemplifies the problematics of chronological and geographical boundaries of modernism as existed, and are beginning to be dismantled.[112] The placement of Rhys's story in *The London Magazine* alongside Sylvia Plath and Derek Walcott, amongst others, brings Rhys's modernism to the forefront along a series of axes. The constant presence of the Caribbean in Rhys's work is highlighted by her inclusion in a magazine that was committed to 'Commonwealth Literature', whilst the periodical itself and the history of her often complex relationship to male editors (Ford's publication of *Vienne* in the *Transatlantic Review*, and Michael Sadleir's insistence on changing

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[111] 'Calypso in London' is the tale of Mango, a Trinidadian in London, who composes a calypso song with a compatriot whilst unemployed and looking for work. The song is sold by Hotboy, and the story concludes with Mango waiting to see if he will get any recompense for his contribution. Samuel Selvon, 'Calypso in London', in *Ways of Sunlight* (London: Longman, 1973), pp.125-131.

[112] My reading of the publication history of 'Let Them Call it Jazz' and its connection to Rhys's modernism emerges from discussion with Dr Faith Binckes and members of the Modernist Magazines Seminar at the Institute of English Studies, November 2013.

the end of *Voyage in the Dark*), throws Rhys's writing of female experience into sharp relief too.

Closing my introduction with a reading of 'Let Them Call it Jazz' within the context of her re-emergence in the 1960s hopefully exemplifies Rhys's attention to a discursive creolisation of form: a re-writing of the boundaries of modernism, and modernism's connection to visuality, that can also be mapped onto her earlier fiction. Coral Ann Howells suggests that Rhys's 'subversive critique of Englishness and imperialism' was 'focused by her recognition of difference after her arrival in England'.[113] But this recognition of difference, as Selina Davis shows, is based not only on the sight of *racial* otherness but the sound of *cultural* otherness too. Rhys's 'in-betweenness'—as almost the same but not quite, visually the same but audibly different—can be read across her body of work to highlight the problematics of identity formation through vision. Rhys's Creolité sets her apart from other contemporary authors, Caribbean and modernist, providing Rhys with a unique vantage point to combine the dual perspectives within the act of seeing. Rhys's fiction and its attention to new ways of seeing can be read as an alternative form of representation that uses the mechanisms of visual culture to speak directly of positions of cultural and social hybridity.

Chapter One begins with Rhys's voyaging in to London in 1907 and her brief career as a chorus girl on the musical theatre stage. This context opens out towards a discussion of theatrical spectacle and its relationship to everyday performances of the self, reading her character's engagements with the concept of 'performance' (both on stage and in daily life) in a multitude of ways. Most importantly for the structure of my argument throughout the thesis is my reading of performance as both narrative device and metaphorical mode of representation. Viewing Rhys's writing as a multidimensional engagement with modernism beyond its conventional borders facilitates commentary on the performative nature of the form of Rhys's texts. I look at how Rhys draws on performative traditions, in particular on carnival, to locate her representational politics within a liminal space between systems of signification.

The second chapter of this thesis moves issues of identity performance towards the 'fashioning-through-fashion' of female identities and sartorial constructions of Englishness. As women became an increasingly visible presence within public, commercial spaces of the city—both as fashion consumers and objects to be visually 'consumed'—altered processes of looking allow Rhys to question the limitations to liberatory fantasies of fashion. I focus on two short stories from *The Left Bank* collection, 'Mannequin' and 'Illusion', to discuss the way identities are shaped through processes of assimilation and appropriation. Fashion and

[113] Howells, p. 20.

make-up are a means for Rhys to speak of the visual encoding of cultural identity. The second half of the chapter is a reading of Rhys and make-up, and how she uses the practice of cosmetic 'masking' to draw attention to struggles between public, surface selves and private, internalised identities. I argue that Rhys's descriptions of make-up relate to the modern urban condition that requires a covering or concealment of "otherness".

Chapter Three attends to Rhys's deployment of ekphrasis as a narrative device to question representational structures as they exist in the modernist, primitivist art context. I begin with a close reading of 'Tommie', a short section from Rhys's unpublished novel *Triple Sec*. This narrative details a young woman's experience posing nude for a male artist, and can be related to Rhys's own experiences posing for the British artist Sir William Orpen soon after she arrived in London. The 'framing' of painting practices and visual art objects within Rhys's narratives facilitates a binding of gendered, colonial relations to the politics of vision. Rhys's narration of visual arts culture in the early decades of the twentieth century becomes both a challenge to prevailing aesthetics of primitivism and a reworking of dominant modes of representation.

My fourth chapter conceptualises the cinema screen as a mirror by which Rhys's characters encounter visual *mis*representations. I focus on the fractured or divided subjectivities of her protagonists and how these are relayed through allusions to distorted mirrors. This conveys a powerful evocation of themes of alienation and dislocation which can be traced across Rhys's narratives. The chapter is structured around three instances of Rhys's characters engaging with cinematic viewing. The disrupted viewing experiences of the characters reveal a crossover between a personal identification, and internalisation, of the image on screen, and the socially constructed and enforced misrepresentations that occur in the cinema auditorium and beyond. In support of my readings I place Rhys's engagement with cinema within a detailed historical context, specifically in regards to female viewing practices. I close my chapter with study of how Rhys's narratives address the politics of cinematic identifications as constructed via the exhibition of racial and cultural otherness.

My extended conclusion to this thesis stands as a separate chapter: "This Way to the Exhibition': Mapping Empire and the Visual', and as the title suggests, my focus lies with imperial exhibition practices of the interwar period. I argue that the various visual media discussed within the thesis as a whole can be united within the concept of global exhibition space. In doing so, I reveal that the processes of vision within the exhibition, just as with the other visual media, spill out of its borders and into the everyday life of the modern metropolis. As that happens, the exhibition reveals its lack—it cannot, as it professes to do so, represent everything. Within this failure can be located the potential for

alternative representations. I conclude my thesis with the premise that through the formalist spaces between the verbal and the visual within her fiction, Rhys focuses our attention on the space between visual representation and individual identification. The exhibition—and by extension all of the strands of visual culture covered within this thesis—becomes a way for Rhys to articulate the dislocations between colony and European metropolitan life. As she does she opens a new space of representation that links, then collapses, colony and metropole together, revealing that modernist visual cultures were inextricably linked to the practices of empire.

1. From Stage to Page: The Alternative Performances of Jean Rhys's Modernist Fiction

Jean Rhys does not fit easily into the field of theatre or performance studies: a novelist and short-story writer whose body of literary work was primarily written in the early decades of the twentieth century, of course re-emerging and receiving most critical attention with *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. And yet in the context of the recent reconceptualisations of the field of modernist studies, Rhys's engagement with theatrical spectacle and performance both as a narrative tool and metaphorical mode of representation significantly raises the cultural currency of her writing for both modernist and performance scholars alike.

Following her brief stint at RADA in 1909, Rhys began a career on stage as a musical comedy chorus girl prior to her eventual turn to writing. Rhys's early work offers material for a critical engagement with the multi-dimensional rethinking of modernism beyond its conventional stylistic and geographical borders, challenging canonical Western modernism from cultural, class and gender perspectives. Her treatment of theatre in her fiction adds new perspectives to pre-existing areas of modernist scholarly criticism, in particular female modernists' engagement with the concept of performance. If, as Penny Farfan notes, drama and performance have been under-represented in studies of modernism's development, and women's contributions to theatre's development likewise insufficiently acknowledged, Rhys's engagement with theatrical performance on stage and page becomes a worthy case-study of how the more traditional concerns of both modernist and theatre/performance scholarship are being challenged and reshaped from colonial as well as gender peripheries.[1]

Rhys's early flirtations with Edwardian theatre were first as a student then, following the death of her father and the threat of being returned to Dominica, two years touring the country in a series of low-paid, unsuccessful jobs as a chorus girl, including a brief stint in *Our Miss Gibbs* (1909) as well as Cinderella at the *Lyceum*. Rhys's was a colonial family in decline, so without the necessary means to support herself in London her

[1] Penny Farfan, 'Women's Modernism and Performance,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.47-61 (p.58).

employment on stage was less a childhood fantasy of a glittering career and more an act of financial necessity. Rhys was never cut out for the stage. In a heavily drafted piece of writing called 'Chorus Girls', Rhys relates her time in a music hall sketch called '*Chanteclair*' or 'Chant Èclair' ('an appalling show'), detailing her fear of the audience:

> As soon as we began our very amateurish dancing I felt the mockery and scorn from the audience like a smoke coming up. I was at the end of the line, near the wings, and after a bit of this I simply left the line and went off the stage. Before I went, I looked at the girl next to me. I saw she felt as I did, what a bad audience it was. Nevertheless, with a rather grim expression she was bravely going on with the dancing and even as I ran into the wings I thought what a coward I was. I reproached myself for my cowardice when I got home next day determined to go to the matinee and stick whatever they did, whether they hissed, booed or even threw things. (*JRA* 1.4:6 ver.5)

I see this as indicative of Rhys's experience with performative spectacle in the heart of empire, which is constantly offset by her fear of over-exposure. Sound becomes an important element in this. Rhys had learnt from her brief stint at RADA that King's English was the only acceptable speech for the stage, and that her Caribbean accent would prove a significant limitation to her own success as an actress. Rhys biographer Carole Angier quotes from her end of term school report:

> Although she is painstaking, we consider that her accent will stand very much in her way in stage work. She might in the course of a long training be able to conquer it or improve it greatly, but we would not like to speak with any certainty at this point.[2]

Rhys's voice would situate her constantly 'between' locations, identities and forms of representation. In this respect Rhys was an actor on the imperial stage too, engaging with the complexities of performance at a time when the presentation of empire via the spectacle of "primitive" people at exhibitions and fairs, placed on display for the entertainment of the viewing British public, was still wide-spread practice.

Rhys reworked her early theatrical experiences into her fiction. The passage above from 'Chorus Girls' is but one version of multiple drafts that eventually formed part of *Smile Please*. The disrupted performances she experienced during her time as an actress led to a turn from the stage to the page, producing an alternative representational space that complimented her Creole 'in-betweenness' in the provision of a new form of performative theatricality through writing. Rhys uses theatre as a means of interrogating the formation, then (re)presentation of identity in performative terms, revealing a complex negotiation between actor and spectator positions within such performances. This concern with exposing the politics of representation, and the use of theatrical spectacle in her fiction to rework dominant representational conventions is, I argue, specific to her 'in-betweenness'.

[2] Angier, pp.45-49.

This constant oscillation between actor/spectator roles exemplifies the complexities of representation for Rhys, a struggle that results from her inability to locate herself concretely in European or Caribbean subjectivity. As such, Rhys's adoption of different systems of signification from two distinct cultural traditions also questions the negotiations at work in the process of 'authentic' identity formation, negotiations that require the continual performance and re-performance of culturally-defined, socially accepted acts.

Within her writing Rhys presents the spectacle of theatrical performance as occurring on three levels: Rhys's female protagonists' 'perform' race, gender and class; they are actors in a literal as well as metaphorical sense and the imperial metropolis is their stage. The following chapters of this thesis will continue to return to aspects of visual performance in regards to her characters' interactions with multiple elements of visual culture, but here my focus is on theatre and the specific—often overt, but also covert—performance of identity both on the stage and streets of modern Europe's urban spaces.

The ambiguity of the concept of performance must first be acknowledged here. On a narrative level, the Rhys woman's 'performances' occur both literally and metaphorically. Some have engaged with standard acts of theatrical performance through employment, and continue to perform specific roles as the 'act of acting' spills into everyday life.[3] Similarly, performance occurs as part of the act of writing, with Rhys's fictional texts negotiating performative traditions via her allusions to Edwardian popular musical theatre and Caribbean carnival. Representational strategies that are hidden or masked such as these are, I argue, part of Rhys's tactic for critiquing the power dynamics at work within visual representation. As this thesis turns from a broad socio-historical analysis of visual culture in the early decades of the twentieth century to a more detailed investigation of the representation of unstable racial and gendered identities, Rhys's early writing situates itself as a key body of literary work that, in experimenting with alternative formal patterns, explores the nature of identity performance as enacted through visual mechanisms.

This chapter covers the early literary experimentations that initially brought together writing and performance as complementary representational concepts for Rhys, as well as readings of her four interwar texts, all of which treat 'performance' in slightly differing ways. But I focus my analysis on a reading of the collage-like aspect of two of Rhys's novels—*Quartet* (1928) and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934)—in relation to the figure of the chorus girl; the allusions to a voicing, or performing of other identities in traditional arenas of performative spectacle as well as in the everyday public spaces of the imperial

[3] My initial thoughts on the relationship between more theatrical performance and the movement into the everyday were shaped by a reading of Alan Read's *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

metropolis. This is part of a larger claim about Rhys's engagement with the politics of representation through theatrical performance. In the turn from acting to writing, Rhys adopted elements of both European popular culture and Caribbean cultural theatre tradition (in particular the political performativity of carnival and masquerade) to produce a hybrid genre of modernist fiction that unifies literature and the performative arts.

I propose to read Rhys in ways similar to how Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott has characterised his situation as a 'split writer'. Walcott writes in his essay 'Meanings' (1970): 'I am a kind of split writer: I have one tradition inside me going one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, the Narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other'.[4] In terms of his dramatic writing Walcott talks of not wanting to find himself '[n]ot on Broadway, but in a way, not off-Broadway as well'.[5] Thus the creation of a hybrid genre: 'what would spring from our theatre need not be a literary thing—not the word, not the psychology—not the *detailed* psychology of character so much as a mimetic power'.[6] Comparisons can be made here with *Quartet* being written initially as a play, or as Rhys referred to it: 'a literary play, meant to be read not acted'.[7] Rhys could thus be said to use theatrical spectacle in her novels—works to be read and not performed—in the creation of a creolised modernist form. Turning to theatrical performance, Rhys positions her writing in the context of—yet significantly (and self-consciously) removed from—more standardised, spectacle-oriented, representational genres. By representing performance literally and metaphorically, Rhys undermines the power relationship in traditional visual, performative hierarchies.

Both the Caribbean and metropolitan Europe held cultural traditions of performance that provided Rhys with tools for artistic representation. The Edwardian era was a crucial period in the formation of popular modern theatre, but by the time Rhys arrived in England, theatre as a mode of popular entertainment was facing a multitude of problems, from the 1907 music hall strike, attacks from moral and social reformers, and waning audience numbers connected to the emergence of other forms of visual entertainment including the cinema. Yet there is no doubt that English theatrical tradition greatly influenced a young Rhys, whose views on femininity, respectability and what it was to be English were formulated through childhood tales and images of the imperial stage which she related in her early non-fiction writing. Rhys's time as a chorus girl in the 'shop-girl' musical comedy *Our Miss Gibbs* seems to resonate most strongly in her fiction, not just

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[4] Derek Walcott, 'Meanings' (1970), in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.45-57 (p.48).
[5] Walcott, p.46.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Carole Angier writes: 'This means that it wasn't very good: that it wasn't really a play, but the dialogue of a novel. In fact it was an early stab at the novel; […] Much of her writing was voices' (p.163).

in terms of the narration of theatrical performance experiences, but also in regards to the more theoretical connections made between theatre, fashion and the performance of femininity. I address this more fully in the 'Colonial Interfolds: Girls on Stage' section of this chapter, and again in my next chapter on fashion.

The Caribbean, particularly carnival, provided Rhys with a performative tradition with which she could find association. Cynthia Davis has recently detailed how strongly the interwar novels are informed by Afro-Dominican culture, specifically the transgressive style of carnival performances Rhys remembered from childhood.[8] Davis determines that Rhys 'borrowed cultural and oral tropes from the Yoruba and other West African peoples [whose] cultural markers had crossed the Atlantic with the slave ships and evolved into the […] satirical calypso songs and carnival street performances of Dominica and other Caribbean islands'.[9] Davis views the novels set in London and Paris as privileging Afro-Caribbean 'orality, heteroglossia, hybridity, and satire', and that Rhys's subversive 'interrogation of power relations across racial, sexual and economic lines' is approached 'in the indirectly elliptical style of Afrocentric social criticism'.[10] From carnival festivals and masquerade rituals, Rhys's experiences with the Caribbean's performative elements were translated into her early work through songs, dialogue, and theatrical narrative strategies remembered from her Dominican childhood. Rhys was extremely knowledgeable about Caribbean folklore in particular, and *soucriants* and zombie figures appear in the interwar texts, which also relate traditional West Indian story-telling practices, folk tales and carnival songs. Poems with titles such as 'Calypso', 'Trinidad Selina' and 'Shak-shak (the Dance)' can likewise be located amongst the papers that are held at the Jean Rhys Archive.[11]

Tensions between modernist, imperialist theatrical discourse and the Caribbean culture of her youth provided Rhys with new, hybridised, representational space. This enabled Rhys to move between semiotic systems even as she simultaneously foregrounded her lack of control of those systems and therefore how she presented herself. But of course Rhys wasn't the only female modernist to do this. In placing Rhys's work alongside that of Una Marson and Virginia Woolf—two female modernists who, emerging from distinct cultural traditions produced alternative treatments of visual performance using theatrical strategies in very different ways—we can begin to locate Rhys's representational politics from the liminal space *between* systems of signification.

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[8] Cynthia Davis, 'Jamette Carnival and Afro-Caribbean Influences on the Work of Jean Rhys', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 3:2, article 9 (2005). Available at http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol3/iss2/9

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] 'Poetry', *Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.3:9-10.

Alternative Modernisms

Jamaican Una Marson, as poet, playwright, political activist and journalist, held a unique ability to work within multiple representational forms as she explored the experiences of being black and female in 1930s London. Marson's first play, *At What A Price*, marked a significant moment in the visual culture of interwar Britain, not least in its status as the first black colonial production to appear on London's West End, performed in 1934 as a benefit for the League of Coloured Peoples. The play offered a new visual experience for its audience. In presenting the tale of a young Jamaican girl seeking independence through a move from her rural home to urban life in Kingston, it offered an alternative vision to the stereotyping of "primitive" black performers as found in popular music hall entertainments, minstrelcy acts or imperial exhibitions. Marson's two later plays, *London Calling* (1937) and *Pocomania* (1938), were heavily influenced by her time spent in London, first between 1932 and 1936 and then returning again in 1938. Produced following her first return to Jamaica, these plays 'confronted and reframed colonialist performance of "native" and "folk" stereotypes directly, highlighting them as performances rather than identities. Once highlighted, the staged performances became a means for the exploration and refashioning of Afro-Caribbean women's social identities'.[12] In this context Marson's work bears similarities to Rhys's, with both women portraying, self-reflexively, the obstacles presented to marginalised individuals within colonial, patriarchal societies.

London Calling depicts Caribbean students in London performing stereotyped African identities in a 'native sketch' play-within-a-play. In the context of diaspora and displacement and 'performing' constructed identities (a cultural identity that they have never experienced, therefore is only ever performed or 'taken on'), this relates to Rhys and the 'real West Indian' question that most consciously emerges through the repeated assertions Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* makes to affirm her Caribbean heritage: 'I'm a real West Indian,' I kept saying. 'I'm the fifth generation on my mother's side' (47). Rhys's characters also enact seemingly 'prescripted', socially-dictated identities as defined by familial, social and cultural codes of respectability, but while Marson's play suggests agency within this enactment—Anna Snaith commenting that a reversal of power occurs because the Caribbean students of Marson's play are in control of their performance—the possibilities for subjectivity within Rhys's character's performances are much more fragile.[13]

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[12] Emery, *Modernism*, pp.124-5.

[13] Anna Snaith, "'Little Brown Girl" in a "White, White City": Una Marson and London,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 27.1 (2008) 93-114 (p.100).

Snaith determines that it was in the heart of empire that Marson's anti-imperialism, her feminism, and her West Indian identity deepened:

> [Marson's] own developing multicultural self-image as someone Caribbean, African, and British, thus always positioned at an oblique angle to her surroundings, caused her to focus on the performative aspects of those identities and to represent them on stage. Her dramatic engagement with African culture in particular provides an illuminating contrast to accounts of primitivism, rarely considered in the context of pan-Africanism in London. […] Marson's exploration of the hybrid state of Caribbean identity in the context of the metropole is both modern and modernist.[14]

I argue that the same can be said of Rhys. In their movement into Europe, both Rhys and Marson produce distinctly modern and modernist critical reflections of literary traditions that they simultaneously adopted and undermined. They, along with other West Indian writers, found within European literary modernism (notably experimentations with language, form and stylistic narrativisation) techniques that they could adapt to express concerns related to their position, and in turning to issues of the visual as a central part of their work, offer their readers or viewers opportunity to engage in new ways with visual performance.[15] This alludes back to the '*contra-modernism*' emerging from Homi Bhabha's notion of a 'contra-modernity': the participation of Caribbean modernists in (and sometimes resistance to) the tenets of modernism, their being 'contingent to modern[ism], discontinuous or in contention with it'.[16] Rhys's liminal position gained through her colonial heritage placed her as part of, yet somewhat external to, an emerging Caribbean modernism, just as she found familiarity with but was alienated from traditional literary circles in Britain.[17] Given the parallels with Marson, Rhys's writing allows us to shift our readings of representational methods regarding performativity from more familiar manifestations. We can question how the relationship *with* and *between* multiple cultural references turned Rhys towards the more internalised form of writing performance that is read rather than enacted.

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[14] Snaith, p.96.

[15] I allude here to the thematic affinities between Caribbean and European modernism, including a careful scrutiny of language, a concern with subjectivity and identity, an interest in counter-discursive practices, and a consideration of exile. See Raymond Williams' listing of formal aspects of modernism in 'When Was Modernism?': a radical questioning of the process of representation; the author in the text; treatment of metropolitan cities and transnational capitals; art made by the 'restlessly mobile' émigré or exile; the non-natural status of language. Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp.31-35. See also Mary Lou Emery, 'Taking the Detour, Finding the Rebels: Crossroads of Caribbean and Modernist Studies', in *Disciplining Modernism*, ed. by Pamela L. Caughie (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.71-91 (pp.77-78).

[16] Bhabha, p.6.

[17] 'Because of Rhys's upbringing in a plural and divided colonial culture, she could give modernism a distinctly different cast, reshaping what she learned from people like Ford in light of her uniquely eccentric experience and within a larger context of social and literary change'. Emery, *"World's End",* p.18.

Marson, in producing plays, was engaging with a visual tradition that in its very nature involves multiple sense perceptions, with what is seen on stage playing as important a part as what is heard and understood through dialogue, gesture and motion. But race was a complex visual marker for Rhys.[18] I argue that her turn to writing is a move away from the physicality that is such an important part of Marson's work. While Marson stages (in a literal sense, with plays written to be performed) the dynamics of seeing within colonial relations, Rhys uses the novel as a method of concealing, both visually and orally.

Rhys makes use of devices such as repetitions and ellipses, re-workings and omissions that record the double or fractured identities of her characters. Rhys, like other contemporary modernist writers, enables us to see other representational possibilities as she exposes the limitations of conventional narrative form. Virginia Woolf, as a female contemporary of Rhys's, provides a further contextual marker with which to identify the critical currency of Rhys's engagement with alternative performance strategies. Woolf connected with theatre and performance in a multitude of ways: in her novel *Between the Acts*, writing a play for friends and family titled 'Freshwater: A Comedy', and through her impressive dedication to theatre spectatorship, exemplifying her comprehension of the flexibility of theatre's representational forms. Most important for this discussion though is the infamous Dreadnought Hoax of February 7th 1910**,** in identifying how Woolf saw physical 'performance as a site of subversive potential' which 'functions as a central metaphor' through her work.[19] The Dreadnought Hoax is viewed by Jane Marcus as rehearsal for her critique of imperialism in *The Waves*, for example.[20] The Hoax, which had anti-imperial subversion and protest at its heart, was masterminded by Horace de Vere Cole and included Woolf, her brother Adrian and the artist Duncan Grant. Woolf and the rest of the group disguised as Abyssinian princes to tour the British navy's latest warship, sporting false beards, moustaches and blackened faces, and speaking a mix of Latin, Swahili and nonsense phrases to cover the performance (fig. 3). To quote Snaith: 'The Hoax, in its use of blackface and racial stereotype […] drew on racial tropes familiar to their audiences in minstrel shows and music hall acts [note a popular contemporary group touring Britain

[18] Rhys felt a distinct sense of alienation from the West Indian community in London, although she maintained a close relationship with fellow white West Indian writers Phyllis Shand Allfrey (Dominica) and Eliot Bliss (Jamaica).

[19] Penny Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.91.

[20] Jane Marcus, "Britannia Rules *The Waves*," *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons*, ed. by Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp.136-162 (p.142). For more on Woolf, the *Dreadnought* Hoax and Woolf's relationship with theatrical performance, see Penny Farfan's chapter 'Writing/performing: Virginia Woolf between the acts' in her monograph *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Adrian Stephen, 'The "Dreadnought" Hoax' for Virginia's brother's account of their masquerade as Ethiopian royalty (The Hogarth Press, 1936).

Fig. 3: The Dreadnought Hoax, by Lafayette (Lafayette Ltd), 7 February 1910.
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

called the Ethiopian Serenaders]'.[21] As with the 'constructed' performance of African stereotypes in Marson's *London Calling*, the success of the group's masquerade suggests the deep-rootedness of these tropes within the imperial imagination'.[22]

Steven Putzel's *Virginia Woolf and the Theatre* (2012) speaks of Woolf's attempts to outline 'the modern search for a hybrid art form that would bridge the gaps between poetry, drama, and fiction'.[23] Woolf was interested in the interrelationship between the audience and the actor, and with the audience's self-reflexive 'gaze' at the end of *Between the Acts*, made use of theatrical mechanisms in her fiction in a similar manner to Rhys, searching for ways to incorporate its representational force into her narratives. But Woolf was a highly sophisticated and experienced theatre-goer, watching performances that covered pantomimes, musicals, opera, Shakespeare productions and minstrel shows. Her relationship to theatre was most certainly dominated by her class and educational privileges, operating at the opposing end of the class spectrum to Rhys, whose engagement with

[21] Anna Snaith, 'Assassins and Abyssinia: Bloomsbury Against Empire', conference paper delivered at the December 1910 Centenary Conference, University of Glasgow, December 2010.
[22] Ibid. Snaith also comments on the problem within British Modernism that subversion was achieved through the tropes of a problematic primitivism.
[23] Steven Putzel, *Virginia Woolf and the Theatre* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), p.115.

Edwardian theatre was on the stage earning a living wage rather than as a member of a more privileged audience. Comparisons drawn with Marson and Woolf identify a race and class coding within Rhys's writing that positions her at an oblique angle to her contemporaries. Starting from different vantage points to both Marson and Woolf, it could be said that Rhys, through her adoption of performance on a literal and metaphorical level, writes herself out of an embodied space (that of the colonial, the modernist, the feminist) to ensure a space of representation that is *within* and *between* identities. That effort—in itself a performance—makes itself clear in her writing, so that theatricality is a pervasive metaphor for the process of representation, both in visual terms and also on the page.

Smile Please

Rhys's novels are often read as mirrors of her life, with the protagonists and author interchangeable. Critical texts frequently enforce parallels between moments from Rhys's own life and the events of her novels, often to erroneous effect. The provision of chronologies at the start of many books written on Rhys further push forward connections between fact and fiction, but as Diana Athill states in her Foreward to *Smile Please*, Rhys herself noted that while her writing started from something that had happened, she 'like[d] shape very much', and that 'a novel has to have shape, and life doesn't have any'.[24] It would be reductive to limit Rhys's writing to biography; there is much evidence, not least in the numerous draft copies of multiple manuscripts, to reveal Rhys's meticulous attention to the writing of fiction. Mary Lou Emery contends that to best understand Rhys we must follow an approach that acknowledges the 'connections among the social forces shaping the author and the novels', that 'the events of Rhys's life are indicators of the conflicting values, ideologies, and social circumstances in which she wrote'.[25]

Following a rough chronological order from early childhood memories to leaving Dominica for England, Rhys presents in the opening part of *Smile Please* a series of stories identifying how enacted performances and the looking or viewing as an audience member were influential early experiences, helping shape the representational strategies of her later fiction. The juxtaposition of theatrical motifs from colonial and black traditions in these opening sections reveals the slippage between identities that social, visibly-enacted performances attempt to reinforce, and these instances helped shape the performance politics that emerge so forcefully in Rhys's later fictional work. Her awareness that she

[24] Diana Athill, Foreward, *Smile Please*, p.10. Rhys also later wrote: 'all of a writer that matters is in the book or books. It is idiotic to be curious about the person. I have never made that mistake', p.168.
[25] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.9.

didn't 'fit' into European or Caribbean subjectivity, that she occupied a liminal position between the two, is consciously presented by the inclusion in *Smile Please* of repeated episodes of disrupted acts of performance and spectatorship.

Early in the autobiography Rhys relates her first clear memory, her sixth birthday where she is 'crowned, bursting with pride and importance, safe, protected, sitting in a large armchair' (23) ready to watch her siblings perform their version of Little Red Riding Hood. But the play is interrupted by her elder brother who declares the charade 'nonsense', refusing to continue the show and leaving Rhys's first experience as an audience-member unfulfilled. This episode is the first in a series of disrupted performances. The re-telling of so many failed or mis-directed performances begins to unearth for the reader Rhys's interest in the problematics of performances aligned with social convention—the way colonialism and its perpetuation relies on the performance of identities that reinforce and repeat colonial power structures. Rhys recounts, amongst others, the obeah ceremony acted at the start of stories told to her by the young black helper Francine, who then disappears from the family home without a word (31); the colonial community's musical evenings Rhys was not old enough to attend, sitting on the staircase looking through the banisters into the dark (65); the knowledge that her father would attempt to gather strength 'to appear happy, jolly' (69) in the presence of others; her boredom in church where all but one family acted their congregational duty by kneeling during the service (74); and her failed piano performance when she is eventually invited to the musical evenings, failing twice to play the right notes and upsetting another guest (83). Such episodes serve as representations of the burden of social convention that Rhys finds both uncomfortable and incomprehensible, a burden Rhys relates both on a narrative level as well as formally, in her writing style.

Rhys's interest in Caribbean performance conventions are recounted in the 'Black/White' section of *Smile Please* where she relates her conflicting emotions towards the local black community, acknowledging the tension within the power dynamic of her oscillating actor/spectator and colonised/coloniser visual positioning. She writes:

> Side by side with my growing weariness of black people there was envy. I decided that they had a better time than we did, they laughed a lot though they seldom smiled. […]
>
> Every night someone gave a dance, you could hear the drums. We had few dances. They were more alive, more part of the place than we were. (50)

Contrast this with her later description of a formal dance at Government House, a party Rhys wanted to attend as a West Indian Zouave soldier but instead was dressed as 'yachting':

> All the furniture had been taken out of the room, there was only the dark polished slippery floor with a few chairs set round it, the white walls and

> the music. I don't remember whether it was the local band which consisted of a concertina, a steel triangle and what they call a shakshak, or perhaps it was a piano and violin. In any case the musicians were behind a screen. (91)

The musicians sitting behind a screen is indicative of the barrier in place between the whites' acts of social convention and the seemingly spontaneous (albeit rather stereotyped) performances of the black population in the first quotation. Rhys cannot remember whether the musicians were a local (black) band or (white colonial) musicians. The visual signifier of colour is removed; they cannot be identified fully without vision. In the second passage the formality of the colonials' party is at stark contrast to the *joie de vivre* Rhys imagines in the first: the carefully ordered room with its slippery floor and white walls in opposition to previous descriptions of the colourful, beautiful, wild terrain of the Caribbean. This contrast between Dominica and England re-emerges later in the opening lines of *Voyage in the Dark*, which begins with a confusing juxtaposing of landscape and climate: 'Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or the bed-clothes drawn around me, was sun-heat; or I would pretend that I was standing outside the house at home looking down Market Street to the Bay. When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple' (7).

Rhys's desire to be part of Dominican culture is then explored in 'Carnival', as is the conflict of spectatorship for Rhys as a member of the colonial ruling class. She writes:

> We couldn't dress up or join in but we could watch from the open window and not through the jalousies. There were gaily masked crowds with a band. Listening, I would think that I would give anything, anything, to be able to dance like that. The life surged up to us sitting stiff and well behaved, looking on. As usual my feelings were mixed, because I was very afraid of the masks. (52)

Here is a clear demarcation between the life of the carnival crowd and the rigidity of the white audience. Rhys is permitted to watch from an open window and not hidden behind the slats of the jalousies, as if the audience's exposure and formal posture, above the carnival, looking down on the crowds, is part of the performance too. Notably this scene is repeated at the close of *Voyage in Dark* within the carnival stream-of-consciousness section, but there an alternative viewing position is adopted. That Rhys will 'give anything', that she longed 'so fiercely to be black and to dance, too, in the sun, to that music' (53), shows that her emotional distance from the Anglo-European conventions of the colonial spectators is in opposition to the physical distance from the carnival performers, while her 'mixed feelings' caused by her fear of the masks is another reason why she cannot identify fully with the carnival revellers. It is the 'Bois-Bois', a mask not in a crowd but alone, that Rhys finds some degree of identification with. The Bois-Bois's carnivalesque performance is a satirical play on formal convention—he would 'do a formal little dance on the stilts […]

take the money, duck his head in a little bow, then stalk away' (53). The merging of formal convention and inversion is where Rhys appears most at home, a space that she returns to throughout her writing and which speaks directly to the in-between nature of her own representational performances.

In the appendix to *Smile Please* Rhys discusses England and the nature of Englishness, once again identifying her estrangement from the country and its literary and theatrical conventions of representation, mediating on the 'irritation, harsh, gritty' that she feels about 'England and the English. Disappointed love, of course' (165). This section, and others from *Smile Please*, repeats prose contained within an undated, unpublished and incomplete typed manuscript from the *Jean Rhys Archive* held at the University of Tulsa titled 'Essay on England'. I take this to be an early draft version of that which is found in *Smile Please* (indeed, many of the passages of *Smile Please* originate from short pieces of writing—often in multiple drafts, within handwritten fragments, and from Rhys's famous coloured notebooks). In this manuscript Rhys details how her knowledge of England and its representational politics was shaped through text and theatre. 'Essay on England' stands as a record of how Rhys 'learnt' to be English through the repetition of tradition and the performance of socially-contrived roles. She relates how the books she read as a child were all English books, 'all the thoughts that were given to me were English thoughts […] So to me England was a wonderful place, but all I knew of it was a small brown map on a page of my geography book' (*JRA* 1.1:15, p.1). At this stage Rhys cannot yet visualise England, it exists only as part of a prescribed representation—the map—that is contained and sanitised by its presentation in an educational text where '[t]he countries were all dealt with very neatly' (1).

This geography text was a tool for Rhys to learn her role as a member of the British Empire. Rhys's education continued after her move to London in 1907, where Edwardian theatre initially stood as an idealised cultural practice. But in 'Essay on England' Rhys is already acknowledging that Englishness is a performance through the 'defamiliarisation' of culture (as well as race). Rhys notes her homesickness for the Caribbean, countered by 'the entire strangeness of everything, by my occasional glimpses of very pretty women, whom I hoped to be like, and by my idea that I was going to go on stage' (4). But this clichéd adoration was:

> always spoilt because I had only seen the poor ones and the ugly ones. I couldn't get used to the idea that white women could look like that, and so my little bourgeois dream was quite spoilt really. Because I saw it – the poverty and the misery. [*No*] I didn't see it, [*yet*] but I felt it. But however on the top of it I pranced about, being quite determined that I was going to go on the stage and be a marvellous actress and perhaps be a fille de joie into the bargain. (4)

Rhys is preoccupied with the requirement of visibly performed, socially-dictated roles, as well as the falsity of any promise of social mobility from such prescribed identities: 'I would think all of the time "Of course, this isn't England. I'm going to see England suddenly. Of course this isn't it." But already it was pressing on me' (5). This acknowledgement is gained not only through the visual—her disappointment at seeing the falseness of theatre sets while watching a performance, her dismay at the sight of poor, ugly, English actresses—but also internally, unable to see the 'real' England yet affected by the oppressive nature of its social conventions.

Colonial Interfolds: Girls on Stage

Jessica Berman's chapter 'Intimate and Global: Ethical Domains from Woolf to Rhys' in *Modernist Commitments* (2011) introduces some further comparisons between the political—read imperial—implications of both authors' atypical, 'performative', narrative methods. Berman calls upon the Deleuzian concept of the 'fold' in regards to Woolf's work, arguing that her writing style often creates 'a "fold" in the text that brings subjects into relationship with other subjects […] without conflating them, assuming their commensurability, or eliminating their distance'.[26] Berman notes that Rhys's work—displaying a more disjointed, incomplete interfolding of colonial and metropolitan experience that emerges from the writing in *Smile Please* and continues into the fictional work of the twenties and thirties—'may be seen as a political act that disrupts normative assumptions about social relations'.[27] In both writers' literature there is 'an encounter with global positioning that marks the matter of narrative hiatus or interruption as a sign of the politics of empire'.[28] But while Woolf—and here Berman cites the Society of Outsiders as an example—imagines a new location for an oppositional politics of identity, Rhys's heroines lack the necessary resources to carve themselves a space outside of contemporary politics.

This makes Rhys's literature far from apolitical however. Berman argues that 'by refusing to posit a productive potential future for their heroines, […] these novels challenge the viability of the very categories of identity that have created them'.[29] Such narrative strategies connect to the novels' form, with Berman arguing that the interruptions, movements (both spatial and temporal), and fragments of narrative separated by gaps on the page, which formulate the style of Rhys's early fiction, likewise 'question the possibility

[26] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.40.
[27] Berman, p.42.
[28] Berman, p.43.
[29] Berman, p.78.

of personal growth under conditions of uneven colonial development'.[30] Rhys was particular about word choice and revised her work frequently, evidenced from the early manuscripts that form the basis of *Smile Please*. The seemingly vague omissions and fragments that form her fiction are stylistic choices displaying the complex challenges the presentation of identity poses to narrative form. This feeds back into the hybrid spaces of representation within Rhys's fiction which speak of issues of identity performed visually, and which use a unique narrative style that, in its presentation of an oppositional, modernist politics of 'in-betweenness', refuse to act as a marker of locatedness. And here again the discrepancies between representation through the verbal and the visual come into play. The possibilities for Rhys's characters to self-narrate are forever governed by ambiguous identities that determine what they can say about themselves, and who will listen.

Berman positions this analysis of Rhys and Woolf as part of her wider, geographically-focused argument on the ethical significance of intersubjective encounters and the potential for disrupted acts of self-narration to reorient future progression. Here I turn instead to the beginning of this self-narration, to the performative nature of Rhys's narratives about identity formation. Marya Zelli in *Quartet* and Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* adopt performances of culturally defined, socially accepted acts in their attempt to carve a space for themselves within the modern urban landscape. This is a triaxial performance, emerging out of class, gender and race anxieties that exist within the modern imperial imagination, and for Anna in particular is most notably connected to issues of national identity and belonging.[31] I argue that the narrative form of both of these novels, the repetitions, breaks and fragments within passages of text, stand as evidence of Rhys's pointed critique of the dichotomy between being seen/exposed (with a degree of personal agency within this) and visually silenced—to return to issues of orality—through cultural/social/national uniformity. Anna, Marya and the other interwar protagonists lack uniformity in their performances, and as such their acts become representative of Rhys's response to her own inability to situate within class, gender and racial hierarchies existing in imperial metropolitan culture.

Anna and Marya exemplify the contradictory ways in which theatre and spectacular performance work within the modern social imagination. This is not only because of their

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[30] Ibid.

[31] According to Berman, geographical location is important to Rhys 'especially as it brings to the fore questions of the interrelationship between metropolis and colonial outpost and between normative white European and racialized Creole or black identities.' The interfolding of Dominica into the imperial metropolis with Anna's physical movement from the Caribbean to London, as well as narratorially with Anna's story oscillating between the two locations in fragments of passages, creates 'a new hybrid location' of identification. The lack of uniformity both in terms of content and form implies that 'racialized identities [do not] stay attached to the specific groups or the particular geographical situations' they appear to belong to (Berman, pp.80-83).

age and the youthful process of performance they undertake in shaping a social 'self' but also—and perhaps this acts as a precursor to, or a space of, such learning—their direct relationship with the stage as both have worked as chorus girls. In this respect they have learnt to play parts, they have some experience in learning or rehearsing a role and performing that adopted identity for the benefit of a clearly identifiable audience. But where (if it at all) does this performance end? Marya's history as a chorus girl is only briefly acknowledged, yet the narrative of the novel repeatedly alludes to her requirement to 'perform' or 'play'; as she notes herself, 'everyone pretends'.[32] *Voyage in the Dark* contains much more overt references to Anna's chorus girl life, yet as with Marya this merges with the performance of a personal (yet distinctly public) identity; the techniques Anna learns during her time as an actress are reconfigured within her everyday life, so that the boundaries between stage and public social space are blurred.

The chorus girl found her way into the social imagination via her presence on the musical comedy stage, a theatrical genre that was closely tied to the production of modern popular culture and spectacle. Emerging during the 1890s and deriving from Victorian burlesque, the musical comedy was a theatrical narrative (as opposed to the multi-sketches of the musical hall, for example) whose style was most certainly lavish and spectacular. Resonating with important cultural developments—the rise of mass-produced entertainment; a fascination with public, commercialised personae; a utilisation of modern technologies; and an affinity with the rise in consumerism—musical comedy 'reproduced consumerism in a theatrical extravaganza that transformed the Edwardian stage into a fantastic celebration' of spectacular modernity and excess.[33]

The chorus girl was an integral part of the genre, identifiable through the popularity of one of its most famous shows—and the first work to be termed 'musical comedy'—*A Gaiety Girl* (1893-96). Chorus girls were set apart from conventional female stage extras (both financially and in terms of their social visibility) and enjoyed star-like status: their pictures were found in show programmes, posters advertising performances at the front of the theatre and within fashion columns of magazines that were devoted to their costuming.[34] Their presence in public spaces outside of the theatre, in restaurants, bars and clubs, came with their own levels of scrutiny, and influenced the strict regime of tutoring that were used to teach the girls both stage and social skills including song and speech,

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[32] Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.9. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

[33] Len Platt, *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.2-4.

[34] The Gaiety Girls paid its tallest and most imposing members—the Big Eight—nearly quadruple the amount of the regular chorus. Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) pp.27-29. Rhys discusses her wages as a member of the chorus in the 'First Steps' version of 'Chorus Girls', *Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.4:6 version 5 (p.4).

dance and dress, training similar to that undertaken by Rhys at RADA. This continuity between operations of performance on stage and life outside the theatre exemplify that the theatrical world of illusion and spectacle was grounded by the routines of the modern city, and that the two spaces were often interchangeable as sites of performance.

And yet the theatre worked in contradictory ways in giving meaning to the modern working-girl. As Emery writes:

> The theater can make legitimate and pleasurable the fractured identities of socially displaced women, yet it cannot give them the "solid" class background they may lack or have lost by entering the theater. It disguises women whose social status might be questioned, and yet it immediately renders questionable their social status, especially their sexual respectability.[35]

Peter Bailey points to the multiple categories of social existence in which the chorus girl can be found: 'as working woman, stage persona, public image, and private person', making clear that these often 'intersect and elide'.[36] The narratives of *Quartet* and *Voyage in the Dark* can be read in a new light when aligned with such contexts. The social status of the chorus girl, in the context of Anna and Marya's rehearsal and repetition of identities, is shown to be part of a cycle of performance that is intrinsically connected to modern, urban, consumer-driven life. Indeed, Bailey alludes to the anonymous repetition of life as a chorus girl, evoking an industrial analogy as he notes 'the general phenomenon of the modern chorus line can be read as duplicating the more intensified and routinized production regimes of the late Victorian factory' and further, that the chorus members 'were among a numerous, interchangeable, and readily replaceable category of semi-skilled workers, employed in long production runs in a large-scale culture industry of global scope'.[37] Through Marya and Anna, Rhys questions the intersecting statuses of the working chorus girl, as well as the contradictory nature of the theatre as a space for women in the social sphere.

Rhys's acknowledgement of the performative aspects of social life, and the narration of this within her fiction, was alluded to in the naming of her first published novel *Quartet*, which was originally titled *Masquerade* by Rhys, *Postures* by her publishers Chatto & Windus, and finally re-titled as *Quartet* for publication in 1928.[38] This change re-focuses

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[35] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.3.

[36] Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.177.

[37] Bailey, p.178.

[38] See the following from the Green Exercise Book where Rhys discusses the novel's title:

> When after a long struggle *Quartet* stopped being a record of facts and became a book: a book with a start a middle and an end where the characters sometime ___ acted ___ I called it 'Masquerade'.
>
> Anyway I changed it to Quartet because I though Masquerade had been used too much. So has Quartet. Then for some reason the publishers said that Quartet

attention on the performative element of both narrative and form. Emery provides a reading of this re-naming as recognition of the colonial illusions in the text, commenting on *Masquerade* as suggestive of, 'along with deception, the metamorphoses of power enacted through masks and alluding to colonial hierarchies of sex, race and power'.[39] *Quartet*'s narrative contains a multitude of references to the construction, possession and dispossession of pre-scripted identities. Early in the text, the narrator alludes to Marya's complex social status with the following direct address to the reader:

> Marya, you must understand, had not been suddenly and ruthlessly transplanted from solid comfort to the hazards of Montmartre. Nothing like that. Truth to say, she was used to a lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds.
>
> Before her marriage she had spent several years as a member of Mr Albert Prance's No.I touring company. An odd life. (14)

In describing Marya's 'vagabond' life amongst 'the hazards of Montmartre' as lacking solidity, the narrative likens the ambiguous nature of Marya's existence (first in her marriage as she lives on the fringes of society with her husband who is a thief, and then alone after he is sent to prison) as a return to an identity Marya has 'performed' before during her time as a chorus girl, thus conflating the figure of the lone woman in modern urban society with the female performer on stage. Here the lack of solidity and fixed backgrounds, when discussing Marya's life, is a lack of substance or security. When reinterpreted with reference to her stage experience (where backgrounds are always changing) the phrase takes on a somewhat different meaning.

Marya's distinction from the narrator through her specific naming in the sentence implies an identity that, while lacking fixed solidity, is secure by means of its separation from the narrator. Yet this is made complex as the passage continues, where Marya is reduced to anonymity through the label of 'artist':

> Marya had longed to play a glittering part – she was nineteen then – against the sombre and wonderful background of London. She had visited a theatrical agent; she had sung – something – anything – in a quavering voice, and the agent, a stout and weary gentleman, had run his eyes upwards and downwards and remarked in a hopeless voice: 'Well, you're no Tetrazzini, are you, deary? Never mind, do a few steps.'
>
> She had done a few steps. The stout gentleman had glanced at another gentleman standing behind the piano, who was, it seemed, Mr Albert Prance's manager. Both nodded, slightly. A contract was produced. The thing was done.

> wouldn't do. I've always though that I called it Postures because I was sick of the whole thing and Postures was a meaningless title.
>
> But was it so meaningless? Hasn't [sic] I ___ back to my first idea that it was all posturing all a ___ pretense?
>
> They mock themselves with antic gestures.
>
> Of course all that didn't help (*Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.1:2a, p.24).

[39] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.108.

> 'Miss – I say, what d'you call yourself? – Miss Marya Hughes, hereinafter called the artist.' (14-15)

Marya loses her personal identity—her name—as she gains a professional, anonymised identity as 'artist'; only to return to 'Marya' in the present as Stephen's wife, an identity that is again erased in her subsequent role as mistress to Heidler, the English picture-dealer who positions her as a nameless 'savage' and who consistently reminds her that she must 'play a part'. But unlike her stage job, there is no binding contract here:

> [Heidler] went on to explain that one had to keep up appearances. That everybody had to. Everybody had for everybody's sake to keep up appearances. It was everybody's duty, it was in fact what they were there for.
>
> 'You've got to play the game.' (89)

Details of Marya's previous life as a chorus girl, with the repetitious 'you' in her conversation with the theatre agent, serves to merge Marya the character (the object of both the agent's scrutiny and the reader's attention) with the reader (in terms of point of view, the spectator in this literary performance). This perhaps highlights the malleability of subject/object positioning both socially (via the story being told), and formally (through the structure of the narrative). The breakdown of a traditional actor (character)/spectator (reader) position places the reader within the text. This dissolves the distinctions made between character, narrator, author, and reader and thus questions the viability of formal identification within a performance, be it written or acted. Such fragmentation of identities and merging of subject/object positions becomes characteristic of Rhys's writing and can be clearly aligned with her focus on the status of outsider, displaced or 'in-between' identities.

Marya's history as a chorus girl as related in this extended passage merges with the requirement, both on stage and in everyday life, for her to learn to play a part:

> Clause 28: no play, no pay.
> 'Ladies and gentlemen. This play wants guts!'
> […]
> There she was and there she stayed. Gradually passivity replaced her early adventurousness. She learned, after long and painstaking effort, to talk like a chorus girl, to dress like a chorus girl and to think like a chorus girl – up to a point. Beyond that point she remained apart, lonely and frightened of her loneliness, resenting it passionately. She grew thin. She began to live her hard and monotonous life very mechanically and listlessly. (15)

This alludes to a removal of a 'self' that occurs during performance of pre-scripted identities.[40] Passivity as one of a homogenised mass replaces individuality and

[40] We can refer here to Judith Butler and her analysis of identity not as a stable construct, but constituted by and through the performative acts that bring 'I' into being, thus generating a cultural *fiction* of a stable

adventurousness. In learning to talk, dress, think, like a chorus girl Marya is emptying out her pre-existing personal identity, yet she is also able to withhold something, 'up to a point'. She doesn't buy into the collective of the chorus girl absolutely but remains apart. Marya thus becomes a 'host' for an identity, with the repetition of live/life in the final sentence seemingly ironic because it is as if she is not living at all. The doubling of live/life also suggests a withdrawal or splitting, as if her 'real' life was not the embodied life she performed, despite the hard work and monotonous routine it takes up, but a kind of disembodied state of mind. I think this is reminiscent of Bailey's industrial analogy of an alienated labour force that in its loss of identity (as actor/worker) is interchangeable and readily-replaceable, much in the same way Marya and Heidler's wife become interchangeable objects of Heidler's attention. But it also points to something that is unable to be seen—her hard and monotonous life is empty yet she retains a passion to resent this emptiness, so that in essence her original 'self', her real identity, remains internalised and is invisible, her thinness preventing emotion from attaching itself to anything concretely. This at once implies a degree of agency (through the position of employment as a chorus girl) that is simultaneously diminished through the loss of personal selfhood.

This passage also exemplifies Rhys's self-conscious style of writing, particularly through the repetition of 'like a'. It also identifies the role of the reader in fleshing out Rhys's representational strategies. It is only through repeated readings that one can begin to see the work the syntax does; in later readings the absences, or what is not being said, become visible. This highlights Rhys's articulation of reading and writing as themselves processes of revision, much in the same way as Marya repeats or rehearses actions in the formation of an identity. The theatrical metaphor in this respect is very productive for it links with larger structures of narrative progression and layered representation.

Thresholds

The movement Marya makes between standardised performances within a theatre space and the performance she is required to undertake subsequently in her role as Heidler's mistress, can be likened to movement within a threshold space between everyday 'reality' and performative illusion. Walter Benjamin, in *The Arcades Project*, describes a threshold as a 'zone of transition' or, Terri Mullholland expands, as 'a passageway through which transformation can take place'.[41] But the ability for Rhys's heroines to undertake such a

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self. Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519-531.

[41] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.856. See also Terri Mullholland, 'Between Illusion and Reality, 'Who's

transformation from structured theatrical performance to a more concrete identity in everyday life is hampered by their ambiguous status within society. As social outcasts or outsiders, they are always in motion.

Threshold spaces can therefore be seen to operate both physically and mentally, with 'subjects pass[ing] through a period and area of ambiguity'.[42] For Anna and Marya this involves working as a chorus girl, a role that requires the repeated performance of identities that are clearly not their own and which they have relatively little control over. Benjamin's threshold here becomes a zone with defined social and cultural boundaries, and for *Voyage in the Dark* in particular this contains a distinctive colonial inflection, with Anna's complex negotiation of performances racially encoded.[43] Anna Morgan is a young white West Indian in pre-World War I England, working as a theatre chorus girl after she loses her family legacy to her stepmother. As she turns away from the stage where the idea is precisely to *not* 'be yourself' to become mistress to a wealthy older Englishman, Anna's ability to 'fix' her identity is complicated by a West Indian colonial heritage which means she already negotiates a tension between duplicitous or fluid identities.[44] Anna already occupies a threshold position between blackness and a white European identity, alluded to in her repeated insistence on a West Indian identity she cannot fully articulate: silenced by her lover as she tries to speak. Anna at the start of the novel is neither black nor sexualised, but as the novel continues she becomes more and more a resemblance of the Hottentot Venus she is portrayed as. Anna is viewed through the prism of primitivism, as an embodiment of racial difference that renders silent her own attempts to speak out her identity.

In terms of narrative form, the threshold also plays out on the page, with Rhys using the textual space of the novel to navigate between metropolitan and Caribbean literary traditions as she works towards a hybrid space of representation. This moves us closer to Derrida's reading of the threshold in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, where it is not so much a space of transformation—i.e. not an ontological space—but where questions about beginnings and endings, including questions about transformation, can be posed.[45] Significant commentary has been produced on the fragmentary nature of *Voyage in the Dark*'s montage narrative: viewed as a Frankensteinian text that exists as 'a monstrous

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to Know': Threshold Spaces in the Interwar Novels of Jean Rhys', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 23.4 (2012), 445-462 (p.446).

[42] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), p.24.

[43] Mullholland, p.447.

[44] As Emery writes: 'Like the Caribbean carnivals of Rhys's homeland, [the theatre] can turn the masks imposed upon social "others" into potentially subversive masquerades. Yet the theater exposes "otherness" to view and consumption and, as an institution of European culture, perhaps contain it' (Emery, *"World's End"*, pp.3-4).

[45] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, ed. by Geoffrey Bennington and Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), pp.308-313.

conjoining of narrative fragments, constitutively intertextual'.[46] The citing of elements of European visual culture (films, books, advertisements, songs, and theatre shows) connects with West Indian performance cultures and references to folk beliefs (the *soucriant*, story-telling and obeah). Veronica Marie Gregg correctly views this collage of fragments from the two cultures as an engagement with the master narratives of empire.[47]

This amalgamation plays out in the opening sentences of the novel. With a curtain falling with suitable theatricality for the start of a narrative of the life of a chorus girl, Anna attempts to place England and the West Indies together in a merging of reality and illusion:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn't like England at first. […]
>
> Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together. (7-8)

Voyage in the Dark's narrative juxtaposes several voices, all of which are spoken from Anna's point of view. This merging of competing fragments (voices, places, 'selves'), just like the competing colours, smells, emotions in the passage above, delineates the cultural conflicts that Anna internalises, conflicts that play out through the mechanism of visual performance.

The curtain falling here signals the end of one performance: the end of Anna's childhood in the Caribbean, moving to London after the death of her father, her colonial family in decline, and the start of another: her chorus girl life which she subsequently gives up to start her affair with Walter Jeffries. That this theatrical motif occurs at the start of the novel signals Rhys's movement away from standard performative structures, just as Anna's story, her failure to 'get on' by not following traditional social conventions of marriage, resists a standardised romantic literary plot by its close. The title of the novel also alludes to Rhys's positioning alongside canonical modernist authors as well as a literary performance, with a play on Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* becoming a voyaging into the dark without destination. Anna's 'blackening' by her stepmother as she voyages into the imperial centre, her placement as Other by the social forces of demi-monde England, become textual strategies that enable a re-writing of dominant codes, so that the curtain falling—the end of standardised performance—opens space for Anna's narrative to be related.

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[46] Carol Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (London: Routledge, 2005) p.39.
[47] Gregg, pp.123, 116.

The closing passages of *Voyage in the Dark* have led to complex, often conflicting readings, most notably because of the well-known fact that Rhys was required by Michael Sadleir at Constable to change the original ending where Anna dies from a botched abortion. But if we take the novel as a whole as an attempt to find a place of belonging, a fixed identity, then the importance of the Caribbean to the close (whereby Anna returns in a post-abortion delirium to the Caribbean and its celebration of carnival), more forcefully identifies how Rhys worked within—and yet outside of—both European literary and Caribbean visual traditions to open up a new space of representation. That Rhys kept substantial parts of the passages relating to carnival after Sadleir's edit indicates the importance of Caribbean performative tradition to the formal dynamic of the text. As Emery confirms, placing carnival scenes 'alongside events and metaphors of European theatre [becomes] a challenge to the colonizing culture, as an alternative vision of community, and as a counter-worldview' often overshadowed by European traditions.[48] And we can think here too of carnival and its performative politics; a fusion of Lenten and African traditions after Emancipation becoming a briefly licensed space for challenging authority.

In the published version Anna relates an imagined return to the Caribbean, specifically carnival, in long italicised passages which are notably absent of punctuation:

> *I was watching them from between the slats of the jalousies dancing along dressed in red and blue and yellow the women with their dark necks and arms covered with white powder – dancing along to concertina-music dressed in all the colours of the rainbow and the sky so blue – you cant expect niggers to behave like white people all the time Uncle Bo said it's asking too much of human nature – look at that fat old woman Hester said just look at her – oh yes she's having a go too Uncle Bo said they all have a go they don't mind – their voices were going up and down – I was looking out of the window and I knew why the masks were laughing and I heard the concertina-music going*
>
> 'I'm giddy,' I said.
>
> *I'm awfully giddy – but we went on dancing forwards and backwards backwards and forwards whirling round and round* (157)

The carnival procession signifies a ritual of power inversion and rebellion. This is evidenced in the discussions about banning carnival while Anna is watching the procession, as well as the satirical impersonation of the whites through the dusting of white powder on the women's arms which inverts the spectacle of blackness found on European stages.[49] Anna's affiliation to this moment of resistance is identified through her knowledge—which was

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[48] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.4.

[49] Una Marson writes of the spectacle of blackness on stage in her 1933 poem 'Nigger': 'In later years when singing Negroes/ Caused white men to laugh,/[…] "Nigger" was raised then to a Burlesque Show/ And thus from Curse to Clown progressed/ A coloured man was cause for merriment' (*The Keys*, The League of Coloured Peoples, July 1933, p.9).

only related in the original ending that was cut by her editors—that the masks laugh at the idea 'that anybody black would want to be white' (*JRA* 1.5:13 p.15). The original manuscript housed in the *Jean Rhys Archive* includes a pencil addition after this quotation (here underlined): 'I knew and so I was dancing and the concertina was going' (15). Anna gains power through her ability to associate with a carnivalesque inversion. Her imagined participation—evidenced through the collective 'we'—comes to represent a significant cultural choice in relation to identity that seems to place her into the collective of the West Indian social spectacle even as she remains inside, looking on. This refuses possibilities for recuperation within the English/European collective represented by her relatives as it reinforces her negotiation between actor and spectator roles.

The closing paragraph of the final version of the novel suggests the possibility for Anna's narrative to be re-told, and in the light of the carnival passages that precede it spells out her movement against pre-scripted socio-cultural identifications:

> 'She'll be all right,' he said. Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt.'
>
> When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again… (159)

The 'starting all over again' is not a return to the beginning, but an emptying out of the personalities forced on her during the novel and an opening up of space for new identities to exist, space denied to Marya in *Quartet*. Indeed, the passage almost seems to rewrite what in *Quartet* is described as Marya beginning to live her hard and monotonous life mechanically and listlessly. Thus the curtain falling at the start of the novel, and the 'starting all over again' at the close become signs of inversion of the rehearsed identities imposed upon her. While the repetitious 'all over again' suggests the limits on Anna's ability to narrate her own story within an Anglo-European context, the ellipsis refuses to fix her narrative within the novel's form. In this respect, Rhys likewise refuses to contain her story within the constraints of literary tradition, highlighting her interdisciplinary representational abilities. The question of performative agency in Rhys's texts, both here in *Voyage in the Dark* and also in *Quartet* is part of her modernist 'in-betweenness'; the reader is unable to pin down an emancipatory narrative. As such, the associations made to the spaces *between* England, the Caribbean and their respective performative traditions reinforce their importance.

The Infinite Rehearsal

> *I know that in unravelling the illusory capture of creation I may still apprehend the obsessional ground of conquest, rehearse its proportions, excavate its consequences, within a play of shadows and light threaded into value; a play that is infinite in rehearsal, a play that approaches again and again a sensation of ultimate meaning residing within a deposit of ghosts relating to the conquistadorial body—as well as the victimized body—of new worlds and old worlds, new forests and old forests, new stars and old constellations within the workshop of the gods.*[50]

If Marya and Anna are forced into multiple rehearsals of pre-defined identities, identities that are read before they have even been acted, then the two older protagonists of Rhys's early novels can be placed at a later stage in this exercise: an infinite repetition of acts, performances and identities adopted over the time they have spent within the visible, public 'stages' of modern Paris and London. Both Marya and Anna undergo an emptying out of pre-existing identities to fulfil socially-defined roles in their attempt to find fixity of place within the urban, imperial imagination. This 'hosting' takes another form with Julia and Sasha. Julia Martin of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* hides behind the identities she adopts but finds little agency in this, caught in a cycle of scenes in which she exists purely by virtue of her relationship to the male characters. Sasha Jensen in Rhys's final interwar text, *Good Morning, Midnight*, appears more able than any of the characters to oscillate between actor and spectator positions, yet her ability to manipulate the visual politics of theatrical spectacle remain questionable.

Julia and Sasha do not engage with the visual aspect of modern theatre in the same manner as Marya and Anna who both have recent histories on stage as chorus girls. Instead, they engage with spectacle in the public spaces of the city, adopting performances of femininity and respectability that are presented as an inescapable condition of modern urban life.[51] The performances Julia and Sasha undertake are cyclical, repeated processes that are fragmentary in nature; with the fragmentation and doubling of performance that occurs narratorially replicated by the shape of novels' form. Any opportunity for Julia to exit the spectacle is thwarted by the repetition within the novel of that which has occurred before. She does not experience a social or moral decline in the same ways that Marya and Anna do, yet she is never able to actualise an identity that does not circle back on itself. Progression is continually thwarted, just like the 'phlegmatically' circling plot:

> The regressive, circular plot structure formalizes a crisis of representation that the images of nothingness thematize. The impossibility of representing

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[50] Wilson Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987) p.1.

[51] 'As Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. […] Understood in pedagogical terms, the performance renders social laws explicit'. Butler, 'Performative Acts', p.526.

> a female "self" or subject is exacerbated by the protagonist's extreme marginality.[52]

The form of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* lends itself to comparisons with a three-act play, comprising of two book-end parts which separate a longer section in the middle containing the most detailed dramatic action of the text, notably Julia's mother's funeral in London.[53] As with *Voyage in the Dark* the text is full of ellipses and shifting scenes, with the inclusion of lengthy passages of dialogue necessary to differentiate between the characters. The scenes within these acts are presented to the reader via a contents page of chapter titles which allude to settings and characters: 'Mr Mackenzie', 'The Hotel on the Quay', 'Café Monico', and the ambiguous 'It Might Have Been Anywhere'. Julia's narrative exists *between* these spaces and characters, never seemingly in a space of its own.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie begins with a scene that could offer Julia a moment of resistance, but in its placement at the start of the narrative, signals instead the cycle of repetition she is stuck in. This theatrical spectacle is a repeat of something that has already happened, somewhere outside of the structure of the novel. Julia has already separated from Mackenzie six months prior to the novel's start, and this separation has, according to the narrator, already caused Julia a 'scene'. Two further meetings and partings occur between Julia and Mackenzie before the close, signalling the infinite repetition of Julia's position. Her stipend from Mackenzie terminated, Julia searches for her former lover to confront him about her abandonment. Julia locates Mackenzie in a restaurant, slapping him weakly across the face with her glove. This meeting repeats itself at the close of the novel, the seemingly infinite repetition of their encounters indicative of Julia's inability to rid herself of the cycle of spectacle her lonely existence draws her towards.

Chapter 2 ('Mr Mackenzie'), like the rest of the novel, shifts between memories and present reality. We are introduced to the eponymous Mackenzie as he sits in a restaurant, thinking back to his initial break with Julia and how she caused a scene the last time they met there:

> Mr Mackenzie began to think about Julia Martin. He did this as seldom as possible, but the last time he had seen her had been in that restaurant. Now he remembered her unwillingly. That affair had ended very unpleasantly.
>
> […]
>
> Julia had wept; she had become hysterical. She had made a scene, sitting in that very restaurant, under the shocked and disapproving eyes of monsieur Albert. She had made him look a fool.[54]

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[52] Emery, "*World's End*", p.123.

[53] Savory, p.43: 'The plot is laid out like a well-made play, with an opening "act" to set up the plot and characters, a substantial central "act" which complicates and deepens characters and their dramatic interaction, and a third "act" to resolve the action and bring it to a close'.

[54] Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 2000) pp.19-21. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

'Making a scene' has been learnt through repeated occurrences of failed relationships. Below is a passage from Chapter 6 ('Mr James'), which connects almost directly back to Anna Morgan's reactions to the end of her affair with Walter Jeffries in *Voyage in the Dark*:

> This was the affair which had ended quietly and decently, without fuss or scenes or hysteria. When you were nineteen, and it was the first time you had been let down, you did not make scenes. You felt as if your back was broken, as if you would never move again. But you did not make a scene. That started later on, when the same thing had happened five or six times over, and you were supposed to be getting used to it. (78)

Prior to Mackenzie's entrance, Julia waits outside of his apartment. After an 'interval'—and here Julia is the audience member waiting for the actor (Mackenzie) to emerge onto the stage (Paris' streets)—Mackenzie emerges. Making his way to the restaurant, the scene is set for Julia's performance. Here Julia is in control of her part in the spectacle; it is she who follows and confronts Mackenzie. But by the end, after slapping him with her glove, Julia has become immersed in the spectacle. Julia's movement from spectator to actor, the framing of the performance by narrative passages focusing on Mackenzie and George Horsfield (as the audience of Julia's 'performance'), and the use of mirrors in the restaurant Horsfield uses to watch, bear similarities to Woolf's *Between the Acts* when the mirrors are turned onto the audience, their reflection now part of the visual spectacle. Julia knows that everyday objects, like the hand glasses, tin cans, embossed silver mirrors of Woolf's narrative, can be used to direct a gaze toward her, moving her from audience to actor. Yet this knowingness hints not at an act of agency, more that Julia is so used to an objectifying gaze that she is unable to prevent placing herself within the spectacle. As an artist's model, a mannequin, an unmarried woman floating between men, Julia's identity has been shaped by repeated acts of spectacle.

The power of Julia's small act of resistance against Mackenzie is further diminished in its narration via the perspective of the two male characters, Mackenzie and Horsfield; Julia's vision as audience member is absent. She stands across from Mackenzie's apartment as spectator, but when the light goes out (again, theatrical imagery at work) the mirror is turned on her. The visual spectacle is fixed; Julia *is* the spectacle and the male gaze is used to undermine her agency: 'Together the two [Mackenzie and Maître Legros] perfectly represented organized society, in which she had no place and against which she had not a dog's chance' (17). Julia's slap against Mackenzie's cheek is relegated to a stereo-typical, tragi-comic spectacle familiar in popular performances of the time.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie concludes as it began. Julia returns to Paris after an interlude in London and finds herself in a scene just like that at the start. This doubling of repeated action is typical of Julia's existence, revealing the impossibility of her escape from

spectacular visibility. It becomes another 'disconnected episode to be placed with all the other disconnected episodes which made up her life' (129). These disconnected episodes are enacted within a narrative that itself refuses structural cohesion. In a chapter mockingly titled 'Last', Julia again meets Mackenzie: a return to the start, or even somewhere before that. Julia sees Mackenzie before he notices her, but this time, she merely meets his eye then looks away. It is Mackenzie who draws her into the scene by initiating a conversation, and again Julia is visually silenced as Mackenzie's gaze assess her, with no reciprocal look from Julia. With her request for money and her acceptance of Mackenzie's offer of a drink, Julia is left alone in the bar, presumably ready for the next man to enter. The act|re-enactment of scenes of separation and failed relationships ends with Julia alone, 'on-stage' in a Parisian bar; we know Julia must have been here before. But her age and looks are not what they were, and her ability to continue relying on men for financial support is questionable. The multiple textual references to ghosts take the idea of emptying the self one step further than with Marya in *Quartet*. Julia's failure to find significance from the narratives of her life leaves her—and the novel—floating in a cyclical process of performance from which her 'shadowy' identity cannot escape.

Turning to *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jensen displays capabilities to vary the repetition of her public performances better than any of Rhys's women. As such she comes closest to achieving the 'agency' Judith Butler speaks of that enables a subversion of identities imposed upon (in Rhys's context) lone females in the modern imperial metropolis:

> all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility […] then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible.[55]

But Sasha is still caught within cycles of performative repetition and her narrative circles in a similar fashion to Julia's, repeating memories that identify her inability to move against the power structures she internalises through acts of visual performance. The shift from memory to present reality conveys Sasha's desperate attempt to fix an identity that is fractured. As Emery writes:

> Sasha's marginality forces her to play roles without scripts, improvising parts for every situation because no stable social relations define, reinforce, or repeat a particular performance. Knowledge of her part depends upon her audience and critics—on how others see her. Her success depends on her ability to interpret their judgements, which she alternately resists and internalizes.[56]

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[55] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.145.
[56] Emery, "*World's End*", p.149.

Sasha's awareness of her acting signals a self-conscious 'act' against these performances, but as with Marya, Anna and Julia, Sasha's marginality refuses the illusion of a stable self.

Emery, in *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, provides a comprehensive analysis of how Sasha's status as an outsider forces her into playing or performing roles in the context of the novel's politics, particularly its depiction of violence towards women and the persecution of ethnic and racial minorities. Emery's study of the theatrical allusions in *Good Morning, Midnight* pays particular attention to the duplicitous nature of her ritual-like 'transformation acts': 'While allaying the danger of actual death or suicide, the rituals enact the death of a previous self […] rituals which, while indicating danger, also codify her marginality and temporarily integrate her into a social order'.[57] The performances appear to enable Sasha to reinvent or rescript her identity—Sasha changing her name from Sophia, or the appearance of happiness and beauty which is gained from a new outfit, for example—yet she must also participate in an emptying out of a previous self that induces what Emery terms a 'robotlike order and passivity'.[58] I see these dual possibilities playing out through Sasha's negotiation between actor and spectator positions, with this movement suggestive of subversion of the norm. Sasha, as a lone female of questionable national identity, should be contained with the spectacle, her ability to act as spectator should be denied.

Subversion also plays out in the form of the novel. If *Voyage in the Dark* opens a space somewhere between Caribbean and European modernism, then perhaps *Good Morning, Midnight* works to carve a female modernism. As Howells comments, the novel acknowledges 'the power of the (male/'universal') space in which it cannot avoid to some extent operating, yet it deliberately situates itself as a critique of male modernist representations of the city, of social history and above all, their representations of women'.[59] With the allusion to Emily Dickinson's oxymoronic poem in the title of the novel, Rhys is pointing to an alternative space of feminine subjectivity that relates more closely to a female literary tradition, opening new representational space as a result of what Howells sees as her rejection from the patriarchal literary world. As such the novel stands, as do other works produced by Rhys in the period, as a challenge to 'the modernism that it participates in and contributes to'—through the visual performances and exposed improvisations of identities by marginalised figures such as Sasha—yet 'also writes against'.[60]

Good Morning, Midnight (1939) is set in Paris 1937, a place of extreme social turmoil with the rise of fascism and the threat of an impending war looming over Europe. For

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[57] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.153.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Howells, p.93.
[60] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.170.

Sasha this is a return to a past life in Paris, a ten-day trip of recollection and re-ordering: '1923 or 1924…Was it 1926 or 1927?'.[61] The trip has come about following an unsuccessful suicide attempt. Sasha has been sent to Paris by a friend who 'can't bear to see [her] looking like this' (11). The narrative follows Sasha through a process of de/re-construction through a 'doubled-voiced language of parody, of mimicry, of other voices in contexts which have been emptied of significance'.[62] Sasha's experiences of the public, social spaces of the landscape are filled with moments where she tries to mimic a persona of plausibility or rationality, a 'femme convenable', yet she never quite feels as if her performance is convincing enough. The roles Sasha adopts contain her, nullifying any subversive quality. Her 'hosting' of identities, like Marya, manifests itself through her 'unreality'. She has 'no name, no face, no country' (38) other than that which her current appearance or image presents.

But there is also the hint at agency underneath the many invented personas: 'And after all, the agitation is only on the surface. Underneath I'm indifferent. Underneath there is always stagnant water calm, indifferent' (128). Sasha is also more acutely aware of the performances others in society undertake, including those who at first glance would appear to be stable 'selves':

> phrases run trippingly off the tongues of the extremely respectable. They think in terms of a sentimental ballad. And that's what terrifies you about them…. Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliché. Everything is born out of a cliché, rests on a cliché, survives by a cliché. And they believe in the clichés – there's no hope (36)

Theatrical allusions in the novel signal artificiality. Sasha is fired from her job in a Parisian fashion house as a result of her misunderstanding Mr Blank, her English manager. Sasha cannot understand his (mis)-pronunciation of the French word for cashier—'kise' instead of 'caisse'. The irony is that it is he, not Sasha, who cannot recite his lines properly. Despite this, it is Sasha who pays for her subordination to the laws of a capitalist system of domination: 'You who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society […] Sacrifices are necessary' (25).

Sasha's movements around the city's public spaces—the streets, shops, restaurants and bars which are such integral settings for Rhys's fiction—position her as an urban commentator, she is able (unlike Julia) to turn the gaze back onto those who label her a theatrical spectacle. René the gigolo becomes an important figure in this regard. René and

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[61] Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.11. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.
[62] Howells, p.99.

Sasha's conversation where they very consciously allude to the comic theatricality of their situation follows thus:

> 'You love playing a comedy, don't you?'
>
> 'How do you mean – a comedy?'
>
> I shouldn't have taken whisky on top of brandy. It's making me feel quarrelsome. Sparks of anger, or resentment, shooting all over me…. A comedy, what comedy? A comedy, my God!
>
> […]
>
> 'Tell me something. You think that I meant you all the time to come up here, and that everything else I said this evening was what you call a comedy?' (150)

Sasha and René are two actors in the same comedy, both aware of their performances. René initially attaches himself to Sasha in the hope of financial support gained via a romantic liaison in a gender reversal of Julia's position. Like *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* however, the text counters the possibility of conventional romance through the artificiality of their relationship. As Emery states, 'these fictional characters play the parts of theatrical actors who are playing various roles […] They become producers and directors of their "play"'.[63]

Emery has also made the connection in this scene with the performance of writing, acknowledged through René and Sasha's discussion of her previous job as a ghost-writer. Here acting and theatre most clearly serve as metaphor for writing. Sasha writes for a wealthy Montparnasse woman who reprimands her for not adopting a style that would reflect the amount she was paid. The woman wants a sophisticated language to mark her status as a member of the bourgeoisie. Earlier, Sasha discusses her inability to speak the right language, find the right words:

> Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn't every word I've said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And, mind you, I know that with all this I don't succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well….But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think – and have a bit of pity. That is, if you ever think, you apes, which I doubt. (88)

Searching for an identity that is more solid than the improvised roles she performs, Sasha enacts Rhys's response to the restricted space for female writers 'to be accepted as authentic, to carry any conviction' (135). Sasha's negotiation of restricted space, her ability to move towards a position of spectatorship over performance, is thwarted as she is contained within the mechanised vision at the close of the novel: 'the arms wave to an accompaniment of music and of song. Like this: 'Hotcha—hotcha—hotcha.…' And I know the music; I can sing the song.…' (156-7). René's threat of physical and sexual

[63] Emery, "*World's End*", p.161.

violence as punishment for her 'idiotic comedy' serves to split Sasha, separating the 'real' self from the enacted parts. But it is 'I', the real Sasha who suffers:

> This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other one—how do I know who the other is? She isn't me.
>
> Her voice in my head: "Well, well, well, just think of that now. What an amusing ten days! Positively packed with thrills. The last performance of What's-her-name And Her Boys or It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat. (154)

These ironic references to performance titles reconnect Sasha back to spectacle. The 'real' Sasha becomes the self that merges into the vision of a mass-produced, mechanised and readily-replaceable figure at the close.

The 'performances' of Rhys's fiction (both as narrative device and metaphorical mode of representation) form part of her multi-dimensional engagement with alternate forms of modernist representation. Rhys draws on performative traditions—in particular carnival, but also through her allusions to the on-stage experiences of Edwardian chorus girls—to locate her representational politics within a liminal space that attends to her own 'in-betweenness'. Allusions to voicing or performing identities both on stage and in everyday life can be found across her interwar novels. Anna, Marya and Julia lack uniformity in their performances, with their acts becoming representative of Rhys's response to her own inability to situate within class, gender and racial hierarchies as existed in imperial metropolitan culture. Sasha too, despite the potential for agency, also remains part of a spectacle-driven consumer culture where marginalised women become *the* image for theatrical performance.

2. Fashioning-through-Fashion: The Public/Private Identities of the Rhys Woman[1]

> All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes—others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful.
> (*Good Morning, Midnight*, p.156)

The mechanised female image Sasha Jensen encounters at the close of *Good Morning, Midnight* serves well to connect the theatrical performance tropes of Rhys's fiction to another pervasive motif tied to her politics of visual culture and evident throughout her interwar fiction: that of clothing and make-up.

The mechanical figure with its innumerable flexible arms that wave to a musical accompaniment can perhaps stand for the chorus girl, a multipliable image of performed femininity that typifies the culture of mass-produced visual entertainment and its objectification of women. But the figure also exemplifies Rhys's expert illustration of the mechanisation and standardisation of female looks as dictated by the European fashion industry of the 1920s and 30s.[2] The elongated arms extending to mascaraed eyes, the lights accentuating their image, speak directly of contemporary fashion models or mannequins that share a similar replicable, replaceable uniformity to that of the chorus girl. The unification of the chorus girl and the mannequin into a single nightmarish vision occurs as the product of the interrelationship between visual performance, clothing and make-up, and a rapidly emerging consumer culture, all of which construct malleable, fragmented female

[1] Sections of this chapter have previously appeared in an edited anthology, following presentation at the 4th International Conference on Fashion. Sarah Downes, "I Should Never Make Such a Fool of Myself as to Wear Them': Fashioning Public/Private Identities in Jean Rhys's Modernist Fiction', in *Trending Now: New Developments in Fashion Studies*, ed. by Laura Petican, Marriam Esseghaier, Angela Nurse and Damayanthie Eluwawalage (eBook, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013).

[2] I use 'fashion' here as an umbrella-term to combine clothing, make-up and masking into a single unit of definition. Where clarity is required, I will refer more specifically to the element in question. Fashion is also about 'fashioning' identities, and this speaks to a process of internal construction as much as it does visible, fashion practice.

identities. Rhys's documentation of the limitations and restrictions of the liberatory fantasies of fashion relies on the urban settings of her interwar fiction. The public spaces of London and Paris, the shop windows, fashion houses and city streets that are numerously referenced in Rhys's texts, become important sites for her political commentary on contemporary visual culture.

Fashion and the city stand as disjunctive yet analogous systems of representation for Rhys to address the visual politics relating to lone females on the periphery of modern society. Most crucially for the following analysis of Rhys and fashion—and specifically for my commentary on make-up and masking in the second half of this chapter—the connections between city and fashion practice maintain a distinct colonial inflection. Rhys assembles aspects of imperial politics and history into her writings on the function of fashion, as women become an increasingly visible presence within the public, commercial spaces of the urban landscape. What Mica Nava has termed the 'feminisation of consumption' occurred at a time saturated with imperial and commodity-driven ideologies that ran concurrent with economic and imperial uncertainty, so that the constructed personal identities produced through clothing and make-up are superimposed by factors of class and colonialism as well as gender.[3] The increasing exposure of European cities to far-reaching commercial networks of exchange and consumption transformed them into global nexus points for flows of money, goods and people. The gaze directed towards women as they engage with the trappings of metropolitan consumer culture alludes in Rhys's fiction to the economics of imperialism and commercial possession as public commercial space turned its vision outwards to colonial peripheries. Here I focus on Rhys's interrogation of a commodity culture that, via fashion, models faceless, anonymous individuals. This is another aspect of her critique of capitalist modernity, as well as part of her wider challenge that whiteness itself is an unstable identity or mask.

I have previously acknowledged the increased critical interest in the spatial politics of Rhys's interwar fiction, noting its general failure to more forcefully connect metropole and colony.[4] I aim to revise this by paying closer attention to the replication of the movement between colonial periphery and imperial centre as it occurs at a personal/private level. I argue that the physical processes of 'looking' as related to clothes and make-up—both the fashion 'looks' worn by the Rhys woman as well as the physical act of looking and

[3] Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store', in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, ed. by Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (London: Routledge, 1996), p.43.

[4] My argument here is indebted to Anna Snaith's work on Rhys and London, as she attends to the colonial context of Anna Morgan's London location in *Voyage in the Dark*. My own MA thesis looked specifically at the trajectory that can be drawn from interior space (rooms, bedsits, hotels) to public spaces of the city streets, and finally the imperial spaces of global exhibitions. Sarah Downes, 'The Spatial Politics of Jean Rhys's Fiction', *King's College London*, 2009.

being 'seen through' (or not seen, and thus another form of invisibility)—produce a simultaneous internalisation of the effects of the fashion/commerce/city triad. While this relationship is most clearly grounded in physical space (the shops, department stores and other public, commercial spaces), it also functions at a psychic level—to borrow from Andrew Thacker, the 'between spaces' that induce a psychologising of symbolic identities as related to racial and social codifications.[5]

Rhys's personal context and its influence on the politics of her literature allows for a new interpretation of how identities are shaped through processes of assimilation and appropriation as occurring at both public and private levels (seen/unseen, visible/invisible). Narratorially, her reinscription of fashion iconography and the performance of the self through dress and make-up is inseparable from her own unique position 'within the racial and sexual hierarchies of the British Empire, and, more specifically, from its historical construction of the 'white' Creole subject'.[6] Rhys's visible whiteness contrasted with a personal fantasy of blackness as a site of belonging. This sets Rhys apart from other modernist writers: the importance of fashion to her narratives is not just as a descriptive tool related to the performance of gender but is also about the visual encoding of cultural identity.[7]

Clothing in Rhys's fiction represents a threshold where the modern subject/object dichotomy plays out in repeated attempts at self-fashioning through dress. But as Rachel Bowlby has identified, lack of personal and narratorial progress are key features of Rhys's fiction. This alludes to the oft-mentioned impasse that Sasha finds herself in at the start of *Good Morning, Midnight*, where it occurs 'at the confluence of personal nightmare and public urban directive'.[8] That Sasha speaks of having 'no way out' from something which cannot be named makes the impasse here the force that propels her into the spectacle of everyday life; she navigates Paris shopping for her illusory 'transformation act' although the clothes never fully actualise what they are meant to signify. Thus the impasse in this instance can also stand as the space where architectural and sartorial concerns coincide, working

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[5] Thacker writes of Rhys's novels engaging with 'borderline space', 'liminal space', 'spatial flux' and a 'shuttling between spaces'. According to Thacker, the movement within and between these spaces is the beauty of Rhys's work: 'The supreme pleasure of Rhys's work is just this fictional representation of movement between diverse spaces, so that to privilege any one space—imperialism, memory, gender—is to neglect the most significant feature of all: their interplay.' Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.192-219.

[6] Britzolakis, p.462.

[7] Only Anna Morgan overtly shares a similar Creole heritage to Rhys. But connecting the narratives to Rhys's background brings to the fore the importance of clothing in claiming and asserting a multitude of identities, national, cultural, and social.

[8] Rachel Bowlby, *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.34. See also p.57: 'In rhetoric, an 'impasse' defines a structure where the proposition includes assumptions which are contrary to those of the addressee, who is thus unable either to reply according to the same terms, or to deny something on which s/he has not been directly challenged'.

simultaneously to unite the public/physical (shopping space) and the private/psychic (personal identity). As the reader identifies that there is no way out from the structures of spectacle, clothing in Rhys's fiction is where character becomes image.

Both publicly and privately the Rhys woman attempts to negotiate the complex race, class, and gender categorisations of her urban setting and their effects on her personal perception of 'self' through clothing. This manifests through visible layering or covering with the garments and make-up worn, as well as an invisible internalisation of meaning acquired through this addition, which is simultaneously an emptying-out of identity. In her study of feminist aesthetics and make-up as potential means of liberation from the 'impasse of identity politics', Rishona Zimring has noted how Rhys 'draws attention to the struggle between public surface and private "deep" selves'.[9] There is no doubt that processes of identity formation involve a tension between the public and the private, exterior and interior. In Rhys's narratives, this tension plays out through a process of learning, of a repeated adoption of techniques that aim to negotiate the encompassing spectacle of modern urban life.

Using a comparative reading of two of Rhys's early short stories from her *Left Bank* collection—'Mannequin' and 'Illusion'—supported by my continued readings of the four interwar novels, I aim to show how, in respect to sartorial discourse, Rhys mediates the public/private, visible/invisible binaries on three levels. Firstly on an architectural level Rhys very concisely maps public and private sartorial spaces of Paris and London, from the secret closet space of Miss Bruce in 'Illusion', the dress shop Sasha cannot navigate in *Good Morning, Midnight*, to the rabbit-warren couturière in 'Mannequin'. Secondly this binary occurs socially, as she critiques the shaping and organisation of identities within the European fashion industry, as well as how appearance influences social interactions (the problems Sasha Jensen's fur coat causes, or Anna Morgan's labelling as a tart, for example). Finally, the binary plays out psychically, through the internalisation of identities that Rhys shows are at odds with what is presented at surface level through dress and make-up, and which maintains a strong colonial context.

Within Rhys's fiction clothing becomes a distinctly private mode of identity (trans)formation: Miss Bruce's secret collecting or hoarding of clothes and make-up becoming a 'search for illusion—a craving, almost a vice'; Anna Morgan's recognition of women's silent musing that 'If I could buy this, then of course I'd be quite different.' (111).[10] By contrast, the experiences Rhys's characters have working as shop assistants or

[9] Rishona Zimring, 'The Make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 33.2 (2000), 212-234 (p.223).

[10] Jean Rhys, 'Illusion', in *Tigers are better-looking: with a selection from The Left Bank* (London: Penguin, 1972), p.143. All subsequent references are from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

mannequins (Anna in 'Mannequin' from *The Left Bank and Other Stories* collection and *Good Morning, Midnight*'s Sasha Jensen) rework the shop into a metaphor for the city, with their assimilation into the society of the shop dependent upon the public performance of prescribed identity through dress. This slippage between consumer and producer within the labour of fashion produces a tension between opportunity and choice associated with fashionable consumption, and the limitations of such choices in their enactment. As I argued in my previous chapter, the figure of the Rhys woman consciously enacts 'postures' or performances within this negotiation of public and private appearances. To that end, the interplay between 'spectator/consumer' and 'actor/objectified commodity' roles within the public/private binary—beginning with the interchange of chorus girl and mannequin—will reinforce the connections made between visual culture, consumerism, and the commodification of the female body.

I start with a study of the relationship between performance and fashion, or rather the shift from costume to clothing (and I argue that this is a significant distinction). I then move my analysis towards sartorial space and the consumer city, paying attention to the labyrinthine nature of the city and the internalisation of the effects of the 'impasse' mentioned above. The all-encompassing spectacle of the modern urban landscape leads to processes of learning, of concealment, as the Rhys woman becomes increasingly aware of her role as both subject and object. Finally my analysis turns to make-up and masks, reinforcing issues of racial masking and the codification of colour within physical appearance. Here I question whether the masquerade of femininity as the Rhys woman experiences it can provide a protective masking: can enforced socio-cultural identifications and the hyper-visibility that they produce be countered by a process of making oneself invisible by using the exact same mechanisms that enforce the spectacle? Rhys's modernist fiction offers a critical assessment of the visible fashioning-through-fashion of racial and gendered identities in European society in the 1920s and 30s. Her reinscription of fashion iconography and the spectacle it produces explores the invention and sustaining of identity by sartorial means. This is an engagement in the process of self-construction by the acquisition of commodities—buying an identity for oneself. But Rhys also looks at the labour aspect of this process, of identity imposed through work. Rhys succinctly identifies how both processes reduce the individual to a social identity that exists only through representation—in Goffmanesque fashion—on the stage of urban public life.

From Stage to Store: Theatre and Fashion

> Even if a woman dresses in conformity with her status, a game is still being played: artifice, like art, belongs to the realm of the imaginary. It is not only that girdle, brassiere, hair-dye, make-up disguise in body and face; that that least sophisticated of women, once she is 'dressed', does not present herself to the observation; she is, like the picture or the statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there – that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendour.[11]

> The nature of women's commodification, Benjamin observes, has changed to reflect the changing conditions of capitalist production: The regimentation of the assembly line has come to be reflected in a new form of sexiness: the chorus line, with its display of women "in strictly identical clothes" (V, 427). In the modern city, women appeared as "mass produced" through the "masking of individual expression" under make-up: "later the uniformed 'girls' of the review underline this" (V, 437).[12]

The stage traffic of young female performers, and the ways in which these women were used to advertise both the fashion products they wore and the acceptable gender roles they enacted, offers an opportunity to reassess the relationship between social visibility, fashion, and the performance of constructed identities. A voyeuristic triangle existed between stage, theatre stall, and shop via the prevalence of "shop-girl" musical shows such as *The Girl Behind the Counter* (1906) and *Our Miss Gibbs* (1909), which Rhys starred in under the stage name Ella Gray. Such performances, and their close connection to a rapidly emerging consumer society, focus attention on fashion becoming the means of dramatic discourse as well as the subject. The connection between social space, consumerism and the commodification of the female body, in visual terms, can be extended by attention to the sartorial.

The commercial success of musicals such as *Our Miss Gibbs* celebrated both Edwardian consumerism and the independence of 'the shopping woman'. Magazines such as *Lady* (which ran a column titled 'Dress on the London Stage', 1892), *Sketch*, and *Players* explicitly connected stage and shop, with the 'shop-girl' musical performances spilling into the purchasing performances of everyday life.[13] The London stage was a platform for marketable commodities, not merely reflecting but also anticipating and creating new fashions through the costumes worn. The fashion industry's presence inside the theatre ran

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[11] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1988), p.547.
[12] Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *New German Critique*, 39, Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin (1986), 99-140 (p.125).
[13] Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.8.

alongside the theatricalisation of advertising and marketing in social sartorial space. It was common to find sections within shops and department stores that contained curtained recesses or an elevated platform where, with complimentary lighting and music, girls would parade the latest designs for customers.[14] Indeed, *Our Miss Gibbs* was part of Harrod's seasonal promotion, with other department stores also forming relationships with theatre production companies for marketing purposes: Selfridges' 'Theatre of Dress' included 'mannequins who would parade gowns on a specially constructed stage'.[15]

Our Miss Gibbs contains chorus girls starring in a play about shopping, providing a resonant language for those who wished to explore—via the commercial stage—the fraught relationship between clothes, consumption, and the objectification of women. What I find interesting in this movement or duplication between theatre and shopping space is the replication of anonymous, mass-produced images of femininity. Rhys alludes to this as she talks of her time in *Our Miss Gibbs* (after which she also worked as a mannequin in a Parisian fashion house):

> Chorus girls were not expected to dance anything like they do now. The steps were very easy and as long as you did exactly what the girl next to you did, you were all right. What they called showgirls weren't expected to dance at all. The first act of the show I was in was supposed to be played in a large shop called Garrods and the showgirls, dressed as models, strolled about. (JRA, 1.4:6. ver.5, p.7)

The actresses here become as mannequins in a shop setting, parading across stage for the benefit of potential customers in the audience (fig. 4). It is interesting to note that one of the first instances of the word 'mannequin' as listed in the OED from 1893 similarly combines fashion and theatre: 'The "mannequin" of the stage is moveable; the ladies in the boxes and the gentlemen in the stalls can criticise the dress from every point of view'. The exact replication of movement from one girl to the next speaks of the mass-producible, replicated image of femininity that I start this chapter with, the mechanisation and standardisation of looks via the fashion industry.

This is reminiscent of what Siegfried Kracauer in 1927 termed 'the Mass Ornament' in his essay of the same title. Kracauer studied the mechanically-streamlined choreographic displays by chorus girl groups such as the Tiller Girls, a popular dance troupe formed in Manchester at the turn of the century, alongside whom Rhys performed during her time in *Cinderella.* According to Delia Caparoso Konzett, Kracauer concluded that social identity no longer rested on individual identity but on 'a disembodied context of the mass': 'It is the mass that is employed here. Only as part of the mass not as individuals who believe

[14] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion*, p.117.
[15] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion*, p.131.

Fig. 4: The opening chorus of *Our Miss Gibbs*, Gaiety Theatre, 1909.

themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure'.[16] Here the chorus girl becomes a model of mass culture, a faceless individual whose movements on stage replicate the assembly-line rhythms of industrial production.[17] This dehumanisation pervades Rhys's modernism, reworking the figure of the chorus girl into the fashioned female interacting with the trappings of modern consumer culture—both as shop mannequin and as shopper. This provides a new aesthetic understanding of collectivity that attempts to come to terms with consumerism and the commodification of the female body as reproducible image.

Rhys illustrates this standardisation of image as it replicates industrial production processes in her short story 'Illusion' via what she terms the 'cult of beauty' (140). Fashion historian Caroline Evans has recently noted the reliance on 'Fordist aesthetics' and 'Taylorist management' that pervaded French couture houses contemporaneous to Rhys's writing.[18] Evans' essay focuses on a Paris fashion show held in February 1925 by French

[16] See Delia Caparoso Konzett's reading of this in *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.156. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* trans. and ed. by Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p76.

[17] Kracauer notes that the audience themselves are 'arranged by the stands in tier upon ordered tier', according to the same principle. Ibid.

[18] Caroline Evans, 'Jean Patou's American Mannequins: Early Fashion Shows and Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 15:2 (2008), 243-63 (p.244). See also Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism*

couturier Jean Patou. He had advertised in the *New York Times* three months earlier for 'three ideal types of beautiful young women' for the exclusive purpose of representing the American physique in order to sell his clothes to American buyers (of the six chosen, one was a film actress, another a stage performer and two were artist's models). To summarise from Evans, Patou's choice and display of fashion mannequins was directed by their uniformity, their conformity to a particular type. This 'typecasting' is alluded to in Rhys's commentaries on both chorus girls and mannequins, whereby 'types' speak of culturally determined notions of beauty. In the numerous draft versions of 'Chorus Girls', Rhys questions the existence of a certain 'type': 'People talk now as if all chorus girls are alike, and a type, which is perfectly ridiculous' (ver.1), and further:

> There were chorus girls of 16, and chorus girls of nearly 40 […] some, though not many were married. Some were engaged to be married […] Some were ambitious to get on on the stage. […] There was always the company tart, but no-one ever called her a tart. They just said 'So-and-so has a lot of friends'. (*JRA* 1.4:6 ver.5, p.7)

However, the use of 'type' in Rhys's short story 'Mannequin' unites the chorus girl/fashion model into a replicable image projected by the women in their 'performance'. Such 'types' have a specific, commercial or collectable viability that transcends stage and shop: 'Each of the twelve was a distinct and separate type: each of the twelve knew her type and kept to it, practising rigidly in clothing, manner, voice and conversation'.[19] Rhys also adopts 'collection' as a term to describe the mannequins, connecting the female member of the 'collection' to the clothes 'collections' that they model and thereby confusing which is the commodity on show to be 'collected' by the viewing customer.

The anonymous mass of the 'collective' or 'type' is part of modern life, whereby the female becomes another commodified item to be viewed, scrutinised and then bought, only to be discarded and replaced by the same. Here the female body renders problematic the binaries of distinction and conformity, leisure/entertainment versus labour, and subject versus spectacular object, binaries which speak to the condition of modern city life. Moving aspects of visual performance away from the enclosed space of the theatre and out into the cityscape—most obviously consumer spaces—anticipates, as Christina Britzolakis argues, 'one of the central themes of cultural postmodern theory: the usurpation of historically sedimented "place" by the increasingly abstract and homogeneous character of "space" as

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and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). In this study, Evans focuses on the relationship between fashion and film, two forces that functioned to alter the rhythm of modern life, as she attempts to extend modernism's definition into the performative.

[19] Jean Rhys, 'Mannequin', in *Tigers are better-looking: with a selection from The Left Bank* (London: Penguin, 1972), p.152. All subsequent references are from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

commodity spectacle', with the spectacle of the modern female in the urban scene enabling her objectification.[20]

The Sartorial City: Negotiating the Impasse

> The public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other.[21]
>
> Modernity defines itself by the rate of change tolerated by the system without really changing anything in the essential order…. Modernity is a code, and fashion its emblem.[22]

The geo-historical, socio-political context of Rhys's writings on fashion elucidates most clearly her challenge to masculine literary portrayals of modern female life, presenting as she does the absent female voice of many contemporary commentaries on the visual spectacle of fashion.[23] Recent years have witnessed the emergence of significant research on the fashion and modernism connection, revealing that the processes of *modernité* and *mode* bear comparisons beyond the etymological.[24] Far less consistent exploration has been undertaken on the interrelationship between literary modernism and the theory and practice of modern fashion, particularly as is written by female authors. Virginia Woolf stands as one figure whose literary engagement with fashion has undergone significant critical analysis, although as yet such contributions—though valuable—remain scattered within more general Woolf/modernism studies.[25] Examination of Rhys's commentary on fashion and modernism in her literature is even more fleeting, although Maroula Joannou's recent article on Rhys's sartorial considerations, along with Rishona Zimring's contribution on Rhys and make-up, have opened a conversation that deserves far more critical attention.[26]

Mica Nava and Rachel Bowlby's work on fashion and modernity, in particular their commentary on the structures of modern experience as dictated by the culture of the

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[20] Britzolakis, p.460.
[21] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984), p.266.
[22] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) p.78.
[23] I think here of Benjamin's reduction of the female to the prostitute in *The Arcades Project*, of Simmel, and of Kracauer.
[24] For more on the social history of fashion and modernity connection see Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009).
[25] R.S. Koppen, *Virginia Woolf: Fashion and Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) is a significant contribution to the current interest in literary and visual cultures, providing a comprehensive reading of Woolf's engagement with the theory and practice of fashion.
[26] Maroula Joannou, "All right, I'll do anything for good clothes': Jean Rhys and Fashion', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 23.4 (2012), 463-489; Rishona Zimring, 'The Make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 33.2 (2000), 212-234.

commodity, still holds much critical worth. Nava's essay 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store' focuses, via a 'genealogy of absence', on newly emerging forms of social interaction and perception at the turn of the century.[27] As a response to Janet Wolff's work on the invisible flâneuse, Nava turns to mass consumer culture and specifically the department store in its role in developing 'a new consciousness about the possibilities [or otherwise] that modern urban life was able to offer'.[28] This is linked with increasing consumption of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where women's appropriation of public space was growing markedly, and further with vision as a constituent force in presenting this appropriation.

Rachel Bowlby in *Just Looking* draws on Marxist-feminist theory to focus on the commodified individual as product of urban spectacle. In her examination of consumer culture in the fiction of Gissing, Dreiser, and Zola, Bowlby presents a reading of the commercial activity of the mid-nineteenth century, from which emerged the commodified, collectivised subject drawn to the marvels of modern production. Visual practice was integral to this: 'No longer do goods come to the buyers […] Instead, it is the buyers who have taken themselves to the products: and not, in this case, to buy, but more to "see" the things'.[29] Bowlby's attention to the perceived antithesis between commerce and culture guides her discussion towards literary interpretations of cultural practices within the spectacle of everyday life, and women's unique—if not contradictory—role in this.[30] While Bowlby's analysis rests on the turn-of-the-century male artist/naturalist author as 'spectators of spectatorship', Rhys offers readings of the following years from a distinctly feminine, colonial standpoint. More recently, R.S. Koppen has looked to Woolf's dressing as a 'Gauguin girl' at the 1910 Post-Impressionist Ball, alongside the infamous Dreadnought performance, as but two examples of the author's use of clothing as a visual register of social exploration and critique.[31] While the Gauguin costumes broke primitivism out of the aesthetic borders of the exhibition's paintings and into the social domain, Dreadnought combined a multitude of subversive acts, with empire ridiculed by Woolf's double-cross-dressing as both African and male.[32] Rhys's treatment of fashion in her fiction likewise operates across gender and racial lines, albeit in more subtle ways. Her focus on clothing

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[27] Nava, p.41.
[28] Nava, p.38.
[29] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p.1.
[30] See Bowlby, *Just Looking*, p.11. 'If culture, as a space marked off from business or working concerns, was also associated with femininity, that meant that being an artist might not sit well with a male identity. […] The male novelist then, might be in something of an ideological bind: neither the pure artist nor fully masculine, and unable to alter one side of the pairing without damaging the other.'
[31] Koppen, pp.23-25.
[32] Ibid.

and the visual as ideological imperatives of contemporary society, read alongside her engagement with spatial imagery and the imperial urban landscape, increases the cultural currency of her fiction.

Rhys's interwar fiction is often explicit in its locational references—naming specific streets and the dress shops, milliners, and salons within them—situating her literature within the geographical and aesthetic landscape of expatriate modernism as found in Paris of the 1920s and 30s.[33] Street and shop names are identified with precision in the novels, and while the stories of *The Left Bank* collection are notably absent of such detail, 'Mannequin' and 'Illusion' are likewise clearly grounded in Paris, the city of consumption (per Benjamin) and the heart of the fashion industry. Benjamin's encyclopædic study of Paris, translated to English as *The Arcades Project*, coincided with Rhys's literary engagement with the sartorial spaces of the city between 1927 and 1939. Paris at this time, with its mannequins, illuminated shop-front displays and advertisements, was the fashion capital of the world: according to Gertrude Stein, 'Paris was where the twentieth century was. It was important too that Paris was where fashions were made'.[34] The modern consumer was drawn by the splendour of the fashion houses and arcades, by the 'pleasures of lavish visual spectacle', according to Joannou, 'which occupied an important symbolic place in the economy of desire'.[35]

Maroula Joannou, as she works through the 'cultural, intellectual and historical contexts of Rhys's engagement with sartorial fashion', provides a contextual reading of Paris in the twenties, noting that the haute couture of designers like Coco Chanel, Jean Patou and Cristóbel Balenciaga enjoyed a status commensurate with high art.[36] Indeed, the Paris of Rhys's Left Bank fiction opens up the avant-garde world of contemporary fashion for her readers, a place where clothing was akin to fantastical works of art and practicality an absent concept. Rhys's fashion-conscious characters and their desire for good clothes are bound to a longing for an identity that is beyond reach. Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* speaks of this pursuit of sartorial aestheticism as she 'thought of new clothes with passion, with voluptuousness. She imagined the feeling of a new dress on her body and the scent of it, and her hands emerging from long black sleeves' (15), perhaps an illusion to Chanel's famous 'little black dress'.[37] The cultural backdrop of Rhys's writing is a society of mass culture and high consumption, where everyday life was influenced by the extension—and

[33] *Voyage in the Dark* is, of course, set in London, and with *Good Morning, Midnight* there is the movement from London to Paris. Nevertheless, Rhys's linguistic engagement with fashion, notably through her repeated use of the word 'chic' in *The Left Bank* stories, allies a cosmopolitan Rhys clearly with the French fashion capital.

[34] Gertrude Stein, *Paris, France: Personal Recollections* (London: Peter Owen, 1940), p.11.

[35] Joannou, p.473.

[36] Joannou, pp.473-75.

[37] Joannou, pp.466-67.

expansion—of a commodity market, the emergent figure of the female in public space, and where the question of identity coalesced with that of lifestyle. In this context, identity tended to be addressed predominantly in material terms, often by material goods.

The changes in commercial activity leading up to Rhys's writing ran concurrent with the period offering women the chance to explore new of identities, requiring a negotiation of conflicting social definitions of femininity, desirability and respectability. Clothing facilitated play with identity and self-fashioning in terms of gender, culture and class, and in a period characterised by the increasing instability of class and geographical boundaries, developments in dress connected to the increasing importance of 'external appearances, of surface impressions'.[38] This social fluidity fuelled contemporary commentators' preoccupation with the codes of modern fashions. Within fashion's potential as heuristic device—Georg Simmel having earlier written of fashion as an affirmation of the metropolitan condition of individual independence—Rhys places Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* and Miss Bruce, protagonist of 'Illusion', as embodying a more uneasy coexistence between freedom and constraint.[39]

'External appearance' for Sasha and Miss Bruce can be read as 'visible appearance'. A double reading of the following passage from the start of *Good Morning, Midnight* underlines the uneasy visual presence of women in the street as both wearer of a look and as she who 'looks':

> I had looked at this, I had looked at that, I had looked at the people passing in the street and a shop-window full of artificial limbs. I came in to somebody who said: 'I can't bear to see you looking like this.'
>
> 'Like what?' I said.
>
> 'I think you need a change. Why don't you go back to Paris for a bit? … You could get yourself some new clothes—you certainly need them. … I'll lend you the money,' she said. (11)

Sasha's return to Paris to undertake her 'transformation act' offers the potential for visual agency and a new 'look' that is denied to her in London. But Sasha's impasse, to return for a moment to the architectural-sartorial juncture, renders her gaze problematic. Sasha's movement around Paris, oscillating between subject/object, consumer/commodity, reinforces her unease with the opportunities Parisian life affords.

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[38] Nava, p.47.

[39] Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971). See also Alissa G. Karl's reading of Simmel's 1904 essay 'Fashion'. Karl recounts that Simmel characterises the medium as both 'a material and psychological form that visually distinguishes and maintains class and social hierarchies at the same time that it holds out the promise' of individual departure from social demands. The contrast between 'immersion in the collectivity' and the drive towards individuation is part of the 'strategy for identifying and fixing oneself in the rapid flows of commercialized and mechanized [modern] life'. Alissa G. Karl, *Modernism and the Marketplace: Literary Culture and Consumer Capitalism in Rhys, Woolf, Stein, and Nella Larsen* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.20.

Miss Bruce, like Sasha, has also transferred from England to Paris. But while Sasha's trip is enabled only by a meagre family legacy and the money leant by a friend, Miss Bruce has the benefit of significant personal capital. As such, she is able to carve a public identity of respectability, albeit one which relies upon the erasure of a feminine image:

> she always wore a neat serge dress in the summer and a neat tweed costume in the winter, brown shoes with low heels and cotton stockings. When she was going to parties she put on a black gown of crêpe de chine, just well enough cut, not extravagantly pretty. (141)

Unmarried yet self-sufficient with a private income (selling her own paintings—a feat described as a remarkable achievement), Miss Bruce inhabits a recognisably *un*-feminine position, her 'gentlemanly manner' and her appraisal of pretty females walking past facilitating a role within public urban space as spectator, not actor. By the 1920s sartorial sexual nonconformity had been embraced by fashion, the figure of the androgyne acting as the embodiment of the experimental ethos of the decade. No longer was androgynous dress seen as purely symptomatic of a public proclamation of social radicalism against the clear gendered definitions characterised by Victorian fashions. Miss Bruce can be read alongside Woolf's plea in *Three Guineas* for suitable clothes for women to enter professions, a request as symbolic as that for an income and a room of one's own, which Miss Bruce also has the privilege of having.[40] While Sasha's gaze is threatening to gendered visual norms, Miss Bruce holds agency within acts of vision. As she looks 'appraisingly with the artist's eye [making] a suitably critical remark' at women passing in the street or in restaurants, she appears impervious to what Guy Debord would later describe as the 'spectacle de la merchandise':

> she appeared utterly untouched, utterly unaffected, by anything hectic, slightly exotic or unwholesome. Going on all the time all round her were the cult of beauty and the worship of physical love: she just looked at her surroundings in her healthy, sensible way, and then dismissed them from her thoughts… rather like some sturdy rock with impotent blue waves washing round it. (140)

But this is a role, a performance that the narrator hints has been learnt over a sustained period. She has mastered how to become 'a shining example of what character and training—British character and training—can do' (140). Miss Bruce, like Sasha, is unable to fully develop and express an authentic, individual character outside of the frame of social convention. She has learnt to play a role that is acceptable to society, containing any threat posed by her independence by adopting a costume that in its repetition erases any distinguishing form of wealth or status display.

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[40] For more on modern androgynous and lesbian fashions as representative of subcultural, 'eccentric' or 'inverted' femininities, see Koppen, pp.54-56.

Miss Bruce adopts a public demeanour that renders her anonymous. Her clothes, thus her performed identity, reveal no distinguishing markers that would define her as 'exotic or unwholesome'.[41] Indeed, the narrator notes that 'I only knew the outside of Miss Bruce—the cool, sensible, tidy English outside' (141). This is a form of self-conscious anti-decoration connected to a sense of national, English identity. Her trained process of 'de-spectacularisation' enhances her ability to cast her gaze onto others. This is an invisibility Sasha also craves but is unable to achieve even as she shares a degree of social independence. In her worn, shabby outfit Sasha is a spectacle to be mocked by her hotel patron. Her hat 'shouts 'Anglaise', her dress 'extinguishes' her and the 'damned old' imitation astrakhan fur coat is 'the last idiocy, the last incongruity' (14). Her journey to Paris can be viewed as an attempt to rid herself of this visibility that is the antithesis of Miss Bruce's British character and training, but its success is far from guaranteed. Miss Bruce contains the threat she poses to the social order by avoiding the exotic, the unwholesome. But Sasha's illegitimacies of marriage and citizenship, unable to correctly fill in her nationality by marriage on the hotel fiche, leave her without the same 'tidy English outside' and so she remains part of the spectacle.

Anna in 'Mannequin' more clearly inhabits the opposite end of the ocular spectrum to Miss Bruce. There is no doubt that through her job as a mannequin she is to be the recipient of an objectifying public gaze, the spectacle to be used in the sale of fashions, not the spectator or potential buyer. Here we can return again to the question of agency and identity in relation to space. Anna's lack of agency renders the physical space of the fashion house where she is employed illegible. The story opens with her navigating around the dark passages of the back of the salon. Its 'countless puzzling corridors and staircases' (150) are labyrinthine, likened to a rabbit warren, and she despairs of ever finding her way.

Spatial disorientation and a lack of direction or progress are familiar manifestations in Rhys's fiction. The couturière's complicated network of underground space, dark passages and stairs in 'Mannequin' re-emerges in the nightmarish dress shop of *Good Morning, Midnight* where Sasha was previously employed as an assistant.[42] Tasked with

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[41] This bears similarities to Una Marson's 'Little Brown Girl', where she talks of the sartorial differences between colony and metropole: 'There's nothing picturesque/ To be seen in the streets,/ Nothing but people clad in coats, coats, coats,/ Coats in Autumn, Winter and Spring,/ And often in the Summer-/ A city of coated people/ But little to charm the eye.// […] No chocolate and high-brown girls/ Clad in smart colours/ To blend with the complexion/ And wearing delicate/ Dainty shoes on dainty feet/ That one can admire.' Marson, *The Moth and the Star*, p.13.

[42] Sasha's extended commentary on the mechanisms of the fashion industry emerges from her memories of her time working in a dress shop. The twelve-page section perhaps relates Rhys's most powerful—and personal—analysis of the Parisian fashion industry at the time as she traces job roles, customers, and physical space of the shop into a series of personal failures for her protagonist. Sasha mentions working off the Avenue Marigny in the heart of the 8th Arr., close to Rue Cambon, made famous by Coco Chanel

running an errand for her employer, Sasha is unable to navigate the space correctly. I quote at length here to underscore how Rhys employs architectural descriptions to reinforce a state of personal immobility:

> I turn and walk blindly through a door. It is a lavatory. They look sarcastic as they watch me going out by the right door.
>
> I walk a little way along the passage, then stand with my back against the wall.
>
> This is a very old house – two old houses. The first floor, the shop proper, is modernized. The showrooms, the fitting-rooms, the mannequins' room. … But on the ground floor are the workrooms and offices and dozens of small rooms, passages that don't lead anywhere, steps going up and steps going down.
>
> […]
>
> I turn to the right, walk along another passage, down a flight of stairs. The workroom. … No, I can't ask here. All the girls will stare at me. I shall seem such a fool.
>
> I try another passage. It ends in a lavatory. The number of lavatories in this place, c'est inoui. … I turn a corner, find myself back in the original passage and collide with a strange young man. He gives me a nasty look.
>
> […]
>
> After this it becomes a nightmare. I walk up the stairs, past doors, along passages – all different, all exactly alike. There is something very urgent that I must do. But I don't meet a soul and all the doors are shut.' (22-3)

Sasha is fired for her inability to navigate the space of the fashion house. This spatial intelligibility also translates to a linguistic failure as Sasha is unable to translate, or hear, the instructions properly. She fantasises that if she had been wearing an old mannequin's dress she has asked the saleswoman to keep for her then the fiasco would never have happened. However, the dress, belonging to the house and thus a costume that would have identified her inclusion to the collective, is a false illusion. Sasha later notes that for her, the 'passages never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut. I know…' (28). Sasha's navigational illiteracy speaks of her role within the labour of fashion. As shop assistant her job is to direct customers to the floors above 'where the real activities of the shop were carried on' (16). Sasha has linguistic capabilities in more than one language, and her role in the fashion house is to 'read' her customers, anticipating their desires and direct them as required. But Sasha cannot translate her intellectual ability into her role in the fashion house. As such, she becomes emblematic of a member of an alienated labour force. With no lift in the building, Sasha is reduced to an indistinguishable mechanism in the fashion house machine.

Sasha's comment that the dress would have produced a different ending for her implies that the mannequin is somehow above this; the identity that the mannequin adopts

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who opened her first shop there. The only shop now left on Ave. Marigny is a dress shop by the designer Pierre Cardin, who worked with Elsa Schiaparelli and Christian Dior in the early post-war years.

belongs to the house and will therefore facilitate some form of spatial cognition, but only when full assimilation into that borrowed persona is achieved. Anna in 'Mannequin', as it is only her first day, has yet to be rewarded as such. Connections can here be made to Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies Paradise*, 1883) as the shop assistant Denise similarly experiences a terrifying maze as she steps foot in a department store for the first time:

> She could not follow even the simplest directions [… she would] turn left if she had been told to turn right; so that for ten minutes she had been wandering round the ground floor, going from one department to another, surrounded by the ill-natured curiosity and sullen indifference of the salesmen.
> […]
> She was so lost and small inside the monster, inside the machine, and although it was still idle, she was terrified that she would be caught up in its motion, which was already beginning to make the walls shake.[43]

The opportunities offered to women—as shop assistants, as mannequins advertising the wares of the fashion house—may have signalled a degree of emancipation, yet such offerings simultaneously generated feelings of paralysis or a personal impasse. Rhys's characters respond to their conflicting status with a sense of disorientation that translates from the psychological to the architectural and back.

'It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat'

In 'Mannequin', the lack of agency which renders the physical space of the couturière's illegible is also identified through Anna's status as a replaceable commodity with pre-defined use value. New commercial events such as the rise of fashion houses and the advent of the department store made their greatest appeal to women, inviting them to obtain their benefits and partake in the images they produced. But the process of commodification, whereby more goods of an increased variety of type were offered on sale, marked the ascendency of what Marx terms exchange value over use value.[44] As Mark Jayne succinctly summarises: 'Marx describes a commodity as a product that has been produced not for direct personal consumption on the part of the consumer, but rather with the intention of selling it in the market'.[45] The commodity therefore becomes significant for its exchange value; the actual value of the goods bearing no relation to their use.[46]

Encouraging women into the city as consumers, commercial space became associated with an increased freedom, yet these spaces also became sites of female

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[43] Émile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, trans. by Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 49.
[44] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, pp.11 and p.2; Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 2000), pp.152-66.
[45] Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.29.
[46] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, p.2; Jayne, p.29.

objectification, transaction and transgression. Highlighting the formative role of the commodity in everyday life, Marx viewed individual social experience as being subject to the laws of the marketplace: 'as well as goods and services, people became reduced to a monetary value in an increasingly alienated capitalist world'.[47] We can connect this to Susan Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* as she acknowledges his merging of the prostitute and mannequin into a single image, where the whore becomes 'the embodiment of objectivity'.[48] Buck-Morss writes:

> The prostitute's natural body resembled the lifeless mannequin used for the display of the latest fashion; the more expensive her outfit, the greater her appeal. […] To desire the fashionable, purchasable woman-as-thing is to desire exchange-value itself, that is, the very essence of capitalism. (V,435).[49]

Rhys gestures to this in *Voyage in the Dark*, where Anna Morgan and Maudie discuss the important role clothes play in the construction of purchasable femininity:

> She looked at my dresses and kept saying, 'Very ladylike. I call that one very ladylike indeed. And you've got a fur coat. Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat she has something, there's no getting away from that.'
>
> 'My dear, I had to laugh,' she said. 'D'you know what a man said to me the other day? It's funny, he said, have you ever thought that a girl's clothes cost more 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. To say nothing of underclothes, shoes, etcetera and so on." And then I had to laugh, because after all it's true, isn't it? People are much cheaper than things. And look here! Some dogs are more expensive than people, aren't they? And as to some horses… (39-40)

Outfits identify the wearer's potential worth or value for others. Sasha's fur coat falsely signifies her wealth both to the Russian artist who wants her to buy his painting and later René the gigolo, while for Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, to be seen as being 'dressed up to the nines' signals a problematic elevation of class as her new purchases show that she is a bought woman, a tart.

In all her interwar fiction Rhys makes associations between women and consumption, identifying her protagonists, like commodities, with surface and illusion. In 'Mannequin' Anna sustains a complex interaction with costumes and image, clothes and make-up. She is 'fragile, like a delicate child, her arms pathetically thin', but we know 'it was to her legs' Anna owes 'this dazzling, this incredible opportunity' (149). She is reduced to a

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[47] Jayne, pp.29-30.
[48] Buck-Morss, p.120.
[49] Buck-Morss, pp.120-1.

part of a whole as she assumes the mannequin role that, if we take its source definition from the Dutch '*mannekijn*', could be little more than a doll or dummy used for clothes display. This doll-like imagery also appears in *Good Morning, Midnight* where Sasha talks of mannequins as 'elongated dolls, beautifully dressed, with charming and malicious oval faces' (16). The mannequins here are *just* dolls, but in the context of Sasha's own history as a mannequin—and placed alongside Anna's story—her comments on what they would have been if human reads with an authoritative irony: 'watching those damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart – all complete' (16).

The parts make up an entire image, a type-cast identity that will be representative of the fashion house. In all of the stories, this image is constructed via a carefully crafted programme. Anna must 'learn'—Rhys's vocabulary in this story mirroring that of 'Illusion'—'the way to wear the innocent and springlike air and garb of the jeune fille' (150), to perform an identity that is borrowed. She enacts an assimilation of pre-defined identity that is not hers to keep:

> There were twelve mannequins at Jeanne Veron's: six of them were lunching, the others still paraded, goddess-like, till their turn came for rest and refreshment. Each of the twelve was a distinct and separate type: each of the twelve knew her type and kept to it, practising rigidly in clothing, manner, voice and conversation.
>
> Round the austere table were now seated Babette, the gamine, the traditional blonde enfant: Mona, tall and darkly beautiful, the femme fatale, the wearer of sumptuous evening gowns. Georgette was the garçonne: Simone with green eyes Anna knew instantly for a cat whom men would and did adore, a sleek, white, purring, long-lashed creature … Eliane was the star of the collection.
>
> Eliane was frankly ugly and it did not matter: no doubt Lilith, from whom she was obviously descended, had been ugly too. Her hair was henna-tinted, her eyes small and black, her complexion bad under her thick make-up. Her hips were extraordinarily slim, her hands and feet exquisite, every movement she made was as graceful as a flower's in the wind. Her walk … But it was her walk which made her the star there and earned her a salary quite fabulous for Madame Veron's, where large salaries were not the rule … Her walk and her 'chic of devil; which lit an expression of admiration in even the cold eyes of American buyers.
>
> […]
>
> Madame Pecard, the dresser, was seated at the head of the mannequin's table, talking loudly, unlistened to, and gazing benevolently at her flock. (151-2)

The haute couture houses of Paris were organised according to a strict hierarchy. At the top was the vendeuse, the head saleswoman. Below her were the assistants, often ex-mannequins like Sasha, no longer beautiful or young enough to model the fashions themselves. The workrooms housing the sewing girls and apprentices were separated from

the public sales space of the house, with the labour-force likewise divided between front- and back-of-house.[50] Anna acknowledges this division of labour as she prepares for the day's work, the dressing-room becoming a hostile space where 'coldly critical glances were bestowed upon Anna's reflection in the glass. None of them looked at her directly' (150). This indirect gaze works to further anonymise Anna, breaking her down into little more than a reflected image.

The gamine, the femme fatale, the garçonne, the cat, the sportive: each stands as a 'separate type'. The performances the mannequins undertake is total, even over lunch they must stay in character. Here the mannequins are united on one table, surrounded by the other workers of the salon, 'workers heroically gay, but with the stamp of labour on them' (152). This heightens the sense of ambiguity over their status, implying the mannequins exist outside of labour even though they receive (small) compensation for their use. From an outsider perspective the mannequins are indistinguishable from objects or commodities, although these are actually the dresses or the images of femininity represented in them. From an insider perspective, the mannequins, 'watched covertly, envied and apart', seem to occupy a position near the top of the hierarchy in the system of production of these commodities, i.e. above the sewing girls, saleswomen or shop assistants like Sasha. In this perspective, the mannequins' work seems recognised as a superior skill, in that the sewing girls are able to appreciate the quality of a dress but are not able to complete the image. This double exposure of inside and outside, or public and private suggests potential for agency, albeit a precarious one.

The Real Curse of Eve

> Tomorrow I'll go to the Galeries Lafayette, choose a dress, go along to the Printemps, buy gloves, buy scent, buy lipstick, buy things costing fcs. 6.25 and fcs. 19.50, buy anything cheap. Just the sensation of spending, that's the point. I'll look at the bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue, necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette-cases, jewelled tortoises…. And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow. (*Good Morning, Midnight*, 121)

As a mannequin showing the latest spring models, Anna becomes the physical embodiment of the display of goods in shop windows which turned shop-fronts into spectacular, advertisement-driven, exhibitory spaces (the presentation of a global network of commodity exchange that finds its centre in the decorated salons of Paris is alluded to with Anna parading in front of buyers from across Europe and America). Advertising in this way

[50] For more of the pyramidal hierarchy of Parisian fashion houses see Amy de la Haye, *Chanel: Couture and Industry* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011) pp.34-36.

served to create new desires, contributing to a standard by which femininity could be measured. The attraction of garments on show in the windows, in a similar fashion to the parading of real mannequins, held a double quality: the images are set apart from real life in their theatricality and beauty, yet accessible in that they could be bought and taken home—the identity they represent is enticingly within reach.

The replicas of the display images sold in the shops represent a desire for self-improvement that simultaneously leads to an automation of identity. The use of large glass-fronted panes in shops and department stores was an important commercial aspect of the fashion industry. Looking at the images in the shop window, the glass reflected back onto the consumer an idealised image of herself in the form of both what she wants—the dress—and what she wants to 'be'—the identity represented by the dress.[51] Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* articulates this desire to mimic that which is seen via the window:

> About clothes, it's awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed […] it's jaw, jaw and sneer, sneer all the time. And the shop-windows sneering and smiling in your face. And then you look at the skirt of your costume, all crumpled at the back. And your hideous underclothes and you think, 'All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything – anything for clothes.' (22)

But she also realises the impossibility of actualising the aspired image:

> I walked along Oxford Street. […]There was a black velvet dress in a shop-window, with the skirt slit up so that you could see the light stocking. A girl could look lovely in that, like a doll or a flower. Another dress, with fur around the neck, reminded me of the one that Laurie had worn. Her neck coming out of the fur was a pale-gold colour, very slim and strong-looking.
>
> The clothes of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future. 'If I could buy this, the of course I'd be quite different.' Keep hope alive and you can do anything, and that's the way the world goes round, that's the way they keep the world rolling.' So much hope for each person. And damned cleverly done too. But what happens if you don't hope any more, if your back's broken? What happens then?
>
> 'I can't stand here staring at these dresses for ever,' I thought. (111)

For Sasha too the act of shopping produces a contradictory set of responses. As she searches for a new hat on a street where the shops all have women's names (hinting towards the purchase of a female identity, becoming 'Virginie', 'Josette', 'Claudine') Sasha watches a woman choosing a hat with an expression that is 'terrible – hungry, despairing, hopeful, quiet crazy' (58). She continues:

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[51] Bowlby comments on this process of looking thus: 'the model in the window is something both real and other […] The window smashes the illusion that there is a meaningful distinction in modern society between illusion and reality, fact and fantasy, fake and genuine images of self'. Bowlby, *Just Looking*, pp.33-4.

> I stand outside, watching. I can't move. Hat after hat she puts on, makes that face at herself in the glass and throws it off again. Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that?' (58)

But Sasha has already reached the same point, when she goes to buy her own hat she finds herself with the same 'demented' expression. The hat becomes an identity for Sasha to wear and adopt. The extraordinary ritual of the purchase becomes *the* transformation act: it is Sasha's performance of a new identity. This is tested at the restaurant she then visits because nobody stares at her. Through the purchase of goods Sasha has achieved a degree of invisibility denied to her at the start, but for Sasha, this is only ever short-lived.

For Rhys's characters there is always a failure to match what is presented on the surface through dress and the identity internalised by her status as female consumer. The revelation of Miss Bruce's purchasing habits in 'Illusion' adds depth and complexity to this public/private, surface/internal identity demarcation. Having been taken into hospital, Miss Bruce's acquaintance visits her apartment to gather her possessions. Her wardrobe, like all of her furniture is described as 'square and solid', the narrator's opinion that 'some strain in her made her value solidity and worth more than grace or fantasies' (142). Yet she finds inside 'a glow of colour, a riot of soft silks … everything that one did not expect' (142). Miss Bruce's collecting of clothes has become an internalisation of the process of identity formation that other narratives detail in such visible, public terms.

The narrator's confession that she has no authority to look conveys that this is a personal, private internalisation of identity. But the visual sight of the collection provides knowledge that the fantasy of an identity can be gained through dress:

> Miss Bruce, passing by a shop, with the perpetual hunger to be beautiful and that thirst to be loved which is the real curse of Eve, well hidden under her neat dress, more or less stifled, more or less unrecognized.'
>
> The dress must have been disappointing, yet beautiful enough, becoming enough to lure her on. Then must have begun the search for *the* dress, the perfect Dress, beautiful, beautifying, possible to be worn. And lastly, the search for illusion—a craving, almost a vice, the stolen waters and the bread eaten in secret of Miss Bruce's life. (143)

A number of issues arise with this passage. Here Miss Bruce is likened to a passer-by, she is driven to wander by a 'perpetual hunger', she occupies the public spaces of the city to satisfy her sartorial cravings, but this has happened incidentally. In her writings on the passer-by and the shop-window Bowlby finds in both an invisibility, an unnoticeability: characteristics that match with the initial presentation of Miss Bruce at the start of the narrative: 'The passer-by is a ubiquitous figure in the street, and yet seems rarely to be singled out for observation or analysis or anything else. He or she is quite simply

unremarkable, almost defined […] by lack of significance'.[52] This is movement and existence in the city without determinacy. The passer-by is imagined as drifting, her attention given direction by being drawn by the shop window which, like the passer-by is as though invisible. This makes complex the apparent agency Miss Bruce adopts at the start of the narrative—here she is driven by the force of the commodity she is looking at.

Miss Bruce's public appearance is as 'anybody'. Her fantasy identity is kept in the private space of her home, her wardrobe. This internalisation of identity through the search for illusion opens up a threshold space—both physical and mental—a space that contains Miss Bruce's attempt at personal transformation. But in its private enactment away from the public gaze this transformation is complicated by the social frame Miss Bruce exists in: she knows through her 'character and training' that the 'exotic and unwholesome' would compromise her social status as it now exists. Returning to Benjamin's argument as mentioned in my previous chapter, the threshold thus more accurately embodies a zone with particular social and cultural boundaries, which is exemplified by the narrative movement from the exterior to the interior. Architecturally and psychically, the illusion of transformation must be contained.

Both 'Mannequin' and 'Illusion' end with a return to the public spaces of Paris, and this movement signals a shift in personal presentation. Miss Bruce, now recovered, reverts to type. She questions why she shouldn't collect frocks: 'They fascinate me. The colour and all that. Exquisite sometimes!' (144). Here the clothes are likened to cultural artefacts. Miss Bruce comments on them as if they were paintings, thus there to be looked at. She adopts a role similar to the buyers at Jeanne Veron's, the American buyer approving of Anna in 'Mannequin' in a similar way to Miss Bruce's articulation of her approval of the dresses. These are commodities to be purchased, their exchange value outweighing potential use value. Miss Bruce's comment that 'I should never make such a fool of myself as to wear them' (144) points to a knowledge that her role in society is dependent upon her public image, returning again to the fear of being seen as 'exotic or unwholesome'. Yet she follows this with 'They ought to be worn, I suppose' (144). There exists in the fashions a use value that should not be overlooked, and within this there is the potential for personal identity transformation. Her subsequent comment on a girl's hands and arms, spoken in her 'gentlemanly manner', suggests Rhys's scepticism about this process.

The close of 'Mannequin' sees Anna 'fighting an intense desire to rush away […] from the raking eyes of the customers' (155), overwhelmed by her new role as mannequin. As she leaves the salon 'the feeling that now she really belonged to the great, maddening

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[52] Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.51.

city possessed her and she was happy in her beautifully cut tailor-made and beret' (155), her initiation into the lifestyle of the fashion mannequin affords her an identity as a Parisian, as being part of the capital of fashion. This initiation does not signal individualism however, she is still identifiable in her role as mannequin. She is one of many, dressed in the garments of the house and her fragility as 'human flower' is swallowed by the Parisian night.

Make-up and Masks

Writing on cosmetics was, like fashion, a way for Rhys to engage with a very real change in women's lives, yet hers is a potently critical view of the liberation apparently offered to women in the twenties and thirties as new femininities emerged from the transition into modernity. Rhys offers a dual reading of cosmetics and fashion. They are tools by which women could explore new identities and performative possibilities, providing a degree of personal expression and empowerment, yet they also exist as instruments of commodification and objectification. As my readings of 'Mannequin' and 'Illusion' confirm, Rhys engages with what Simmel identified as a tension between regulatory social structures and individual agency, with her characters constantly negotiating the fine line between social imitation and individual differentiation.[53] Make-up becomes a new metaphorical and material concept with which to articulate the double-sided nature of the 'masking' women were required to undertake in everyday existence. With an ironic awareness, Rhys's women use the symbolic and material rituals of making-up to destabilise the construction of feminine and racial identities, but their success in finding full self-assertion, of fixing a stable unitary self, is always incomplete. By writing about make-up, Rhys challenges concrete identifications—of femininity, Englishness, respectability—making visible the unsteady ground on which these concepts were based. Definitions of the 'real' are exposed through make-up as being unstable enough to be manipulated, but the symbolic order is always caught up in the economies of power from which the Rhys woman remains removed.

Rhys's attention to the psychological aspect of this masking complemented a number of contemporary debates on the idea that clothing and make-up were an expression of the unconscious. The 1920s were the burgeoning years for the cosmetics industry, and the visible stylisation offered by make-up signalled the move towards the face as an

[53] Simmel writes that 'fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation … at the same time it satisfies in no less degree the need of differentiation, the tendency towards dissimilarity, the desire for constant change and contrast'. Georg Simmel, 'Fashion' (1904), in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.296.

aesthetic object and away from Victorian naturalist sensibilities.[54] Joan Riviere's critique 'Femininity as Masquerade' was published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1929, a year after Rhys published *Quartet* as *Postures*, which she originally wanted to title *Masquerade*. A year later, the Hogarth Press, Sigmund Freud's English publisher, released J.C. Flügel's *The Psychology of Clothes*, a theoretical treaty on the connection between the mind and modern society's sartorial regulations.[55] Clothing and make-up as metaphors for the fluid, multiple identities that were a hallmark of modern existence found its way into fictional analyses too, with Woolf's 'clothes-consciousness' shaping her perspective of the psychological and social processes at play.[56]

Undoubtedly the industry offered new opportunities for female self-representation, but the analytical writings of the time articulated a profound ambivalence towards cosmetics as a symbol of female modernity. That cosmetics represented a most conspicuous performance of femininity is exemplified by the following passage from Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925):

> Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. […] this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder puff and making up in public. […] This girl would stand still and powder her nose in front of everyone.[57]

Rishona Zimring comments on the audaciousness of this act as an erasure of the line between private and public space which was emblematic of modernity: 'for a young woman, powdering in public means asserting one's freedom from domesticity and Victorian conventions of femininity that assign women to the natural, not the artificial'.[58] The generational aspect of this shift is also covered by Woolf in the 'Present Day' section of *The Years* (1937), when Eleanor watches her niece putting on lipstick: '"You do look nice. You look lit-up. I like it on young people. Not for myself. I should feel bedizened—bedizzened?—how d'you pronounce it?'.[59] But while the young woman of *Mrs Dalloway* may be able to enact the freedom from domesticity Zimring writes of, Rhys engages with an

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[54] For more on the history of cosmetics, see Maggie Angelogou, *A History of Make-up* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), and Kathy Peiss, 'Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity', in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp.311-36.

[55] Flügel was particularly interested in how bodies and minds were fashioned via clothes, and how dressed, made-up bodies signified within the cultural, symbolic order. J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1930).

[56] According to Jane Garrity, 'during the 1920s Woolf did make some small forays—in addition to shopping—into the world of female commodity culture: she had her hair shingled, got her ears pierced, and mustered some conviction about make-up: "I will rise to powder, but not to rouge"'. See Jane Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British *Vogue*', in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. by Pamela L. Caughie (New York; London: Garland, 2000), pp.185-218 (p.204).

[57] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1996), p.71.

[58] Zimring, p.219.

[59] Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, ed. by Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.311.

alternative reality. Woolf speaks of a particular class of woman, privileged enough to enable a seemingly untroubled, conspicuous assertion of freedom. Rhys was an exile from Dominica who led a precarious life in a series of European cities working in low-paid jobs, including as a fashion mannequin and manicurist. She writes as one who knows that such existence depended upon a well-presented image. As mannequins, shop assistants, chorus girls, her characters project a similar 'homelessness', rendering the public performance of powdering or rougeing a necessary act. Domesticity is an absent concept for Rhys's women; unable to find permanency of place and relying on their looks for survival they cannot escape from the visibility of the street. In this respect, the transgressive public performance of making-up becomes a 'masking' as protection, a turn to the artificiality of cosmetics to make their unstable 'natural' identifications less visible.[60]

Rhys's engagement with the surface identities of her characters as part of the spectacle of modernity is actually more a focus on the concealment, masking and internalised mirroring of identities. Make-up—even more so than the clothes her characters wear—stands for the modern, urban condition that covers or conceals 'otherness'. Its use becomes an attempt by the individual to mimic that which is prescribed by dominant social forces: 'imperial power and the male gaze, [both of which] fix her and judge her'.[61] For Rhys personally, this was a masking or concealing of a West Indian identity lying just beneath the surface as her move from the Caribbean into the imperial metropolis marked her, in Bhabha's terms, 'almost the same, but not quite white'. But this also means that the Caribbean is an ever-present absence, always threatening to become visible, breaking through the boundaries of imperial power. It is in this area of ambiguity produced by such masking that Rhys most forcefully articulates the conflicts of identities as prescribed through dominant modes of the visual.

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[60] If the nineteenth-century model of femininity was grounded in the natural, the artificiality of make-up, as a turn away from this, should in theory provide Rhys's characters with some comfort. Cosmetics should enable a masking through masking—the ability to cover their interior self with a familiar performance of artificiality. Identities are in this respect purchasable, malleable constructions of self-realisation that render the 'true', interior self, unseen and thus illegible. As Zimring states:

> The mask defines femininity as appearance, and as such it associates femininity with the rise of an alienated individualism, what Terry Castle, following Bakhtin, describes as a modern fall away from an earlier, ritual mask that connoted the unity and wholeness of experience. The female mask figures woman's fluidity of identity *and* her alienation in a market economy that thrives on women's commodification and consumption and offers her new materials with which to play, create, and perform.

While this suggests agency in a shift away from typical feminist readings of the fashion and make-up industry as oppressive, the inability for the Rhys woman to successfully engage with cosmetics limits the positive message. Zimring, p.220.

[61] Molly Pulda, 'A Feminist Compact: Jean Rhys's *Smile Please* and Life Writing Theory', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 6 (2012), 159-176 (p.160).

I want to turn here to 'The Interval', a short segment in *Smile Please*.[62] Rhys narrates an incident that occurred while she was lunching at the Savoy with the man with whom she had her first lover affair. Having cleared the table the waiter reaches underneath, emerging with a 'very shabby powder compact, which, without expression, he put on the white tablecloth' (115). The worn gilt of the compact reveals a black base layer beneath it, all the more visible against the whiteness of the cloth. A young Rhys, recently arrived in London, has previously received a new Asprey's compact from her lover but she has chosen to remain using her original which she was convinced has brought her luck during her theatrical tours. The underlying blackness, exposed by the brilliance of the white tablecloth in this expensive restaurant here refigures as Rhys's own "blackness": her West Indian heritage lying under the surface of her white appearance. That the compact is worn and shabby can perhaps be viewed as a reinterpretation of her class status; an impoverished actress on stage who relies on the wealth of her lover (she begins the segment with the idea that her lover's class oppresses her own).[63] It also speaks of class in a colonial context—the decline of her colonial family in Dominica, whose gilt of white European respectability has worn away via their proximity to the colonies. Thus the compact mirror—used to apply powder to the face, smoothing the tone, colour and texture of the skin—stands for Rhys's incomplete or failed whiteness.[64] Underneath the powder that she applies lies a blackness that, through a complicated mix of class, gender and colonial identities, resurfaces to Rhys's shame in the imperial centre.

Introducing make-up to my analysis of the tension between what is visible at surface level and that which remains unseen, internalised or invisible requires a closer study of subjectivity and selfhood in relation to the figure of the Creole woman. The multiple designations of Rhys's work, and indeed Rhys herself, correspond to the ways in which her texts examine the fractured relationship between the identities offered by the trappings of metropolitan consumer culture and those enforced by the structures of patriarchal, imperial social might. In 'The Interval', Rhys is offered a glimpse at social elevation. She 'passes' as one of the group by virtue of her physical appearance, yet this performance is swiftly unmasked by the presence of her 'true' self as replicated by the visible shabbiness of the

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[62] Molly Pulda's reading of the compact in 'The Interval' lies within a wider discussion about Rhys, life writing and autobiographical self-construction. Pulda demonstrates 'the nonduality of femininity and feminist self-construction in autobiography, showing how Rhys co-opts decorative objects and revalues them as tools of agency, resistance, and aesthetic fragmentation' (p.160).

[63] Rhys mentions a woman named Nancy Erwin in 'The Interval', musing what Nancy 'had that I hadn't'. Her response: Nancy 'didn't have a shabby powder compact. She had a handkerchief with a powder puff in the middle so she could powder her face while pretending she was just blowing her nose. Her handkerchief was always plaid, and if it dropped and a waiter picked it up she would say, 'My little bit of Scotch," (116). Rhys doesn't have the same ability at discreet masking. Hers is a hyper-visibility that exposes the constructedness of the identity she is performing socially.

[64] Pulda, p.162.

compact. As a white Creole, Rhys straddles identifications as both racially white and culturally non-English. To quote Alissa Karl, Rhys's Creolité is:

> a plural designation that attempts to capture yet also defer her simultaneous racial whiteness and non-English cultural status. The white Creole is both, and yet neither, colonizer and colonized. As H. Adlai Murdoch writes of a Rhys heroine, her subjectivity "exceeds the parameters that colonization establishes for both metropole and colony".[65]

Rhys's physical/visible whiteness belies a corrupted colonial heritage that in the imperial centre renders her as an outsider. Metaphors of visibility and invisibility pervade Rhys's texts, and the tense negotiation of positions of in/visibility—using one to achieve the other, or rather the enforcement by society of both—becomes useful in examining how Rhys uses make-up to structure her wider arguments on unstable identifications.

'The Interval', as well as providing yet another connection between theatre and fashion, opens a window into the personal connections Rhys makes between cosmetics and identity which then feed into her fictional narratives. What is united in the *Smile Please* passage, and which becomes a repeated tension in her fiction, is the objectifying force of imperial power and the male gaze. Make-up works in terms of racial typecasting as well as marking symbolic distinctions within and between social classes, often articulated in terms of boundaries between social civility and racial savagery. Late nineteenth century connections between cosmetics and racial identity placed make-up, according to Katy Peiss, outside of natural or truthfulness, identifying them with concealment, deception and non-European "otherness".[66] There was a pervasive anxiety over the ability for make-up to mask racial "otherness", and by the twentieth century narratives of people 'passing' into white society were numerous—I think here of Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929) as a contemporary to Rhys's work, and indeed of Ford Madox Ford's claim that Rhys herself was 'passing' as white.[67] Rhys's women are of questionable heritage, with Anna Morgan foregrounding her colonial background as she juxtaposes her urban present with a Caribbean childhood that exists as fragments of memory. But notions of the Rhys woman enacting some form of deceptive 'passing' become complex precisely because of their questionable backgrounds. Writing from a 'white' ethnic position Rhys constructs cultural identity as 'a concealment of masks, as an attempt to anchor identity through appearances of authenticity and belonging'.[68] To that end, I turn to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* to show how Rhys's foregrounding of make-up's distorting nature, its masking of identity, draws out

[65] Karl, p.22.
[66] Peiss, p.316.
[67] Angier, p.656.
[68] Konzett, p.132.

the colonial inflections to those texts less obviously connected to the Caribbean. This is part of Rhys's wider challenge that whiteness itself is an unstable identity or mask.[69]

For Julia Martin, the powder compact becomes a vital tool in her ritualistic compulsion to check her appearance; Julia's use of her 'gilt powder-box' (35) to construct a protective masking can be traced throughout the novel. The compact here works in a similar fashion to Miss Bruce's adoption of 'colourless' clothes: a utilisation of the objects of consumer culture to purchase a degree of invisibility—and thus acceptability—from what is inherently a hyper-visible social form. But Julia is stuck within a constant negotiation between visibility and invisibility. At the start of the text Julia is labelled by Mr Mackenzie 'at once too obvious and too obscure' (20); obvious in that she can be clearly identified as an older woman reliant on money from suitors to survive, obscured from social acceptance or acceptability by that fact. Her visibility also stems from an awareness that her public performance is obscuring a hidden 'true' self: Mackenzie knows that what Julia presents isn't her real self but a public masquerade of desirable femininity. She must be visible in order to be picked up by men like Mackenzie and Horsfield, but must also withhold something in order to maintain an aura of desirability. Julia's failure to 'keep up appearances' is what has made visible her erasure of identity in terms of age, nationality and the 'social background to which she properly belonged' (11). It is also, as Mackenzie prophesises, what will see her descend off the social scale.

Julia's careful face powdering reveals her acute awareness both of its necessity as well as its controlling properties, appearing to Horsfield as furtive and calculating gestures. Julia is aware of her mask, as well as its waning effectiveness, and the novel charts the making-up process as an evolution from a labour of love, a calming act, to an 'inevitable absent-minded gesture' (65) which she begins to lose control of. Instead of powdering to enhance her appearance, Julia's powdered face becomes a 'protective layer that [she] can apply whenever a situation becomes threatening'.[70] As Mullholland continues, 'Julia attempts to make herself invisible to the public gaze, while the constant checks in her compact offer Julia confirmation that, at least in the looking-glass world, she still exists'.[71] The question that remains unanswered is whether Julia finds any liberatory qualities from the substitute mechanical masks she admits she would like to wear.

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[69] I am building here on a reading of Konzett's 'White Mythologies: Jean Rhys's Aesthetic of Posthumanism'. Konzett provides a study of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, arguing that 'in Rhys's work the mythology of white supremacy collapses from within, exposing the formally unchallenged race as merely another ethnic construct'. Konzett frames her analysis with discussion of Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, arguing that he posits white ethnicity as unmediated by itself, a standard that has to be 'learned' by non-whites. Konzett then moves to look at how Rhys adds to this theoretical framework by unpicking an intact white colonialist identity that reveals whiteness 'for the phantom construct that it is' (pp.134-5).

[70] Mullholland, p.451.

[71] Ibid.

Julia shows awareness of her use of the mask as metaphor for a public self behind which stands the private. She is afraid of masks. Her mother's dying face is described as one that Julia finds both frightening and fascinating in equal measure. It is as though she recognises the fragility of its ability to hide underlying identities, concealing the artificiality of a publicly-projected self; we must remember that Julia's mother spent her childhood in South America, providing the tie to a more definitive cultural background of "otherness". It is after her mother's death that Julia's own mask fully slips and Mackenzie's vision of her descent is actualised. With no money, no male companion and no real family to call upon, Julia's last vestiges of respectability are erased. Julia now is masked by 'an inadequate coating of powder. She looked ugly and dazed' (97), and by the close Horsfield is shocked by her poor attempt at making-up. Julia uses cosmetics in an attempt to assert some self-control. But the mask constructed by her obsessive powdering is too obvious, thus exposing the private, hidden identity to social scrutiny. What remains unresolved is what lies beneath the surface. As Zimring concludes: 'if the public self is, in addition to commodity, any social creature's inauthentic façade, the text struggles to find the right figure for the authentic self'.[72]

In *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys turns to masquerade and carnivalesque masks, not to find within their subversive properties an alternative figure of authentic selfhood, but to expose the constructedness of 'idealised' respectable white femininity. Anna Morgan is constantly caught between external and internal identities, a divide that replicates itself through the oscillation of the narrative between West Indian memories and the present day images of imperial London. The hallucinations of carnival reverie at the close can be read as Anna's quasi-victory over the mask of English womanhood she is forced to wear, but its existence as merely a fantasy reduces the redemptive qualities of its use.

In *Voyage in the Dark* Englishness is articulated and practiced as consumerism, Anna becomes English by her participation in the consumer economies of the metropole. Her awareness of the fragility of this identity appears through Anna's anxiety that her clothes and make-up are in some way lacking. She powders with more rouge than usual following her break-up with Walter, attempting as she does to reinforce the mask of modern, urban, white desirability. In this sense, Anna sees consumer culture as 'a beginning' that will open the door to social progression. But while consumer culture makes Anna see England in a different way, she alludes to her knowledge of its distorting lens: 'just as a reflection in the looking-glass is different from the real thing' (25). Anna's performance of Englishness is dismissed by her stepmother Hester, in whose eyes Anna was always too close to blackness. She chides Anna for her degraded social status as a chorus girl, and despairs at her

[72] Zimring, p.224.

promiscuous nature. Hester blames Anna's behaviour on her exposure to West Indian culture in Dominica: 'never seeing a white face from one week's end to the other and you growing up more like a nigger every day' (54); and again, 'I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked—and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine' (26). The adoption of an English identity is a way of avoiding visual conspicuousness, but lacking financial support from her family, Anna's descent into prostitution coincides with the increasingly conspicuous use of make-up as a mask. For Walter Benjamin, the standardising effect of make-up makes the prostitute appear 'not only as a commodity but, in the most graphic sense, as a mass-produced article'.[73] In this respect, Anna is rendered more visibly invisible by the combination of imitation and differentiation as offered by modern cosmetic products.

Anna uses memories of the West Indies and its laughter, songs and stories as resistance to her reduction to a one-dimensional self.[74] In the final scenes of the novel the carnival celebration of Anna's post-abortion hallucination features masks which, according to Emery, become 'overdetermined signs of her eclipsed West Indian identity, her exploitation in England, the false authority of white Europeans, and also, as they did historically, parodies of such authority'.[75] The white face of a man she has sex with morphs into the face of the abortion doctor; both are then condensed into a white-faced carnival parody:

> 'I said, 'Stop, please stop'. 'I knew you'd say that,' he said. His face was white.
>
> *A pretty useful mask that white one watch it and the slobbering tongue of an idiot will stick out* (156)

Anna then recounts the masks worn by the masquerade participants, noting their mocking mimicry of white faces and their behaviour:

> *The masks the men wore were a crude pink with the eyes squinting near together squinting but the masks the women wore were made of close-meshed wire covering the whole face and tied at the back of the head—the handkerchief that went over the head hid the strings and over the slits for the eyes mild blue eyes were painted then there was a small straight nose and a little red heart-shaped mouth and under the mouth another slit so that they could put their tongues out at you* (156-7).

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[73] The quote continues: 'This can be seen in the way the individual expression is artificially concealed by a professional one, as happens with the use of cosmetics'. Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by M. W. Jennings (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 2006), p.165.
[74] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.74.
[75] Emery, *"World's End"*, pp.6-7.

Emery writes of the potential to turn the masks imposed upon social "others" into potentially subversive masquerades. In the passage above the white faces of the colonial masters are parodied 'to excess', even down to the censorship of white women by their own culture with the image of the bound female faces, aligning white females with subordinate, 'silenced' positions akin to slavery.[76] But the subversive gesture of the masquerade is ephemeral. It is an internalised fantasy aligned to the West Indian masquerade of her childhood that does not fit in the urban present, a dream for transformation that remains absent from reality.

Voyage in the Dark's allusion to commodity purification processes with the Bourne's Cocoa advertisement I mentioned in my Introduction provides clear comparison to Anna's supposed 'purification' from the Caribbean through her use of cosmetics. Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight* reframes this with reference to the complexities of cultural appropriation via fashion as she debates a new hair colour:

> Blond cendré, madame, is the most difficult of colours. […] First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it—and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another colour must be imposed upon it. (Educated hair…. And then, what?) (44)

Buying into beauty standards enforces versions of legitimacy both of class and race. With a blond cendré Sasha hopes to pass as a well-to-do Englishwoman, but in order to achieve this she must participate in a 'bleaching' of colour that can be likened to the skin-bleaching products used for racial passing. The bleaching is not to expose the original underneath, for another colour must be imposed on top. There is always a mask to be worn. As we question the potential force of the masquerade's 'un-masking' of identities imposed through the trappings of metropolitan consumer culture, Sasha again disrupts the pattern:

> Besides, it isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place it on a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily?' (37)

Unlike Julia and Anna, Sasha appears able to remove her mask at will, she can choose to wear it or not. But like Julia and Anna, there is nothing to identify what might lie underneath (perhaps this hints at a desire or drive towards death—seen in the title and its reference to Emily Dickinson). The passage continues with Sasha admitting that she has 'no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere' (38). The hat—and we have already seen Sasha buying a new hat as part of her desire to purchase a new costume of respectability—here becomes comically extended. The green feather and veil act in a similar fashion to the mask from the *Voyage in the Dark* quote in reducing the trappings of English gentlewoman respectability into a puppet-like masquerade against social convention. Like

[76] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.77.

the blond cendré, the veil and the hat are yet more methods to shield the face from view. Fashion and cosmetics may provide a surface identity, but this is a mask that is illusory, as unfixed as the identities they start with. The dynamic between the mask—as something imposed upon Rhys's female characters—and the masquerade—as a mocking of the dominant social order—threatens the redemptive nature of its use throughout Rhys's fiction.

Rhys's modernist fiction provides a cynical depiction of the performance of femininity through clothing and make-up. Rhys interrogates the connection between visual performance, consumerism and the commodification of the female body. Using the display, purchase and collecting of clothes to explore the fragmentary nature of identity formation, the Rhys woman becomes a consumer of illusion. Through make-up, Rhys queries whether the masquerade of femininity can provide some form of protective masking; whether fashion enforces, or counters the enforcement, of socio-cultural identifications. Using make-up and fashion practice, Rhys exposes whiteness as itself just another construct; with the tools of metropolitan consumer culture the façade of white respectability is fractured from within. While the endings of her narratives do not undo the public/private pairing, they add a necessary complexity to the seemingly liberatory elements of these modern cultural forms.

3. Beyond the Frame of Representation: Rhys at the Borders of Text/Image

'Tommie' is a fourteen-page section of Rhys's unpublished novel *Triple Sec*, now housed within the *Jean Rhys Archive* at the University of Tulsa.[1] As Rhys's first attempt at writing on the visual arts, it details at length the experience of a young woman posing nude as an artist's model in Edwardian London, alluding in the process to the exoticisation and sexualisation implicit in such an act. Seeking employment and financial independence after her sexual affairs make a respectable marriage prospect impossible, protagonist Suzy Gray is sent to see the eponymous Tommie at his studio, eventually agreeing to model for him. Tommie is often named by critics as the English painter Sir William Orpen, for whom Rhys, in need of money, posed nude aged twenty-three.[2] The act of posing was by no means a pleasurable experience for Rhys, but it was sufficiently important for her to rework the experience into her fictional narratives multiple times, rewriting the act of posing in *Triple Sec*, *Quartet*, and then more fully in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*.

Rhys's relationship to the modern art world has initially been described in autobiographical terms, as a relationship with various contemporary artists with whom she socialised at nightclubs such as London's Crabtree Club or for whom she sat as a model. Such personal history was seen to directly inform her fictional narratives, with artists seeming to appear in her work as specific characters. Along with commentary on Rhys's modelling for Orpen and Sir Edward Poynter (80), Rhys biographer Carole Angier takes Russian Jewish painter Simon Segal—from whom Rhys bought the painting *Old Man with a Banjo*—as the basis for Serge in *Good Morning, Midnight*, who sells Sasha an identical painting (Angier, 365). Angier also names English sculptress Violet Dreschfeld—who exhibited in Paris from 1929 and for whom Rhys also sat for as a model—as the influence for 'several

[1] *Triple Sec* was written using material adapted from exercise book diaries Rhys kept following her first love affair in London around 1911-13. Later, the manuscript was divided into several parts—each headed by a man's name—by Pearl Adam, the wife of a *Times* reporter, who forwarded it to Ford Madox Ford, the then editor of the floundering *Transatlantic Review*. The piece, combined with Rhys's exercise books, eventually formed the foundation of *Voyage in the Dark*. See Rhys, *Smile Please*, pp.155-6.

[2] Leah Rosenberg, 'Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys', *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.2 (2004), 219-238 (p.219).

women artists in Jean's Paris novels and stories' (126), and she connects Bloomsbury set associate Adrian Allinson, who saw in Rhys a 'Renaissance beauty,' to Marston in 'Till September Petronella' (89).[3] The reductiveness of such autobiographical interpretations aside, the connections made to contemporary artists and artworks within Rhys's fiction identify her engagement with the field of visual arts, acknowledging her awareness of the political economies at play. Recent critical studies from feminist and postcolonial perspectives have usefully turned away from the relationship between life and art, widening their focus to include: Rhys's critique of the exploitation of the female model's body as an object of labour (Rosenberg, 2004); her questioning of primitivist aesthetics and destabilising of notions of 'authenticity' (Camarasana, 2009); and her contribution to the group of writers and artists whose Caribbean modernism refigured the colonised person of colour from object of an aesthetic gaze towards a position of subjectivity (Emery, 2007).[4]

The female body as artist's model and its exchange value—both the woman and her painted image—within social and colonial systems provides context for Rhys's fiction, but not just in general terms. The conjunction of revolutions in the visual arts and the destabilisation of the empire in the modernist period enabled the artistic creation of new ways of seeing that provided visual agency for those traditionally deemed incapable of aesthetic production. Rhys's deployment of painting practices and art objects questions representational structures as they exist in the modernist, primitivist art context, becoming both a challenge to the prevailing primitive aesthetic and a reworking of dominant modes of representation. Her texts utilise an alternative modernist, multi-disciplinary artistic language that moves *within* and *between* traditional representational frames, highlighting the hybridity upon which modernist art depended. Rhys uses ekphrasis as a narrative device not only to question the act of representation, but to bind gendered, colonial relations to the politics of vision.

Beginning with 'Tommie', this chapter charts the multiple positions Rhys's characters adopt within the artistic circles of Paris and London. They shift from artist's model to observing aesthete and potential buyer, from one who is objectified by the process of artistic production to a figure who finds solidarity in the studios of artists existing on the

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[3] 'Tommie' self-consciously places itself at the heart of London's painting scene, with mention of the Slade School of Art, as well as naming Poynter and Augustus John, a Welsh painter who was an exponent of Post-Impressionism. In *Quartet*, Rhys mentions French artist Marie Laurencin, and in *Voyage in the Dark*, illustrator and *Yellow Book* editor Aubrey Beardsley.

[4] See Leah Rosenberg, 'Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys', *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.2 (2004), 219-238. Rosenberg situates Rhys alongside Claude McKay who, in his memoir *A Long Way from Home* (1937), also writes of his experience of posing nude as an artist's model. See also Linda Camarasana, 'Exhibitions and Repetitions: Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and the World of Paris, 1937', in *At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s* ed. by Robin Hackett, Freda Hauser, and Gay Wachman, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp.51-70 (pp.64-5); Emery, *Modernism*, pp.92-3.

fringes of society. This manifests as reference to the objectification and commodification of the 'exotic' art subject/object. Rhys's characters appear to put themselves in this role through memory; I think here in particular of *Good Morning, Midnight*, where Sasha's narrative contains memories framed within memories of her past life in Paris as one who was 'to be looked at'. Thus, the allusions to painting and art objects in her texts widen out to issues of frames and framing, where narratives of framed pictures, or the female body within a picture's frame, speaks of social acts of framing, containment and objectification within modernist artistic representational structures.

So how exactly does Rhys 'frame' the visual arts in her narratives? And to what end? Rhys was an author perennially bothered by the relation of inside and outside, a relation that can be translated to the concept of the frame. In Derridean terms, the frame serves as an example of the *parergon*—'by-work'. This could be described as a 'marker of limits' that establishes a 'boundary between the artwork (*ergon*) and everything that belongs to its background, context, [or] space of exhibition'.[5] But, as Paul Duro continues of his reading of Derrida, things are not always so well defined.[6] The frame as *parergon* can more accurately be said to be both lying outside the work but also indistinguishable from it:

> Neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d'oeuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work.[7]

What lies within the frame is some form of representation: the painting. The frame itself is not part of the actual work, yet can be said to supplement it: 'it *gives rise* to the work'. The frame is 'neither simply outside nor simply inside'; we can think of the frame as an 'in-between' space acting as a 'supplement outside the work'.[8] According to Derrida the supplementary *parergon* fulfils its role as 'philosophical quasi-concept' by 'designat[ing] a formal or general predicative structure, which one can transport *intact* or deformed and reformed *according to certain rules*, into other fields, to submit new contents to it'.[9] In Rhys's context, we may infer from this that the visual arts occupy a space in relation to her literary works which is analogous to that of the frame and the art object: that is, works of art lie outside of the text—in the sense that they exist only as verbal representations of the visual—but are used in order to supplement that work. More simply, the visual arts—both

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[5] Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, *What is Deconstruction?* (London: Academy Editions/ St Martin's Press, 1988), pp.17.
[6] Paul Duro, 'Introduction', in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. by Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-10 (p.2).
[7] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.9.
[8] Derrida, pp.54-5.
[9] Ibid.

the rhetoric of the medium as well as specific artworks—function as frames that enable new readings of her written work in light of new representational contents/contexts.

Insofar as it serves as a 'supplement outside the work', the frame (in a more totalising role) then becomes representative of a certain hybridity or marginality that is likewise characteristic of Rhys's engagement with European modernism. But while the frame could be seen to be located literally, in Bhabha's terms, 'at the *limits of representation*', Rhys inhabits a space that forever mediates between interior and exterior, the margins and the centre of European modernist representation.[10] From this we can turn to what Duro identifies as the frame's tendency to invisibility (we look at a painting but rarely at what it is contained within), remaining outside of the work yet *giving rise* to it.[11] Let us apply this to Rhys and the issue of representational visibility so crucial to an understanding of her authorial status. By representing visual imagery textually, by connecting text and image through the rhetoric of the frame, Rhys forces the frame away from its invisible tendencies, identifying—by making most visible—the complexities of the representational structures she works within and between.

Framing the Model: the Ekphrastic Frame

With that in mind, I want to turn back for a moment to Rhys's first depiction of (physical and metaphorical) artistic framing practices in the 'Tommie' section of *Triple Sec*. Having carefully scrutinised her '*amusing*' physical appearance, reducing her to a series of body parts, Tommie decides to use Suzy for his interpretation of the Robert Browning poem 'Song'. What follows is a blow-by-blow account of the modelling process. Suzy has posed nude before, she alludes to the 'dirty studios, dirty hands' of other artists she has sat for, yet the act still renders a wooden Suzy uncomfortably self-conscious, asking for a screen to cover herself: 'I undressed very slowly, wishing various things—that my hair was frightfully long, that I'd never had this damnable idea of being a model, that I could rush off home.—'.[12] Naked in front of Tommie, Suzy feels 'like nothing on earth'. She wonders whether Tommie knows how she feels, alluding to the void that exists between artist and model, the visual power of one and the loss of identity of the other. But Tommie is oblivious to Suzy's distress, responding to her nakedness purely in aesthetic terms: "'I say, you're—you're a beautiful person aren't you?'" (*JRA* 1.5:11, p.133). This is followed by a series of directions:

[10] Bhabha, p.310.
[11] Duro, p.1
[12] 'Voyage in the Dark': Carbon copy typed draft of the first version titled, 'Triple Sec', with handwritten revisions. *Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.5:11, pp.132-3. All subsequent references are taken from this draft manuscript and will be included in the main body of the text.

"'I want—'" (*JRA* 1.5:11, p.133) which Suzy mechanically attempts to follow. But whereas Suzy could mentally remove herself from the objectification experienced during a previous attempt at modelling with Edward Poynter, here the humiliation of stripping in front of Tommie causes a tearful collapse.

Leah Rosenberg reads this moment as Suzy succeeding in halting the alienating production of modern art, with Tommie stopping drawing, apparently distressed at her panic.[13] At once, the narrative Tommie is creating for Suzy as he transposes her image into Browning's poem—and Rhys's narration of this—are paused. But after this episode Suzy returns to Tommie's studio and the modelling process continues. In this respect, I read her initial collapse as the moment Suzy is fully sexualised (and objectified) by Tommie, in real terms. This exposure is also a silencing—and this is key to vision and Rhys across the readings presented in this thesis—as Suzy is both exhibited/on exhibition but also rendered invisible. There is also the question of metaphor—Suzy is 'standing in' for a fictional figure—the woman of Browning's poem. Using her nakedness for the production of art, Tommie is reducing Suzy to nothing more than an anonymous, mute, visual image of his creation and possession. While this may be temporarily stopped by her crying, his subsequent embrace of Suzy, repeatedly kissing her, manages to fully reduce her to a sexual conquest. Rhys returns to this silencing in the published version of *Voyage in the Dark*, when Walter Jeffries stops Anna talking about the West Indies by kissing her. Anna cannot 'tell' her story because, as a prostitute, her body already does the telling. Suzy posing nude enables Tommie to 'frame' not just her image within the boundaries of artistic representation, but also her body within a gendered network of power and possession, exemplified by her acceptance of the job, and later his gift of a dress to wear to a club aptly called 'The Empire'.

In 1906 William Orpen produced a painting titled *Nude Study* (fig. 5), followed five years later by *The Model* (1911). These two paintings, produced by Orpen before he met Rhys, add comparative perspectives to how Rhys would later conceptualise framing practices in 'Tommie'. According to Leah Rosenberg, the model used in the first painting is thought to be Orpen's lover Flossie Burnett, a working-class English woman, and its production caused some controversy, its sexually-suggestive subject matter a challenge to the sensibilities of its turn-of-the- century audience.[14] The painting depicts Burnett stretched across an unmade bed, her nakedness literally laid before us. Burnett's frame is partially shielded by the shadows produced by her pose whilst her gaze, looking upwards,

[13] Rosenberg, p.229.
[14] Rosenberg, p.228.

Fig. 5: Sir William Orpen, *Nude Study*, 1906.

confronts her spectator, breaking out of the frame of the painting's two-dimensionality. This draws the viewer into the scene, rendering them complicit with Orpen in Burnett's sexualised objectification. While Burnett's outward gaze suggests some visual agency, her nudity and her submissive pose reinforce that it is the male artist, along with the spectator, who controls the narrative of the object on display. This connects with the regulation, in Kantian aesthetics, of the art object such that the viewing subject can constitute himself (such regulation serving a masculinist function) comfortably in relation to it. In the context of modernist painting, the dominant viewing subject 'works to establish his authority by situating himself in relation to a contained, *enframed* female [nude as object]', a body idealised to white, Western conceptions of beauty and yet also exoticised as a threatening "Other".[15] The dynamics operating between Orpen/Burnett | Orpen/Rhys | Tommie/Suzy reveal that the female nude is represented in an effort to contain it.

The act of framing the female figure is more starkly demonstrated in some of Orpen's later works, including *The Studio* (c.1910) and, most explicitly, in *The Model* (fig. 7) where Orpen layers the piece with multiple frames in a similar fashion to Rhys's literary interpretation of the same painter/model relationship. In *The Studio* (fig. 6) Orpen places the artist between model and spectator as he reproduces the moment of artistic framing.

[15] Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p.168.

The portrait in production is obscured by the artist's easel, and while the model (in a moment of undressing, much like in 'Tommie') stands semi-nude before both spectator and artist, facing straight towards the viewer, her body is partially obscured by the shards of light reflecting from the studio window.

A year later Orpen painted *The Model*, more clearly gendering the process of visual representation as well as the act of spectatorship. Here Orpen illustrates the male artist's viewpoint, composing the painting almost from behind the artist with the female nude model (again Orpen used Burnett) facing both the artist and the painting's viewer. As in *Nude Study*, Orpen directs the model's gaze outside of the painting's border, directly towards the spectator. Here Burnett's gaze is a more active, confrontational gesture, alluding to an awareness of her status as one who is gazed upon. The look outward also connects Burnett to a convention of early erotic photography, with Orpen positioning the central figure [the model] as directly confronting the observer.[16] In returning the gaze the model here makes conscious the act of framing, yet its power only stretches so far. Behind Burnett is a replication of *Nude Study*, which we know she also modelled for, while on the painter's easel—acting as a mirror-image to the seated Burnett—is the sketched outline of the model as she sits nude on a zebra-cushioned sofa. The zebra print hints at an undertone of exoticism within the painting in a similar way to Tommie's labelling of Suzy as a 'strange, strange girl […] strange, you know, with your slanting eyes' (*JRA* 1.5:11, p.135). This connects to the repeated labelling of Anna Morgan as 'strange' in the published version of *Voyage in the Dark*, and also Heidler's description of Marya in *Quartet*. As Rosenberg points out, Rhys perhaps uses the word as a *double entendre*, producing a pun on the French *étranger*, 'foreign', in allusion to an Orientalist ideal of a sexualised woman.[17] 'Savage' is also deployed by Heidler to describe Marya as his sexual conquest, here in a scene reminiscent of the composition of *Nude Study*:

> He knelt down and stared at her. Her head had dropped backwards over the edge of the bed and from that angle her face seemed strange to him: the cheek-bones looked higher and more prominent, the nostrils wider, the lips thicker. A strange little Kalmuck face.
>
> He whispered: 'Open your eyes, savage. Open your eyes, savage.'
>
> She opened her eyes and said: 'I love you, I love you, I love you. Oh, please be nice to me. Oh, please say something nice to me. I love you.'
>
> She was quivering and abject in his arms, like some unfortunate dog abashing itself before its master. (*Quartet*, p.102)

[16] Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies', p.206.
[17] Rosenberg, p.230.

Fig. 6: Sir William Orpen, *The Studio*, c.1910.

Fig. 7: Sir William Orpen, *The Model*, 1911, Photo: © Tate, London, 2013.

As Rosenberg acknowledges, while Orpen was not directly involved in modernist primitivism, its fascination with African art and the associations made with female sexuality, in painting nudes he was, to an extent, sharing the same 'racial and sexual assumptions underlying other modernist representations of female nudes' including Manet's *Olympia* (1863), for example.[18] In her later modernist work, most notably in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Rhys provides a much more overt focus on primitivism.

In *The Model* Burnett is outnumbered by reproduced images of herself. Here we have three instances of the nude model framed: the framed canvas of *Nude Study* on the studio wall, the pencil outline of the same model on the easel, both of which are themselves contained within the entirety of the painting itself, an image which will presumably be framed and hung to be viewed by its own audience. All three instances (instances which temporally and spatially collapse into one another) frame the female image: both her image(s) as produced by the artist and her 'real' self as she poses, which is of course also an image produced by the artist in a double-layer of sexualised objectification. This multi-framing reduces the woman into a series of images produced by a continual reduction of her identity into that which is created by the male artist. But with Orpen's framing of the male artist in the same painting, we can return for a moment to the ambiguities of the frame as discussed at the start of this chapter. The frame as a 'supplement outside the work', neither simply inside nor out, forces the act of framing outside of the borders of artistic production.[19] While the male artist may also be found within the painting, the way the image is composed, with the viewer complicit in sharing the painter's view, fails to provide any levelling quality. The painted woman, both inside and outside of the frame of the painting, is never freed from her objectification.

A similar multi-framed narrative is conveyed by Rhys in literary form, but she also presents another dynamic to these visual perspectives in order to draw out the ambiguities of the frame. In the following passage from 'Tommie' the framed, painted female verbally engages with Suzy, the model, who is herself in the process of being framed:

> He's painting Lady C. now.
> As I pose for him I'm staring always straight at the picture. I think "I wonder if you could realize my life at all, you beautiful person!"
>
> She must be wonderfully beautiful, and I daresay a certain "Dolly" look that is in the portrait is not in the woman for I notice Tommie makes most of his pictures Dolly. So we stare and stare at each other, the picture and I; I think "Are you haughty or stupid or passionate, I wonder?"

[18] Ibid.
[19] Derrida, p.55.

> And the picture says "Little girl, you're a part of a side of life that I don't care to think about. Go away!" (*JRA* 1.5:11, p.138).

As Suzy poses, her gaze is directed towards another framed female representation. But Lady C. speaks to Suzy only to deny any connection between them. Suzy, circulating between men, posing for necessary capital, is denied subjectivity by a representation that, in sharing the same 'Dolly' look as other models in Tommie's paintings, is itself seen to be lacking. Staring at each other, the two women appear unable to break from a moment of 'being-looked-at-ness'. Despite their ability to return the gaze, the female image is controlled by the systems of visual representation it is created within. Yet this addition of a verbal exchange between painting and painted sees Rhys utilising prosopopoeia: 'the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object'.[20] Here we have Rhys's first attempt at engaging with ekphrasis, a device that in its root form functions to narrativise, 'speak out' or 'envoice' the silent, marginal discourses buried within.

Ekphrasis finds its source in the epic poem, with the description of Achilles' shield, made by the god Hephaestus and presented to him by his mother Thetis in the eighteenth book of *The Iliad*, serving as the canonical example to which most critics of the device refer.[21] With the shield a weapon to be taken into battle, balanced as an object to induce fear in the enemy and hope in the Achaeans as it depicts the totality of Ancient Greek culture, the tradition of ekphrasis can be seen to lend itself to 'formations of national consciousness', associated as it is with narratives of imperial conquest and the re-affirmation of heroic masculine identities.[22] In the passage from *The Illiad* depicting Achilles' shield, the textual narrative appears suspended, replaced by an extended description of the object's encyclopaedic narrative images: the heavens and earth, cities and their populations, wars, deaths, celebrations. Such representation of visual art becomes illustrative of what Murray Krieger terms the 'mirage' and 'miracle' of ekphrasis: the suspension of narrative action by the 'mirage' (the illusion of a visual image/object appearing before us, but only in word form), which enables the 'miracle' of a movement into a reality beyond—yet represented within—language.[23] Adopting Emery's reading of this, 'in representing, through

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[20] Prosopopoeia as 'one strand of the ekphrastic tradition: prosopopoeia, or the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object. Etymologically, *ekphrasis* means simply "speaking out" or "telling in full."' James A. W. Heffernan, 'Ekphrasis and Representation', *New Literary History*, 22.2 (1991), 297-316 (p.302). Rhys also does this with the built environment with rooms and houses speaking out, questioning, and mocking Rhys's female characters as she explores their alienation and dislocation from London as 'home'.

[21] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp.176-181. See also Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore, 1992), pp.xiii-xvii.

[22] Mitchell, p.181.

[23] Krieger, pp.xvi-xvii.

words, another representational language—that of the visual—ekphrasis represents representation itself'.[24]

This notion of moving 'beyond' yet 'within' language returns us to similar rhetoric adopted when describing the relation between artwork and frame. In *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, W.J.T. Mitchell identifies the encounters of verbal and visual language as being always purely figurative. The textual other—here the shield—must always remain alien, never fully present within the narrative, yet conjured as 'a potent absence or a fictive, figural present'.[25] The ekphrastic image acts 'like a sort of unapproachable and unpresentable "black hole" in the verbal structure, entirely absent from it, but shaping and affecting it in fundamental ways'.[26] According to Mitchell, 'what lies "beyond" representation would thus be found "within" it (as the "black hole" of the image is found within the ekphrastic text) or along its margins'.[27]

Mitchell proposes a model of representation whereby it exists as 'a multidimensional and heterogeneous terrain, a collage or patchwork quilt assembled over time out of fragments,' which is 'torn, folded, wrinkled, covered with accidental stains, traces of the bodies it has enfolded'.[28] It is through such 'enfolding' that ekphrasis comes to stand as *the* defining figure for representation. However as Krieger argues, it is the language of visual signs which has traditionally been deemed more 'natural', or closer to, the 'real' beyond language than the arbitrariness of linguistic relations. To continue with Emery's analysis of Mitchell and Krieger, it is 'by representing *visual language*, and through it, appearing to represent the "real," that ekphrasis seems to grant us access to that which lies beyond representation'.[29]

Yet in representing representation through the verbal description of the visual, ekphrasis also evokes the more 'arbitrary relationships between verbal signs and their referents', identifying within ekphrasis a tension between verbal language and visual signs, and its ability to access that which lies 'beyond' representation.[30] These 'contradictory functions', the attempt by writing to possess its visual "other" by rendering it verbally, and the arbitrariness of verbal language as it contrasts with the more "natural" language of visual signs, enables ekphrasis to work as 'a rhetorical strategy for constituting social power'— the narratives on Achilles' shield reinforcing his status as heroic male warrior—but also provides potential for the device to function as critique, as meta-aesthetic

[24] Mary Lou Emery, 'Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination: Tropes of Visuality in Writing by Rhys, Kincaid, and Cliff', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 16.2 (1997), 259-280 (p.263).
[25] Mitchell, p.158.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Mitchell, p.419.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Emery, 'Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination', p.263.
[30] Ibid.

discourse.[31] To quote Tobias Döring: 'ekphrasis is not an innocent activity. As "the verbal representation of visual representation", in Heffernan's definition, it engages in the making and unmaking of semiotic power, with the word seeking to rival and replace the image'.[32]

Because ekphrasis constantly refers to a power struggle between the verbal and the visual, text and image, it seems to naturally lend itself to critical projects that examine the nature of difference or otherness; ekphrasis was used by many modernists to signal the inadequacies of language, like the use of music, which also pertains to Rhys. As Mitchell's reading suggests, the hierarchical relation of words over images has often been framed in terms of gender difference: 'The ekphrastic image as a female other is commonplace […] in a genre that tends to describe an object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective, often to an audience understood to be masculine as well'.[33] Gender becomes a means to draw out the 'workings' of ekphrasis, showing the importance of understanding how it exposes the 'social structures of representation as an activity and a relationship of power/knowledge/desire'.[34] Mitchell turns to the 'portrait of a lady' trope, which, as my analysis of 'Tommie' above argues, seems to celebrate female beauty when it actually comments on social relations whereby a man possesses a woman through his ownership of her image. As with Achilles' shield, masculine identity is consolidated by the verbal representation of the visual.

But while female otherness becomes an over-determined feature within the genre, we can just as easily apply alternative contexts to the consolidation of otherness as performed by ekphrasis. Gender is but one of many constructions of difference 'that energize the dialectic of the imagetext', the rhetoric of possession and dispossession applicable to race, say.[35] And here lies the potential for action against the consolidation of such social power through the deployment of ekphrasis. By representing both the painting and the female/figure of racial otherness in it verbally, ekphrasis reframes the narrative in which they exist, allowing for commentary on the social systems of dis/possession that they signify.[36] But, as Mitchell notes, the 'suturing of dominant gender stereotypes into the semiotic structure of the imagetext' will look very different when applied to the work of a female author.[37] With a female authorial voice the apparently male 'gaze' becomes aligned with a counter-voice; ekphrasis can now more consciously enact its structural uncertainty because, in its very nature representing representation, it enables questions to be posed

[31] Ibid.
[32] Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), p.151.
[33] Mitchell, p.168
[34] Mitchell, p.180.
[35] Mitchell, p.181.
[36] Emery, *Modernism*, p.183.
[37] Mitchell, pp.180-1.

about its own politics. Its use is all the more significant for writers inhabiting positions of 'otherness' to enter the realm of the visual in order to question and resist conventional representational frameworks.

Intertextuality: Primitivism and the Reclining Nude

According to Döring, if the 'hierarchal relation of words over images has traditionally framed itself in terms of gender difference', ekphrasis re-codes this culturally as a way of engaging with the 'legacies of a colonial gaze'.[38] It is in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* that we find Rhys's most potent utilisation of ekphrasis as critical negotiation of both masculine conventions of narrative agency and the sexualised objectivity of the colonised female body, as represented through European primitivist painting. Framing once again becomes a useful structural conceit, in this instance more closely attached to Rhys as a white, colonial female positioned between both Caribbean and modernist European representational structures.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie alludes to primitivist debates, with the Caribbean subtext of the novel found through the embedded narrative of Modigliani's painting which hangs on the studio wall of Julia's artist employer. This is Julia's description of the painting:

> all the time I talked I was looking at a rum picture she had on the wall—a reproduction of a picture by a man called Modigliani. Have you ever heard of him? This picture is of a woman lying on a couch, a woman with a lovely, lovely, body. Oh, utterly, lovely. Anyhow, I thought so. A sort of proud body, like an utterly lovely proud animal. And a face like a mask, a long, dark face, and very big eyes. The eyes were blank, like a mask, but when you had looked at it a bit it was as if you were looking at a real woman, a live woman. At least, that's how it was with me (40)

The closest replication to Rhys's description would be Modigliani's 1917 *Reclining Nude* (fig. 8) from his series of nude portraits from the same year. The painting is introduced to the text via Julia's attempt to tell the story of her life to Horsfield, a moment which itself includes a previous life-story telling moment. There are interesting instances of self-doubt within the passage—'I thought so', 'that's how it was with me'—telling in terms of discourses of authority and who can 'tell' about the painting's meaning, which we can also connect back to Anna Morgan's inability to 'tell' Walter Jeffries the story of her West Indian identity. Complimenting my reading of Orpen's construction of multi-framing narratives of Flossie Burnett in *The Model*, I follow Emery's argument that Julia is likewise triply framed by narrative representation.[39] Firstly, by the narrative of the text in its entirety; secondly, as Julia attempts to tell the story of her life to Horsfield, during which she related her previous

[38] Döring, p.159.
[39] Emery, *Modernism*, pp.210-212.

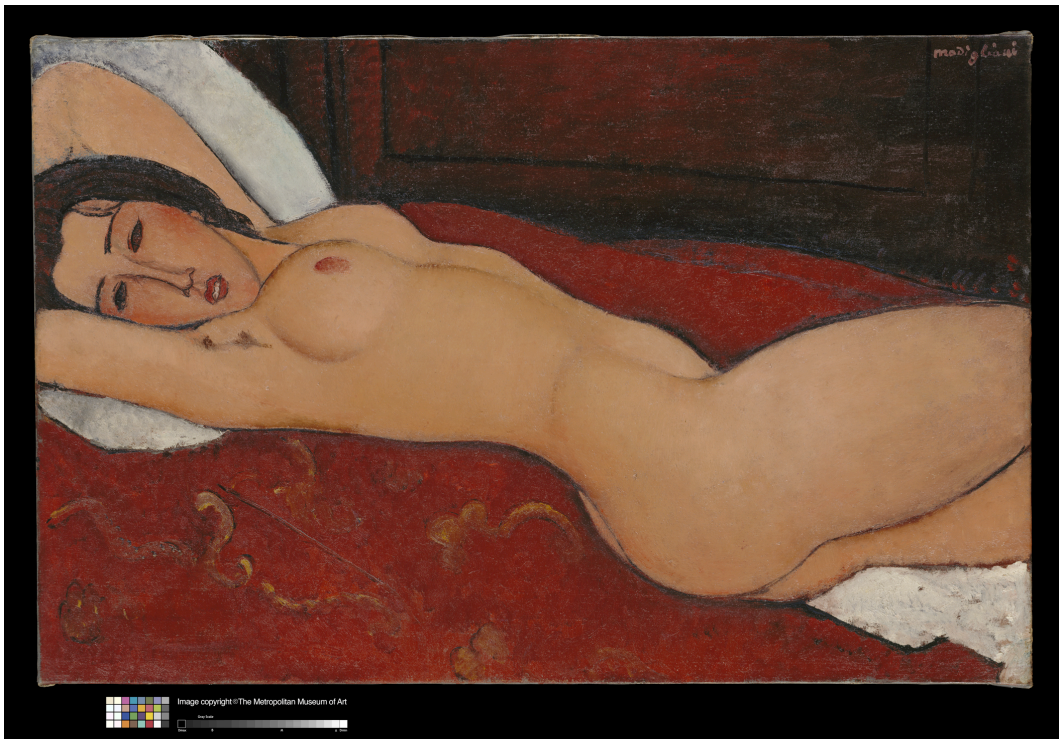

Fig. 8: Amedeo Modigliani, *Reclining Nude*, 1917. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

experience of being a model for a female artist; and thirdly the life story as told to the artist, with Julia encountering the painting in the artist's studio as she does. And yet I find a fourth moment of framing occurring, as the Modigliani portrait enters the space of the text, mockingly claiming to Julia "I am more real than you. But at the same time I *am* you. I'm all that matters of you" (41).

The 'speaking out' by Modigliani's model produces the 'mirage' of ekphrasis, the suspension of the main narrative as the work of art introduces its own narrative—the story it speaks. But this 'speaking out' works in a different way to that found in 'Tommie'. Key to this is the claim by the portrait that it is Julia. With Lady C. denying association with Suzy: 'you're a part of a side of life that I don't care to think about', their exchange is used to emphasise both the power of artistic representational devices as well as the failure of such representation as being all-encompassing. Lady C.'s rebuttal of Suzy is connected to class difference. Suzy is posing for necessary capital, while it is fair to assume that Lady C.'s portrait is a commissioned painting rather than paid work. This functions to reinforce Suzy's objectification, her status as a sexualised commodity that circulates in the marketplace. Lady C. can refuse association with Suzy because they are operating within the boundaries of artistic representation in very different ways. While Lady C.'s image may still

be seen to be controlled by Orpen's artistic discretion, the incomplete painting process by the end of the chapter leaves Suzy literally lost to representation.

For Julia however, the claim by the portrait to be 'all that matters of you' draws Julia to see herself only through the image which is presented via a 'visual discourse that denies her self-representation'.[40] The speaking-out halts Julia's attempt to narrate a life story which would be a means of reasserting her selfhood; the succession of frames makes narrative progression impossible:

> Well, all the time I was talking I had the feeling I was explaining things not only to Ruth – that was her name – but I was explaining them to myself too, and to the woman in the picture. It was as if I were before a judge, and I were explaining that everything I had done had always been the only possible thing to do. And of course I forgot that it's always so with everybody, isn't it?'
> […]
> It was a beastly feeling I got – that I didn't quite believe myself, either. I thought: "After all, is this true? Did I ever do this?" I felt as if the woman in the picture were laughing at me and saying: "I am more real than you. But at the same time I *am* you. I'm all that matters of you." (41)

In claiming to *be* Julia, the speaking portrait offers a vision beyond 'the real' ('I am more real than you'), returning to Mitchell's 'black hole' of ekphrasis. Julia is unable to narrate her own subjectivity, she is left as a ghost of her 'self': 'I felt as if all my life and all myself were floating away from me like smoke and there was nothing to lay hold of—nothing' (41). The 'real' is thus found within the discourse of the painting, a discourse of primitivism that ties Julia to an historical identity of otherness which she herself repeats, later describing her Brazilian mother's mask-like face, framed 'against the white-frilled pillow. Dark-skinned, with high cheekbones and an aquiline nose' (70).

The figure depicted in *Reclining Nude* merges conventional European realist representations of the female body with facial features that can be associated with an exoticised otherness. Julia's description of the face of Modigliani's model as being mask-like connects to the imagery of modernist primitivist painting. This reproduces the visual discourse of famous works by Modigliani and others, including Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which transforms the bodies and faces of five Barcelonan prostitutes with mask-like shapes and angles that found its inspiration in African art.[41] The elongated heart-shaped face of the model in *Reclining Nude* shows the same narrow bridge-like nose and elliptical eye shape of the Baulé masks from the Ivory Coast (fig. 9), a notable influence on Modigliani's sculpture and painting.[42] Modigliani would have had access to these masks through

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[40] Emery, *Modernism*, p.210.
[41] Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.31-33.
[42] http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm [accessed 06 May 2013]

Fig. 9: Baulé Mask, early C20th. Photo: © Yale University Art Gallery

contemporary museum exhibitions (including at the Trocadéro in Paris), as well as local commercial art galleries and curio shops; the influence of African art through such interaction—which I will return to in my later discussion on studio space in *Good Morning, Midnight*—already well documented.[43]

But "primitivist" representations were only as such in name. These visual articulations demonstrated the kind of artistic control usually associated with formalism and modernism. Modigliani's combination of a formalist body with a clearly African-influenced

[43] One notable collector of African art was Sir Jacob Epstein, the London-based sculptor and long-time friend of Picasso, Matisse and Modigliani. Rupert Richard Arrowsmith points to Epstein's friendship with Modigliani as the source of his awakening to the possibilities of using aesthetics derived from African works. According to Epstein, Modigliani's studio was 'filled with nine or ten of those long heads which were suggested by African masks.' Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum: Asian, African, and Pacific Art and the London Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.180. See also Lemke, pp.31-58.

mask-like face associates the woman depicted with the "primitive". Playing with artistic traditions that made the female nude a symbol of natural purity, Modigliani uses the mask/body combination to simultaneously allude to—and then distort—European conventions of female beauty.[44] These early twentieth-century conventions, so enthralled by feminine beauty and purity, often conflated horror, excessive behaviour and social corruption as dark/sexual/feminine, with Western interpretations of primitive objects often stressing extreme states of sexuality, suffering and pain. Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which imagines the primitive female as lower-class prostitute, as sexual object, is an example of this.[45] Indeed, beginning largely with Gauguin in the late nineteenth century, avant-garde artists typically treated black femininity as a potent counter-point to Western industrial modernity, stylising it into what Seshagiri terms a 'voiceless corporeality'.[46] Gauguin's successors continued to depict black femininity as a powerful alternative to white Western beauty and civility, but when the two were placed together, as in Manet's *Olympia* with the figure of the black servant, or more abstractly with the masks of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, white female sexuality was more conspicuously aligned to (black) sexual deviance.[47] Through such ambivalent associations, space was created for the consolidation of European masculinity by identifying its women, and their sexual proclivity, with the primitivism of tribal peoples and/or their art. The sexualised female—and we can reconnect this to Julia, Anna, and other of Rhys's female characters—become the visual analogue of the black woman.

The competing representational frames of European and primitive art within modernist painting are replicated textually through the insertion of the Modigliani image into Rhys's narrative. The written presentation of *Reclining Nude* in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*—clearly described as 'by a man named Modigliani'—is allowed to stand in formal opposition to the text, even as it is contained within it. This structure serves as a self-reflexive moment which acknowledges 'the extent to which women are presented by

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[44] See Sander Gilman's naming of Manet's *Olympia* as the first painting to articulate this merger (p.206). See also Torgovnick, p.102.

[45] Emery, *Modernism*, p.211. See also Torgovnick: 'continuing and expanding an older tradition of including blacks as signs of sensuality, paintings of the modern movement […] had used blacks and African masks in connection with debased sexuality, especially the depiction of prostitution and brothel life'. Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, p.99-102. See also Simon Gikandi, 'Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference', *Modernism/Modernity*, 10.3 (2003), 455-480 (pp.467-470).

[46] Seshagiri, *Race and the Modernist Imagination*, p.99.

[47] This relationship enters a new dimension when contextualized with contemporary scientific discourse. As Gilman writes: 'The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is the black, and the essential black, the lowest exemplum of mankind on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot'. We can of course connect this back to Rhys's reference to the Hottentot in Anna Morgan's naming as such in *Voyage in the Dark*. Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.83.

citation', as it were, by a narrative that comes from elsewhere.[48] This gendered process of production relies on the discourse of racial/colonial oppression found, in this instance, through the primitive. As Emery concludes, the deployment of ekphrasis in this instance works to critique its conventional use as a device to consolidate the power of male identity:

> "Speaking out" about the dispossession of women, the portrait exposes its own visual discourse and suggests both metaphorical and material links between the colonialist history of primitivist art and the dispossession, in the urban centres of Europe, of women of unnarratable backgrounds.[49]

The crossing of aesthetic boundaries—the painting embedded into the text causing a jump from the verbal to the visual and back—is made possible by the use of the African mask. This not only highlights the formal processes of representation, but also the metaphorical. The association made in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* between Julia and Modigliani's model connects Rhys's protagonist to actual and metaphorical positions of dispossession. Julia is drawn into a discourse of otherness that comes to represent her 'real' self as it also denies her subjectivity, and, to return to my argument in Chapter One, the text is left to circulate around Julia's continued social displacement.

Painted Love, Ekphrastic Fear

The visual connections between sexual 'promiscuity' and cultural otherness, and how this is suggestive of the representational dispossession of women of 'unnarratable backgrounds', turns this analysis towards a relatively undocumented short story of Rhys's *Left Bank* collection titled 'Tea With an Artist', which charts the conflict between private ownership and public exhibition through an artist who uses his ex-prostitute lover as his muse. But before I begin my reading, it is perhaps useful to return to Mitchell's writing on ekphrasis to identify how this narrative uses the device to produce a somewhat more powerful critique than that found in 'Tommie' or *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*.

Mitchell identifies that fascination in the 'problem' of ekphrasis can be divided into three moments of realisation: ekphrastic indifference, hope and fear.[50] Ekphrastic indifference is found within our 'common sense perception' that ekphrasis is impossible because verbal description cannot make present its object as a visual representation: 'words can "cite," but never "sight"'.[51] This indifference has not prevented the use of the device producing an enormous body of literature which reflects a second phase, where the

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[48] Genevieve Abravanel, 'Intertextual Identifications: Modigliani, Conrad, and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3.3, Jean Rhys (2003), 91-98 (p.96).
[49] Emery, *Modernism,* p.212.
[50] Mitchell, pp.151-154.
[51] Mitchell, p.152.

impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome through metaphor and imagination: 'the estrangement of the image/text division is overcome, and a sutured, synthetic form, a verbal icon or imagetext, arises in its place'.[52] But such a moment of ekphrastic hope swiftly leads to a third, what Mitchell terms ekphrastic fear. This is 'the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and the visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally'.[53] When the reciprocity between visual and verbal is deemed a 'dangerous promiscuity', ekphrastic fear 'tries to regulate the borders with firm distinctions between the senses, modes of representation, and the objects proper to each'.[54]

Ekphrastic fear is thus the acknowledgement of a desire for separation of representational forms to counter the 'dangerous promiscuity' of a union between the verbal and the visual. Our rational indifference towards ekphrasis may tell us that text and image can never fully come together, but it is only within their meeting, where the 'hope' of an imagetext lies, that the realisation of their incommensurability becomes apparent. The possibility that the two forms may collapse or merge would undermine the stability of either representational form. Thus, the two must remain distinct. Ekphrasis becomes, then, a constant struggle for mastery between text and image.

If the problem of ekphrastic deployment lies within the potential for a collapse of form, this can be neutralised by regulation of the modes of representation. But this separation requires keeping something out of that representation, or at least identifying that there are limits to it. I have already touched upon this idea with Marya's theatrical performance in *Quartet* being narrated as a withholding of some part of her identity. In *Quartet* it is as though the representation of an identity through such performance remains incomplete, with this incompleteness providing a small hint at subjectivity. It could be argued that literature becomes the vehicle for the articulation of this 'underneath' of representation. With the relation between image and text, it is through their separation—as an act of containment—that the potential for subversion can be found within the text. In the case of Rhys's protagonists' this is their elusive subjectivity as contained within the image.

In 'Tea With an Artist', the triangular visual relationship between narrator, painter and his model becomes diagrammatic of this desire to maintain order within the hierarchy of representation, as well as the potential for text to subvert the power of the image. Rhys's English narrator finds herself observing a Flemish artist, Verhausen, as he sits in a Parisian

[52] Mitchell, p.154.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Mitchell, p.155.

café. The woman he sits with, a prostitute from an Antwerp brothel now his lover, is at this moment unsighted. On learning that he refuses to exhibit his work, and that to sell his paintings would be deemed a sacrilegious act, the narrator's curiosity is piqued and she decides she wants to see his pictures, a request Verhausen grants. In this introduction, distinction is made between varying modes of spectatorship: Verhausen will not exhibit, nor will he sell, but to 'show' is acceptable. This hierarchy of viewership connects back to possession. To exhibit would be to reveal his images to a mass audience whose gaze would be outside of his control. To sell would be to relinquish the image from his possession—he would no longer have ownership of it. Showing the works under close regulation serves to maintain a degree of control over the spectator's process of looking.

And so it is when the narrator visits Verhausen's studio, his suspicious scrutiny preceding her granted access. Yet within the studio space, the images Verhausen has created are freed from the constraints of literal frames: 'The room was big, all its walls encumbered on the floor with unframed canvases, all turned with their backs to the wall' as though within Verhausen's personal space, the images are able to exist in their organic form.[55] When finally the viewing commences, the narrator's description of the process focuses as much on the paintings as it does on Verhausen's actions, her gaze mediating between artist and artwork while Verhausen's attention lies solely with his creations. From the succession of impressionist landscapes and portraits, one particular image captures the narrator's interest:

> he produced a larger canvas, changed the position of the easel and turned to me with a little grunt. I said slowly: 'I think that is a great picture. Great art!'
>
> … A girl seated on the sofa in a room with many mirrors held a glass of green liquer. Dark-eyes, heavy-faced, with big, sturdy peasant's limbs, she was entirely destitute of lightness or grace.
>
> But all the poisonous charm of the life beyond the pale was in her pose, and in her smouldering eyes—all its deadly bitterness and fatigue in her fixed smile (78)

The painting that so attracts her attention is a *mise en abyme*, a coinage by André Gide that plays on the French *abyme*/abyss to infer the way a work of art infinitely refers to itself, with the mirror a symbol of this. In the painting, the placement of the mirrors within the image makes conscious the multiple moments of framing that can occur, with the girl subject to an infinite number of observations.

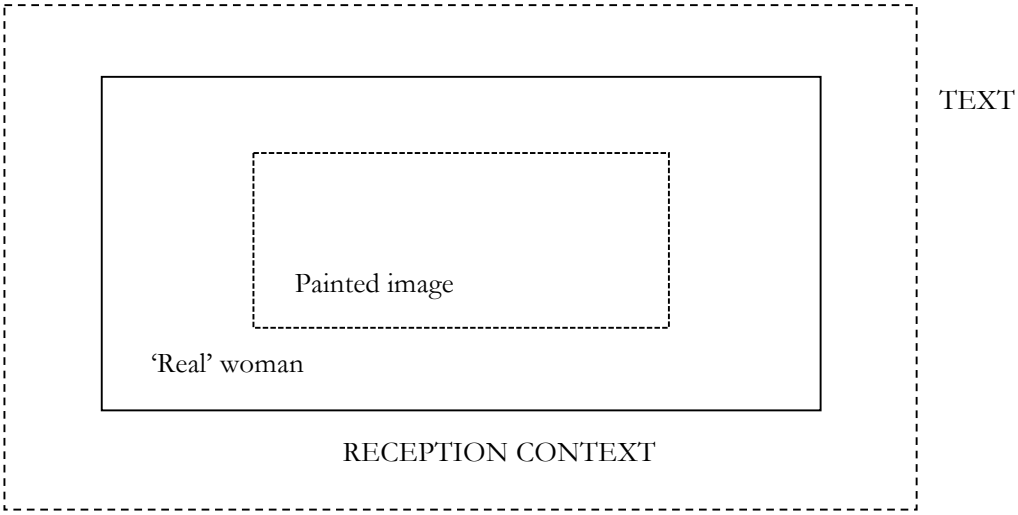
Rhys adds another layer to this when the structure of the *mise en abyme* transfers self-reflexively to the structure of the verbal narrative. The space of the text replicates the painting's conscious identification of the girl as 'representation' when 'the original' walks

[55] Jean Rhys, 'Tea With an Artist', in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p.76. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be included in the main body of the text.

into the studio, disrupting the visual lines created between artist, narrator, and painted image:

> And, just as I was telling him that the picture reminded me of a portrait of Manet's, the original came in from outside, carrying a string bag full of greengroceries. Mr Verhausen started a little when he saw her and rubbed his hands again—apologetically this time. He said: 'This, Madame, is my little Marthe. Mademoiselle Marthe Baesen.'
>
> She greeted me with reserve and glanced at the picture on the easel with an inscrutable face. I said to her: 'I have been admiring Mr Verhausen's work.' (79)

As the painting's model confronts her image, she experiences a similar reduction of her identity as in Orpen's *The Model* where Burnett encounters, and is outnumbered by, representations of herself; here Marthe Baesen loses her name to become 'Mr Verhausen's work'. Such a moment produces an infinite regression into representation, for as soon as something 'real' becomes part of the created work (Burnett sitting amongst paintings of herself, Verhausen's model walking into the studio), one must step back to the next level in order to see it in its proper context. Consider this as illustrated below:



The confrontation of image and reality collapses one into the other, with the painting reaching outside of its context and into the context of its reception, as told by the narrative of the text.[56] In doing so, image and reality fold into each other, the result of which should be the undoing of the veracity of the painting. The image, with the mute figure now rendered dynamic and active, should, to borrow Mitchell's parlance, be rendered a deceitful illusion when confronted with its original form. And yet initially it is the living model that is

[56] Variations of this diagram can be applied to all of Rhys's texts mentioned thus far, with additional layers added as applicable. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* would, for instance, contain four layers or frames: (1) the Modigliani painting (1) within Julia's story of the artist (2), within the narrative related to Horsfield (3), within Rhys's text as a whole (4).

deemed a false representation, by the narrator, the artist, and the painting image, because she does not match that which is portrayed in the painting: 'without the flame his genius had seen in her and had fixed for ever, she was heavy, placid and uninteresting—at any rate to me' (80). Her identity is reduced to that which is created by the artist, reinforced by the gaze of the narrator, who again 'frames' her within the space of the textual narrative.

The narrator here is making a choice between seeing the girl and seeing the picture, and in commenting that she has been admiring Verhausen's work—restricting her to a created piece of 'work'—she admits that she cannot 'see' the model, only her image. There is no 'stepping back' from the painted image to see it in a proper context. The display of the painting by Verhausen has been at the expense of the model, for it is only within its boundaries that she comes to represent her 'real' self. In this respect, the model is constrained by a wall of paint, even as she reveals herself as something that can speak, that can be seen and—crucially—that can itself see.

In an essay titled 'The Underneaths of Painting', Hubert Damisch produces a reading of Balzac's short story *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* ('The Unknown Masterpiece', 1831), a narrative about the relationship between the female model and the artist. As in Rhys's narratives, Balzac produces commentary on the double identities of the model as artist's lover and muse; Balzac's perspective focusing on the choice the artist has to make between such identifications. Again, issues of ownership abound. I want to quote Damisch at length here as I believe he accurately draws out tensions that are equally applicable to my reading of 'Tea With an Artist':

> more lover than painter, [the artist] will refuse to show his creature, his 'woman', and denounce what can only be *prostitution*: 'My painting is not a painting, it is not a canvas, it is a woman'. Not *the* Woman, but *a* woman.
> […]
> Why should he refuse to show this woman? Because that would be to relinquish his position as 'father, lover and god', the trinitarian figure in authority. As if Frenhofer [the painter of Balzac's tale] cannot be master – the frenetic master his name speaks of – unless he does not display his masterpiece, a masterpiece so incestuous that to exhibit it would imply breaking the rules upon which the exchange of women is founded. Does he not declare himself ready to kill the man who would soil his masterpiece with a gaze, and ready to burn the painting (which he will in fact do) rather than lay it bare before the sight of a man. […] The man, the young man will see the woman, or a woman, which to the lover would be intolerable; the painter will see a painting which to the creator would be inadmissible. […] In effect, he has to find a model he can use as the mirror in which he can contemplate his painting.[57]

[57] Hubert Damisch, 'The Underneaths of Painting', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 1:2 (1985), 197-209 (p.201).

The loss of personal subjectivity for Verhausen's model mirrors Frenhofer's desire to maintain possession of his model/lover's 'self'. As Verhausen admits the paintings are precious to him, but perhaps not to anyone else, he ignores the fact that his work has previously been sold, albeit against his wishes. Maintaining ownership of the painting is simultaneously maintaining ownership of the woman presented, a woman in this case who already has circulated as an object of exchange: the story closes with reference to 'a time when her business in life had been the consoling of men' (80). As in Damisch's reading of Balzac, to display the image is to allow her to circulate within a network of other (male) viewers, whose gaze upon her image would diminish his authority. Yet allowing the female narrator to view his painting, Verhausen creates an alliance between narrator/spectator and the artist in order to neutralise the threat the appearance of the real woman poses to his representational authority. When model and her painted image are viewed together, pressure is applied to the ekphrastic mirage because her appearance breaks the figurativeness of representation, collapsing it. She becomes a potent presence identifying the failure of representation.

While Rhys uses the confrontation of image and reality to comment on the failure of the visual, she also embeds a critique on the inadequacies of verbal representation, in this context identified in cultural terms as a distinctly English narratorial voice. The final paragraph of the story implies that the vision created by the narrator of a 'heavy, placid identity' is not all—something has been left out of the representation. The model's touch of her lover's cheek alludes to some level of agency, through her sexuality, over the artist. It is through a visual sign—a 'moment of knowledge, and a certain sureness' (mis-)interpreted by the English narrator, re-deployed by Rhys—that we seem to get closest to the 'real' beyond representation. This comes about after the narrator has left the studio, emerging back into the city where, in the narrator's mind, the portrait's figure of the girl on the sofa 'blend[s] with the coming night, the scent of Paris, and the hard blare of the gramophone' (81). This 'blending' counters the separation of the representational forms as occurring in the studio narrative. Ekphrasis here enacts its structural uncertainty with more force. Rhys uses ekphrasis precisely to question its use, and in doing so looks to the blending of representational form as offering the potential to recoup the meanings underneath.

The Empire Paints Back: Recuperating Meaning, Framing Others

Rhys identifies as a necessary part of the modern condition the 'blending' of reality with aesthetic sensibility and her characters make conscious their engagement with the pleasure

(and otherwise) of visual perception.[58] Rhys's interwar fiction becomes part of the tradition of literary impressionism that shows the network of visual moments, the fragments of experience that hold together the modern city, with *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys's most powerful allusion to this. We witness Sasha's aestheticisation of her memories. As she navigates 1937 Paris she is constantly drawn back to moments or memories of the past where she returns to positions of denied subjectivity. Through the mechanisms of visual culture Rhys's characters find themselves objectified and commodified, often with an exoticised, colonised inflection present. But Sasha's encounter with the Russian artist Serge Rubin in his Montparnasse studio deserves special attention in this respect as this is the closest any of Rhys's characters get to a position of subjectivity in their engagement with the visual arts.

Sasha's visit to the studio is preceded by a memory sequence from a time when she was penniless, contemplating suicide, and seeing the world as a dream 'when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets' (75). This 'close-up of human nature' as Sasha calls it has given her both insight and indifference to the pain of existence. Sasha's narrative fluctuates from memory to present reality, from the 'heaven of indifference' to being pulled 'back to [the] hell' of reality, with the mask symbolic of the artificiality of socially constructed identities. In Serge's studio the mask is refigured as a mechanism through which Sasha can locate a utopian space away from the alienation of Paris' streets. The masks that line the walls in Serge's studio function in a different way to the cosmetic masks Rhys's characters wear in the construction of a performed identity, although at first they appear similarly threatening to Sasha. The eye holes of the mask stare back into hers; Sasha identifies the mask with those who have persecuted her:

> I know that face very well; I've seen lots like it, complete with legs and body.

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[58] Take as an example the opening description in *ALMM* of Julia's hotel room and the connection that is made between the painting and the room:

> The ledge under the mirror was strewn with Julia's toilet things—an untidy assortment of boxes of rouge, powder, and make-up for the eyes. At the farther end of it stood an unframed oil painting of a half empty bottle of red wine, a knife, and a piece of Gruyere cheese, signed 'J. Grykho, 1923'. It had probably been left in payment of a debt. Every object in the picture was slightly distorted and full of obscure meaning. Lying in bed, where she was unable to avoid looking at it, Julia would sometimes think: 'I wonder if that picture's any good. It might be; it might be very good for all I know.… I bet it is good too.'
>
> But really she hated the picture. It shared, with the colour of the plush sofa, a certain depressing quality. The picture and the sofa were linked in her mind. The picture was the more alarming in its perversion and the sofa the more dismal. The picture stood for the idea, the spirit, and the sofa stood for the act (8)

> That's the way they look when they are saying: 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' That's the way they look when they are saying: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille?' (76)

That these are phrases spoken by English characters Sasha encounters transforms the mask into a symbol of the constructedness of all identities, including whiteness.

The insertion into the narrative of the masks made by Serge also hints at their status as a symbol of cultural syncretism, for when Sasha questions their origins, whether they are West African, Serge ironically answers: 'Yes, straight from the Congo…. I made them' (Ibid). This exchange initially alludes to the tension that existed within primitivist discourse between the co-option and appropriation of another culture for artistic purposes: Serge is claiming their authenticity by affirming Sasha's question, then immediately countering this by announcing his authorship of them. The contradictions of cultural theft, appropriation and authenticity are made famous by the now-exhaustive debate as to whether Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* before or after his 1907 trip to the wing of the Musée d'Ethnographie at the Palais du Trocadéro, which held African masks and sculptures brought back from France's African colonies.[59] The presence of such colonial 'fetishes' in junk shops and museums in Paris dated back to the nineteenth century, and visits to or purchases from such places by artists like Picasso, offered the chance to synthesize aspects of multiple works into their own productions. But Picasso displayed a distinct ambivalence towards his debt to such artefacts: his well-documented facetious 'L'art nègre? Connais pas!' in the 1920s clear evidence of this, as well as his later description of that infamous first trip to the Trocadéro.[60]

As Simon Gikandi writes on Picasso's ambivalent relationship with primitivism:

> [w]hat makes Picasso such a central figure in the history of modernism's relationship to its Others was his ability to make the primitive central to the aesthetic ideology of modern art while also transforming tribal art objects in such a way that they were no longer recognizable as models. This is how

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[59] For more on this debate see Lemke, pp.33-7, Archer-Straw, pp.51-57, and Patricia Leighten, 'White Peril and *L'Art nègre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism*', *The Art Bulletin*, 72 (1990), 609-630 (pp.622-628).

[60] The following commentary by Picasso, quoted in André Malraux's 1937 *La Tête d'obsidienne* (pp.10-11), was not published until after his death in 1974:

> 'When I went to the old Trocadéro, it was disgusting. The Flea Market. The smell. I was alone. I wanted to get away. But I didn't leave. I stayed. I stayed. I understood that it was very important: something was happening to me, right?
>
> The masks weren't just like any other pieces of sculpture. Not at all. They were magic things…. I always looked at fetishes. I understood; I too am against everything. I too believe that everything is unknown, that everything is an enemy! Everything! […] I understood why I was a painter. All alone in that awful museum, with masks, dolls made by the redskins, dusty manikins. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have come to me that very day, but not at all because of form; because it was my first exorcism painting—yes absolutely.'

> *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* has come to be read [as…] the site of disavowal of the very difference it considers a possibility.[61]

Picasso's 'entanglement' with Africa, as Gikandi puts it, and art critics' entanglement with this entanglement, is but part of the well-established argument in art historical writings that moves between the promotion or co-option of primitive art by modern artists. The search for the artistic root of modernism often identifies a continuum of formal affinities between modern artists like Gauguin, Picasso, and others, with supposedly "primitive" or non-Western sources. Such a process recognises the primitive as part of an artistic culture that paralleled their modern interests. This implies that there was a primitive tendency already produced from within modern art; the adulation of primitivism positing the Other not as a threat but a source of new energy. But this goes against Western primitivism's core axiom, to return in part to my discussion at the start of this thesis: the assumption that non-white, non-Western races existed in a *pre-modern* state without reason or artistic sensibility. One exception to the exclusion of colonised peoples from the art world was the 1935 exhibition arranged by Michael Sadleir, publisher of Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*. The exhibition, titled 'Negro Art' and held at the Adams Gallery in London, showed ninety-five works, with African artists' names listed alongside the context in which the piece was produced.[62] The exhibition brought together 'negro works such as are usually seen under museum conditions as ethnographical specimens', 'painting and sculpture by living negro artists' and 'paintings by contemporary English artists some of whose works have been inspired by an interest in negro life or art'.[63] In doing so, it attempted to counter the earlier ambivalent reception of African art in England by Fry and others. Published four years after Sadleir's exhibition, Serge's construction of the 'authentic' West African mask in *Good Morning, Midnight* is Rhys's entry into this debate.

But Serge and his mask offer more than just a study of one artist's ambivalent appropriation of one culture by another. By claiming authentic African art as his own, Serge invalidates the essentialist constructions existing within contemporary racial discourse. To quote from Camarasana's reading of the scene, Serge's artistic construction of the mask speaks of a commonality shared between disparate identities: 'one disaporic culture [a Russian Jew exiled in Paris] using the instrument of another [the Congolese mask] to express itself'.[64] When Serge offers to dance with the mask to Martinique beguine music his actions take on multiple levels of significance: 'He holds the mask over his face and dances. 'To make you laugh,' he says. He dances very well. His thin, nervous body looks strange,

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[61] Gikandi, 'Picasso', p.474.
[62] For more on the 'Negro Art' exhibition see Emery, *Modernism*, pp.85-6.
[63] Michael Sadleir, 'Preface', *"Negro Art" Exhibition Catalogue, Adams Gallery, January 19-February 16, 1935*, Tate Gallery Library.
[64] Camarasana, p.64.

surmounted by the hideous mask' (77). Serge reveals an awareness of the mask's original cultural context, not as art object but as an independent element of cultural ritual. Susan Mullin Vogel's study *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes* includes a section titled 'Art That is Watched', exploring the mask's function not as an element isolated for display, but as part of a culturally relevant, community-based moment of ritual or celebration.[65] The crossover between anthropological and aesthetic contexts here—definitions of 'art' and 'aesthetic'—can be related back to Rhys and the way in which she deploys mask imagery, most significantly the carnival masks at the close of *Voyage in the Dark* which become moments of subversive masquerade. As Serge recovers the masks from its wall hanging to a more active role in the creation of a shared commonality, his dance brings Sasha and himself together as 'comrades in exile'.[66]

Serge is willing to become the spectacle, shielding Sasha from becoming one herself and providing her respite from the ritualised performances she has undertaken during the first part of her narrative. It is Serge who is racialised and feminised by the display. Holding the mask in front of his face, he is replicating the same visual imagery of *Les Demoiselle d'Avignon* and *Reclining Nude*, and he contributes to his vulnerability by allowing Sasha to act as spectator. This levelling takes Sasha into a peaceful vision of herself:

> I am lying in a hammock looking up into the branches of a tree. The sound of the sea advances and retreats as if a door were being opened and shut. All day there has been a fierce wind blowing, but at sunset it drops. The hills look like clouds and the clouds like fantastic hills. (77)

Multiple locations—Congo, Paris, Martinique—merge from the studio, the music, the mask, into an 'elsewhere' that identifies Sasha with a past, if not origin, in the West Indies.[67] An exiled Jew and a white Caribbean—neither of whom have a fixed home in the metropole—can combine via the mask, itself an object that is displaced from an elsewhere. This connects to the wider transnationalism in the novel (including issues of passports for Sasha and Réne the gigolo), and its references to a lack of fixed coordinates. I return to Rhys's preoccupation with the idea 'elsewhere' and the impossibility of its representation in my reading of exhibition space in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

The studio thus becomes an idealised space, one where exploitation is redundant. Serge's claim of authenticity over the mask is neutralised into a shared experience of cultural dislocation; his indifference to Sasha's attempted conversations about money places his studio as outside of commercial exchange, safe from exploitation. This is in stark contrast

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[65] Susan Mullin Vogel, *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp.136-187. See also Torgovnick, pp.130-135.
[66] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.158.
[67] This memory replicates, according to Emery, a photograph of Rhys in Dominica taken three years prior to the novel's publication, tying the vision more closely to the Caribbean (Emery, *"World's End"*, p.158).

to the studio spaces of previous texts. Marya Zelli's engagement with artistic studio space in *Quartet* reveals, for example, her sexual exploitation and foreignness. Take the following description of the Heidler's studio, which Marya moves in to on the pretence of posing for Lois:

> The studio was a big, high-ceilinged room, sparsely furnished, dimly lit. A doll dressed as an eighteenth century lady smirked conceitedly on the divan, with satin skirts spread stiffly. There was an elaborate gramophone, several cards were stuck into the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. There was a portrait on the wall above the looking-glass, carefully painted but smug and slightly pretentious, like a coloured photograph. (41)

The 'smug' photo-realistic painting hanging above the mirror holds the ability to distract the eye of whoever is using the mirror, as though the painting is the true reflection. Framing is occurring both through the mirror and through the painting, with the studio itself also becoming a framed space with the doll on the divan replicating numerous paintings described by Rhys in her texts. Moving in to the studio renders Marya powerless, as she has no control over a space that is constantly subject to movement through the creation and circulation of art. Her sexual objectification, hinted at by the art within the studio: 'groups of women. Masses of flesh arranged to form intricate and absorbing patterns' (8)—turns the studio into a prison from which Marya cannot escape.

Serge's studio enables Sasha to be the active spectator, visualising through Delmar's arrangement of the paintings a dreamlike, perfect space:

> 'Wait, I know how we can arrange it, so that you can really see the pictures.'
>
> There are a lot of empty frames stacked up against the wall. Delmar arranges them round the room and puts the canvases one by one into them. The canvases resist. They curl up; they don't want to go into frames. He pushes and prods them so that they go in and stay in, in some sort of fashion.
>
> […]
>
> 'Yes, now I can see them.'
>
> I am surrounded by the pictures. It is astonishing how vivid they are in this dim light. … Now the room expands and the iron band round my heart loosens. The miracle has happened. I am happy. (83)

Frames here function in similar ways to their earlier deployment by Rhys, with the canvases attempting to resist their constraint. But now they are refigured so that the exhibition of the paintings enables Sasha to recover some of her personal agency. The pictures take Sasha into a fantasy of a similar empty studio-like space like, 'nothing in it but a bed and a looking-glass. Getting the stove lit at about two in the afternoon—the cold and the stove fighting each other. Lying near the stove in complete peace' (83). The pictures may bring Sasha out of her own memories and into a present fantasy, but even as this fantasy is

constructed it acknowledges its own impossibility.[68] The looking-glass, that tool of female objectification that emerges throughout Rhys's narratives, reminds us that the possibilities for what Linett terms a disinterested artistic sphere are never fully within reach.[69]

Sasha decides to buy a painting from Serge of an old Jew with a red nose, playing the banjo. Sasha is acting as a consumer of art—not as a collector, or for status. The combination of the Jew and the 'negro' (the Jew and the banjo in the painting, as well as Serge as exiled Jew and his engagement with the African mask) becomes, in Linett's reading of Serge in relation to money and exilic Jewishness, an effective method for Rhys to articulate her critique of consumerist visual cultures that rely on objectifying, exploitative practices for the accumulation of capital.[70] While Linett focuses on Serge's supposed ambivalence towards money, it must be noted that while financial gain motivated many of those who embraced the primitive in their art, it also attracted artists, like Serge, who existed on the fringes of consumer society. When Sasha and Serge discuss Montparnasse jazz 'boîtes' and 'negro music' they refer to one venue as being a 'dirty place' (77). Serge himself has, according to Delmar, lived in 'la crasse' (85)—grime, filth—until his exhibition and sale of his artwork elevated him to the 'respectable' studio he is now in. The painting Sasha buys features a banjo player, described as an old Jew standing in the gutter. Jew and 'negro' combine with Sasha to form a band of displaced peoples: artist, subject and potential consumer are rendered equal, part of a community that remains with her when she exits the studio and returns to the Parisian streets:

> The pictures walk along with me. The misshapen dwarfs juggle with huge coloured balloons, the four-breasted woman is exhibited, the old prostitute waits hopelessly outside the urinoir, the young one under the bec de gaz… (84)

But Sasha's happiness is short-lived when Serge fails to show up for their meeting. The parallels made between the characters in the studio suggest potential for an alliance between disparate race, class, and religious groups marginalised by modern European discourse. But ultimately the possibilities for a continuation of this diasporic alliance are erased, particularly when Delmar realises Sasha's sadness at Serge's absence and begins to criticise him. Sasha is returned to her impasse. She visits a cinema in an attempt to find refuge from the hostile gazes, but is forced from this sanctuary by the uncomfortable connection made between the actor's predicament and her own. The painting she bought, the banjo player 'double-headed, double-faced', returns to mock her:

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[68] Maren Tova Linett, *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 48.
[69] Linett, p.44.
[70] Linett provides an excellent analysis of Serge's ambivalence towards money, as well as the liminality of 'the Jew' as being outside of history, serving a useful vehicle for exploring issues of trauma. See Linett, *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness*, pp.142-172.

> I unroll the picture and the man standing in the gutter, playing his banjo, stares at me. He is gentle, humble, resigned, mocking, a little mad. He stares at me. He is double-headed, double-faced. He is singing 'It has been', singing 'It will be'. Double-headed with four arms. … I stare back at him and think about being hungry, being cold, being hurt, being ridiculed, as if it were in another life than this.
>
> This damned room—it's saturated with the past. … It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms. … (91)

Rhys returns here, according to Linett, to an ekphrastic 'telling in full' to describe her sense of loss and exposure.[71] The verbal representation of a visual representation reveals the impossibility of 'true' representation as Sasha is aligned with the banjo player. The subjective agency she appeared to hold is neutralised as the two figures exchange looks—the 'frame' keeps failing as the image spills over into the present. What has been narrated verbally, namely Sasha's visual subjectivity, is brought into question. As with the film she has just watched, Sasha is drawn into the visual image, unable to escape from a moment where her own objectification is painfully recognised and actualised. The double-headedness of the banjo player highlights Sasha's alignment with him, referring also to her oscillation, through the aestheticisation of experience, between past memory and present reality. The song he sings—'it has been, it will be'—hints that the cycle will continue, and the redemptive nature of the studio dissolves. Sasha, as one who views and purchases art, experiences studio space in a contrasting way to Suzy, Julia, Marya or Verhausen's model Marthe. But even as she more successfully negotiates the power dynamics of modern art, participating in a re-writing of modernist primitivism through her interaction with Serge and his marginal creations, Sasha is left to acknowledge the seeming impossibility of finding within the visual arts a position of subjectivity for those on the fringes of society.

[71] Linett, *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness*, p.168.

4. Mirrors and Movies: The Rhys Woman in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

> You imagine the carefully pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is the truth. That is just what it isn't. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it's in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth (*Good Morning, Midnight*, p.63)
>
> A reflection in the looking-glass is different from the real thing. (*Voyage in the Dark*, p.25)

Rhys's representation of visual *mis*representation is reflected through her engagement with multiple facets of contemporary visual culture. It emerges in her depictions of fashion and make-up industry practices and commodity culture; with theatre and the construction of identities through visual performance; and with modern art's primitivist tendencies, as well as its production and circulation of the painted female image as an object of exchange. Visually divided subjectivities emerge through her characters' interactions with paintings, stage performances, shop windows, and—the subject of this chapter—through reflections in mirrors and references to photographic and filmic images. The failure of these images to accurately represent the Rhys woman is relayed through repeated allusions to distorted, split, and fractured identities that emerge from them, conveying her powerful evocation of themes of alienation and dislocation. Visual sign and reality in Rhys's narratives seemingly never fit together.

In this chapter I will be looking at three instances of the Rhys woman engaging in cinematic viewing. In *Good Morning Midnight*, Sasha, having left the sanctuary of Serge's art studio, seeks shelter in a cinema away from the hostile gazes of the city streets. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia is taken to the cinema by Horsfield after her public disagreement with the eponymous Mr Mackenzie, but her seeming lack of engagement with the film on show disrupts the spectacle for her companion; while in *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna Morgan finds association and solidarity with the foreign actress of a contemporary British crime comedy, further distancing her from identification with English respectability. In each of these depictions there is significant interplay between mirrored reflections and distorted

representations on screen, covering both the fantastical nature of fictional film narratives, as well as cinema's more ethnographic documentation of everyday life. This manifests as a crossover between the personal internalisation of image/identity through the mirror and the socially constructed *mis*representations via cinematic imagery, with the Rhys woman superimposing the latter onto the former.

I open my discussion on Rhys and cinema with the above musings by Sasha Jansen and Anna Morgan because they serve well to start drawing out the relevant connections between mirrors, photographs, films, and Rhys's commentary on the failures of such visual mechanisms. The identifications and comparisons made with images reflected back from the cinema screen mirror the use of looking-glasses in Rhys's narratives as metaphorical devices exploring visual (mis)representation. In the distorted mirror of the cinema screen Rhys's characters are faced with reflections of their own existence, but the cinema also offers acknowledgement that what is viewed in the mirror/screen does not always depict reality, that the visual media of contemporary mass culture cannot always provide a true representation.

Mirrors frequently appear in the texts as a sign of fractured identities. Earlier in my reading of Rhys and make-up I discussed the narrative of the gilt compact mirror in *Smile Please*, where the mirror is used as a way for Rhys to write about failed or incomplete whiteness, her awareness of her failure to mirror the ideals of English respectability. So too the analysis in my last chapter of the dreamscape Sasha imagines as she views Serge's paintings in his studio. When Sasha goes into Serge's studio she fantasises of a similar empty space for herself, containing not much more than a bed and a looking-glass. While the studio may appear as a sort of utopian space for Sasha to escape from the alienating world outside, the room with the mirror hints at the impossibility of a disinterested artistic sphere. The Rhys woman will always be reminded of the objectifying process of being looked at. The mirror serves as a moment of self-framing, an attempt at reaffirmation of identity that plays to the idea of the female as object of the gaze.

Mirroring undoubtedly evokes the Caribbean and Europe—the 'two tunes' of *Voyage in the Dark*'s working title—as doubled and distorted spaces. But how do the cinema and the mirror work together in this respect? What does cinema add to Rhys's critique on the process of seeing and being seen, as well as her representation of this on a formal level? One could certainly continue the ekphrastic analysis from the previous chapter.[1] Instead I

[1] According to Emery, 'if we consider Françoise Meltzer's emphasis on ekphrasis as a "version of the intercalated story or 'frame story,'" we can see the film-within-the-novel as an intercalated story which suspends the action of the larger story in order to "concentrate on the 'telling in full' of a different tale." […] Rather than producing a full, multiple, and interleaved narrative, the frame collapses, and the

want to situate Rhys in the context of modernist debates about the literary and the cinematic.[2] James Joyce briefly ran the first cinema in Dublin, The Volta, in December 1909, the prominent film magazine *Close Up* began life in the twenties, The Film Society was founded in 1925, and numerous essays were published contemporaneous to Rhys—Woolf's 'The Cinema' (1926) and Elizabeth Bowen's 'Why I Go to the Cinema' (1938) but two examples. I place Rhys contextually alongside some of these texts to show how she was engaging in pre-existing debates about the medium as a representational tool, in particular cinema's potential to enhance a fictional work's engagement with the politics of aesthetics.

In 1926 Woolf saw *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) at The Film Society, questioning afterwards in 'The Cinema' whether 'there is some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye?'.[3] If this is an allusion to the sort of language Woolf was searching for in her experimental novels, as Lara Feigel questions, then comparison can perhaps be made to Rhys and the way her literature responds to cinema both as form and subject matter. As Sasha thinks in *Good Morning, Midnight*: 'she speaks to me in a language that is no language. But I understand it' (50).[4] I am

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difference between the two narratives is lost, creating a sense of a larger story suddenly aborted.' Emery, *Modernism*, pp.217-18.

[2] My focus on the interplay between cinema and literature from the modernist period is indebted to the following key texts: David Trotter's *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Laura Marcus' *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lara Feigel's *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930-1945: Reading Between the Frames* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); and, in relation to poetry, Susan McCabe's *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Marcus' interdisciplinary study looks at the impact of cinema on early twentieth century literature, aesthetics and culture, focusing on the newness of film, its recognition as an art form, and the importance of the writer in documenting the medium's early years. Marcus does this by exploring the cinema/literature relationship as one dependent on time and place: 'Fictional representations and literary incorporations of the cinematic, and statements by early writers on film, frequently inscribed a history, and a historiography, of pre-cinematic and cinematic modes and technologies' (14). Marcus reads texts in conjunction with writings that aim to capture the impact of film, keeping in sight time and place specificities.

Trotter's approach is grounded by an engagement with Andre Bazin's claim that the best way to understand the relations between twentieth century literature and cinema was as a 'certain aesthetic convergence'; how cinema shares modernist literature's concern to break with conventional forms of representation to render a more complex reality. Trotter moves away from the ahistorical emphasis on technique to reveal 'a shared concern of modernist writing and early mainstream cinema with the implications of a world in which representation without an intervening consciousness is possible' (xi). Trotter notes that the vast majority of discussions into literary modernism's relationship to cinema have committed themselves to the notion that the literary text is structured as though it were a film, with techniques of cinema—the close-up, edited cuts from shot to shot—transferrable to the page. But Trotter believes that literature's affinities with cinema 'should only be established on the basis of what a writer might have conceivably have known about cinema as it was at the time of writing' (2). Whilst modernist writing undoubtedly engaged with the new, literature and films of the period can best be understood 'as constituting and constituted by parallel histories', and what fascinated modernist writers so much was the 'original, and perhaps in some measure reproducible, neutrality' of the medium in offering a new method of representation' (3; 5).

[3] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie Vol.3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1988) pp.348-354 (quotation found in the Appendix of Vol. 3, p.594).

[4] Feigel reads Woolf in relation to way she used cinematic technique to 'politicise aesthetics, creating fiction that engaged actively with politics and history' (Feigel, pp.156-158 & pp.184-87).

particularly interested in the diction used by Rhys in her cinematic descriptions, the rhetorical strategies adopted and the linguistic similarities with other (literary and theoretical) commentators of the time. The model of the mirror, issues of reproduction and reproducibility, and the connection between cinema and everyday reality, align Rhys's fiction with theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno, Benjamin, and Kracauer. Rhys was working through, in literary form, many of the conceptual issues discussed by earlier theorists of the cinema.

What is particularly interesting about Rhys's engagement with cinema is its concern with the medium of film as well as the social contexts of its consumption. Rhys is alert to the tension between cinema as a site of sanctuary for women to escape the surveillance of the city streets, and as an articulation of the female subject constituted by and for public circulation and consumption. This draws into the second, interrelated aspect connecting to the colonial context of Rhys's work: film as a mode of propaganda for the promotion of the empire. The interface between cinema and literature in Rhys's writing produces a cinematic vision that incorporates social and imperial politics and history into the landscape of the texts. Crucial to this, as exemplified by the mirror and photograph of the *Smile Please* opening section, is the cinematic capacity to collapse past and present together in a painful realisation of personal stasis or impasse.

What makes Rhys's engagement with cinema different to her representation of the theatre or the visual arts, is that all of Rhys's heroines engage with the cinema as spectators, as part of the collective mass of the audience. This of course produces a very different experience to that within the theatre as chorus girls, and indeed their encounters with the world of contemporary modern art as artists' models. Their presence in the cinema auditorium breaks apart the traditional Mulvian active/male passive/female dynamic. I aim to explore the formal deployment of cinema in Rhys's narratives via the motif of the mirror in order better understand what cinema-viewing moments provide for Rhys's discussions of representational agency and identification. The double position of watching and being watched, and the fractures that emerge as a result, deal directly with Rhys's own troubled articulation of mimicry, doubling, and the alienation that follows.

Sasha Jensen's movement from Serge Rubin's art studio into the streets of Paris and then into a cinema provides a useful entry point. As discussed earlier, Sasha, Serge and the characters in his paintings form a band of displaced people in a space where artist, subject and consumer are rendered equal in a moment of social and visual levelling. The paintings leave the studio with Sasha, walking along with her and adding to her 'protective armour' on the streets. But this moment of solidarity and companionship is erased by her next venture into the Parisian night in a passage which immediately follows from the studio

narrative. Sasha enters a tabac, seeking shelter from the rain. Her presence in the bar is immediately rendered questionable: 'The woman at the bar gives me one of those looks: What do you want here, you? We don't cater for tourists here, not our clientele. … Well, dear madame, to tell you the truth, what I want here is a drink—I rather think two, perhaps three' (87). Sasha is singled out for her foreignness. The association she has made with the community of displaced identities in the studio is further reinforced, but now the protective armour has disappeared: 'everything has gone out of me except misery' (87).

Sasha at first tries to appear able to resist their hostility—'Never mind, here I am and here I'm going to stay' (87)—then asks for directions to the nearest cinema. This would be her second visit to the cinema in the novel, the first, following on from the questioning of her nationality by her hotel patron, also a movement into another physical space as response to accusations of her 'non-belongingness'. The later passage continues with Sasha explaining the reason for her request for directions:

> This, of course, arises from a cringing desire to explain my presence in the place. I only came here to inquire the way to the nearest cinema. I am a respectable woman, une femme convenable, on her way to the nearest cinema. Faites comme les autres—that's been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you.
>
> And a lot he cares—I should have spared myself the trouble. But this is my attitude to life. Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. (88)

Rhys here provides an alternative take on Horkheimer and Adorno's theorisation of the culture industry as a dangerous descent into mass deception (of manipulation into passivity), as she identifies the comforting possibility of a place within the mass.[5] It offers a welcome disguise of respectable conformity. Throughout the novel Sasha has found the invisibility she craves impossible to attain. She constantly searches for sanctuary from the gaze of the city, places that will provide anonymity from both herself and others, places 'where you hide from the wolves outside' (33). Sasha aims to explain her presence in the bar by asking directions to the cinema, an act that she hopes will make her one of the invisible mass in the auditorium, situating her as one of the collective as she admits to 'trying so hard to be like you'.

Indeed, during her earlier trip to the cinema at the start of the novel—part of the programme Sasha has devised to fill her day—she sits through the show twice, making sure

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[5] *Good Morning, Midnight*'s setting of Paris, October 1937, with the threat of world war looming, makes Adorno and Horkheimer's writings from 1939-44 particularly fitting for this analysis. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.94-136.

she laughs in the right places in an act of obedience to social etiquette. Her position as spectator becomes one of performer as she learns to play a role, as discussed in Chapter One. The repetition of 'faites comme les autres' in the second cinema section highlights not just the erosion of the autonomous subject produced through a desire to conform via modern mass culture, but also—in switching to the French—how Sasha's position is always made complex by her unstable personal identity. She is always removed from the mass because her notion of not belonging will always create a division—here a linguistic one. Describing her daily ritual of choosing a hat, trying to look like everyone else, Sasha makes the mirror and movie interchangeable signifiers, picking the act of cinema-going as a continuation of her attempt to anchor her identity in, to return to Konzett, 'seemingly unchallenged appearances of authenticity and belonging'.[6] But the bar and the cinema only momentarily exist to provide Sasha with respite from the 'dark, powerful, magical street' Sasha imagines walking in, recognising her for the lone drunk she is. Having been given directions, Sasha validates her place in the bar and can continue drinking, even as she is then forced to acknowledge her own failed performance.

Rhys moves the narrative towards a lengthy description of the film Sasha watches, in similar fashion to the ekphrastic deployment of various descriptions of paintings in this novel and others. With the provision of a full film synopsis—along with the spectator's responses to the narratives—Rhys disrupts the idea of cinema-going as a restorative act of social inclusion, moving the narrative deployment of cinema practice towards a more complex critique of the power relations at work in the act of film spectatorship. In the process, Rhys queries the adoption of a passive mode of viewing by the audience:

> The Cinéma Danton. Watching a good young man trying to rescue his employer from a mercenary mistress. The employer is a gay, bad old boy who manufactures toilet articles. The good young man has the awkwardness, the smugness, the shyness, the pathos of good young men. He interrupts intimate conversations, knocking loudly, bringing in letters and parcels etcetera, etcetera. At last the lady, annoyed, gets up and sweeps away. She turns at the door to say: 'Alors, bien, je te laisse à tes suppositoires.' Everybody laughs loudly at this, and so do I. She said that well.
>
> The film goes on and on. After many vicissitudes, the good young man is triumphant. He has permission to propose to his employer's daughter. He is waiting on the bank of a large pond, with a ring that he is going to offer her ready in his waist pocket. He takes it out to make sure that he has it. Mad with happiness, he strides up and down the shores of the pond, gesticulating. He makes too wild a gesture. The ring flies from his hand into the middle of the pond. He takes off his trousers; he wades out. He has to get the ring back; he must get it back. (89-90)

[6] Konzett, p.132.

This description offers a film plot that upholds a fantasy of social ascent, the 'good young man' who shows unrelenting loyalty to his employer is granted the opportunity to enhance his social status through marriage to the daughter, but is denied when his over-exuberant gesture causes him to lose the ring. Sasha not only recounts the entire film plot, but also the audience response: 'Everybody laughs loudly at this, and so do I'. Sasha is buying into the comedic value of the scene and joining in with the collective through a process of trained spectatorship, just as watching the show twice during her first visit to the cinema has trained her to respond in the right places. But she is not fully taken in by the moment. Sasha's comment 'She said that well' also hints at identification with the mercenary mistress. This is an acknowledgment of, and identification with, the performance on screen, with Sasha perhaps not laughing for the same reasons as the rest of the audience.

In her reading of this scene, Delia Caparoso Konzett turns to Siegfried Kracauer and his essay 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies', where he remarks that through the increasing commodification of cinema, commercial film has lost its revolutionary potential: 'Indeed, the films made for the lower classes are even more bourgeois than those aimed at finer audiences, precisely because they hint at subversive points of view without exploring them'.[7] The film Sasha watches maintains its seemingly subversive tone, in keeping with Kracauer's argument, up to the point where the audience mocks the manufacturer's loss of his mistress. But this is neatly contained by the close, as the final section of the film—to quote Konzett's reading of the same passage—'restores the balance between respectability based on social class and subversive humour'.[8] The power of cinema to dampen its subversive elements and restore social convention narrows down to the individual with Sasha's comment in the next part of the passage: 'Exactly the sort of thing that happens to me. I laugh till the tears come into my eyes. However, the film shows no signs of stopping, so I get up and go out' (90). Here then, Sasha's identification is placed not with the mercenary mistress but with the good young man. There is a degree of predictability in what happens to the film's protagonist, a predictability that is familiar to Sasha as she identifies with the man making an exhibition of himself wading into the pond. The promise or hint at social elevation for the man to marry his manager's daughter is at this stage thwarted, just as Sasha's social elevation—her return to Paris as a moneyed consumer and observer—is diminished by her identification with the character on screen. Sasha's laughter turning into tears becomes an echo of her desire to react as everyone else does, but her

[7] Konzett, p.161; Kracauer, p.291. Walter Benjamin speaks of cinema's revolutionary potential, describing the loss of the 'aura' of a work of art as offering the potential for it to function for political purposes. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp.219-53.
[8] Konzett, p.161.

mirroring with the film protagonist turns her reaction into one of shame. This stems from an over-identification, because Sasha believes she knows how the film will end. Her departure from the auditorium is now also a rejection of the film's inevitable romantic conclusion, something we know is an impossibility for Sasha.

Sasha experiences a similar moment of mirrored identification as she did with the painting of the old Jew and the banjo she bought from Serge Rubin, and we can find instances such as this littered throughout the novel. One such example is Sasha's response to a lady purchasing a hat. Sasha can see the woman's face reflected in a mirror: 'I stand outside, watching. I can't move. Hat after hat she puts on, makes that face at herself in the glass and throws it off again. Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become?' (58). Moments later, Sasha herself goes to purchase her own hat: 'In the glass it seems to me that I have the same demented expression as the woman up the street' (58). Sasha has identified with, and then taken on, the persona of the old woman that is projected by the mirror. In this respect, the mirrored reflections of looking-glass/painting/film all reflect an identity that reminds Sasha of her social predicament.

Konzett argues that Sasha's identification with the young hero 'preserves the potentially subversive message drowned out by the restorative plot'.[9] This identification pre-empts her exit from the cinema at the moment when both the character on screen and Sasha in the audience are reminded of their unstable social positions. In this reading, Sasha's exit from the cinema occurs because she is acting against the film's attempt to uphold its fantasy of bourgeois social elevation. With the film showing no signs of stopping, Sasha senses that escape from this mirroring or doubling with the film character is diminished because the line between art and reality is blurred—both suffer from the same effects of their social exhibition. But while Sasha is aware of the film's manipulations—she is able to read the visual signs of the language that connects the young man and herself—she is caught between leaving the auditorium and staying as part of a mass she cannot fully become part of. The agency gained from a position of spectatorship is undercut by her mirroring of the on-screen presentation. This more fully focuses attention on Sasha's own social displacement.

In 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', Horkheimer and Adorno contend that the culture industry serves to support the totalitarian instincts of modern capitalism, in part because the interests of those in control of the cultural industries, including cinema, are inextricably linked to the interests of all other capitalist industries. The culture industry is likened by Horkheimer and Adorno to fascism; in its attempt to reconfigure social relations within a homogenised society, it turns people into

[9] Konzett, p.162.

complacent consumers by depicting a seemingly realistic world that is, in reality, nothing more than a collection of stereotypes and propaganda methods. In this respect, Sasha's refusal to continue watching the film can be read as a challenge to its bourgeois cultural restoration, yet her ability to maintain this moment of resistance is immediately thwarted as she adopts the language and posture of social convention at the bar next door. Again, the film shows no signs of stopping; Sasha is not left unaffected by the film's message. She goes to the bar and attempts to re-enact her own scene of bourgeois respectability as begun earlier:

> Another Pernod in the bar next door to the cinema. I sit at a corner table and sip it respectably, with lowered eyes. Je suis une femme convenable, just come out of the nearest cinema.… Now I really am O.K., chère madame. If I have a bottle of Bordeaux at dinner I'll almost be as drunk as I'd hoped to be. (90)

The dislocation Sasha experiences when she leaves the cinema is a singular fate, she is the only one leaving before the film's conclusion. Sasha's social status, her transient existence in Paris as she wanders from place to place through the city, always thwarts her attempts at solidarity with others. The collective band of misfits from Serge's studio has given way to an abstract model of mass culture—to borrow Kracauer's phrase, a 'mass ornament'—that is comprised of faceless, anonymous, passive spectators. But any notion that Sasha can continue in her role of subjective observer as adopted in Serge's art studio is impeded. Sasha's 'facelessness'—'no name, no face, no country' (38)—paradoxically makes her too visible.[10]

At the close of the cinema section Serge's painting of the old Jew with the banjo returns to mock Sasha. That the effects of her cinematic identification spills back into Sasha's everyday life, with a blurring between filmic representation and reality, mimics exactly what Horkheimer and Adorno see as a duplication between film and everyday life. They write:

> The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema. Since the abrupt introduction of the sound film, mechanical duplication has become entirely subservient to this objective. According to this tendency, life is to be made indistinguishable from the sound film. Far more strongly than the theatre of illusion, film denies its audience any

[10] The intertext with Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) can be acknowledged in relation to Sasha's 'no name, no face, no country'. Woolf's expansive gesture—'as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world' offers comparison to Sasha's geographical homelessness which is a sign of her lack of any kind of identity (p.229).

> dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination—contained by the film's framework but unsupervised by its precise actualities—without losing the thread; thus it trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality.[11]

This blurring of boundaries between film and everyday reality in Rhys's fiction stretches across cultural forms, from the art studio to the commercial space of the hat shop. The mirror is utilised by Rhys precisely to draw this out; its properties—the reflective aspect, its ability to frame—providing the necessary similarities across the spaces. The product of Sasha's mirrored identifications (with the characters in Serge's paintings, the lady in the hat shop, and more explicitly here with the young man in the film) can find some definition via what Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' calls an estrangement or exile. Benjamin quotes playwright Pirandello and his description of the estrangement felt by the film actor who:

> feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering in an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence…[12]

For Benjamin, this strangeness is 'basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror'.[13] The mirroring Sasha experiences produces an unstable switching between active/subject, passive/object spectator positioning, with this binary undergoing a forcible collapse which maintains Sasha's social and personal exile. In Rhys's writing the reflected image has, continuing with Benjamin, 'become separable, transportable' and, perhaps, transferrable, accounting for Sasha's unease at her identification with the images on screen and her subsequent withdrawal from the cinema auditorium.[14]

The connections offered between cinema and mirror in this instance are reminiscent of the deployment of mirrors in Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) where the audience members of the story's main pageant are revealed to themselves via strategically placed mirrors held up by the actors. As Lara Feigel notes:

> Woolf's characters are subjected to the experience of absent presence. Seeing themselves in the mirror, they come face to face with their own reproducibility. At the same time as they become aware of their own bodies in a visceral moment of embodied spectatorship, they begin to doubt the authenticity (or presence) of their original selves: 'scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that?"[15]

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[11] Horkheimer and Adorno, pp.99-100.
[12] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.231.
[13] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.231.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Feigel, p.185.

Feigel writes that in Woolf's context, a post-mirror-stage self-consciousness is needed for one to recognise one's own distorted self, and I think this is also exactly where Rhys positions Sasha.[16] Sasha, like a young Rhys recognising her difference via the portrait photograph from her youth as described in *Smile Please*, is caught in a moment of unforeseen, undesired recognition that is too painful to continue to look at. The cinema spills out into the city streets. The section ending with Sasha's re-identification with the painting's banjo player reveals that she remains caught in a complex network of representations which offer little chance of escape.

The Cinematic City

In 'The Culture Industry' Horkheimer and Adorno write that to walk from the street into the cinema is no longer to enter the world of dream, for the fantasy of restorative spectacle within the cinema auditorium does not exist; it has been replaced by a pseudo-subversive replication of the reality of daily existence.[17] We are talking here of movement, between reality and illusion, past and present, cinema and cityscape. Key to the insertion of the cinema narrative into the space of the text in *Good Morning, Midnight* is Sasha's movement between the cinema and spaces of/in the city. The city is crucial to Rhys's deployment of the cinema in her novels, for the relationship between cinema and the city landscape is a necessary one, far from co-incidental. Similarly, the connection between the city and Rhys's writing has become an ever-important aspect of her critical discourse. As I mentioned in my introduction to this study, the relationship between Rhys's literature and urban space has flourished in recent critical analyses, yet any connection between this and Rhys's use of the cinema is noticeably lacking. As yet, no detailed investigation exists which focuses on the intersection of cinema (as thematic trope and formal quality), the urban setting of the novels, and Rhys discussion of doubled or fractured identities.

Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of research into the ways in which cinema has impacted upon cities, in particular the ways in which the city has, through cinema, provided a dynamic space of representation. The relationship between cinema and the city is one uniting 'the most important cultural form—cinema—and the most important form of social organization—the city—in the twentieth century'.[18] To

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[16] Feigel, p.186.

[17] Indeed, they continue: 'the culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasure issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged: the promise, which actually comprises the entire show, disdainfully intimates that there is nothing more to come, that the diner must be satisfied with reading the menu'. Horkheimer and Adorno, p.111.

[18] Mark Shiel, 'Cinema and the City in History and Theory', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. by Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.1-18 (p.1).

quote Jean Baudrillard: 'Where is the cinema? It is all around you outside, all over the city, that marvellous, continuous performance of films and scenarios'.[19] It is undeniable that the cinema has been shaped by the historical development of the city, much in the same way that that the cityscape is often conceived of as a screenscape; Rhys's awareness of this evidenced by her description of the streets of Paris looking 'like the best German films' in her unpublished short story 'And Paris – Sinister'.[20] There is a peculiar homology of being within both the city and the cinema auditorium, and a unique relationship between the individual and the mass in both; the cinema is not just a form of escapism, but also—and in clear connection with Rhys's treatment of the subject in her modernist fiction—'a possible encounter with one's own unsettling displacement as a member of a homogenised mass audience'.[21] There has been a flourish of studies on the cinema and city nexus, including David Clarke (ed.) *The Cinematic City* (1997), Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice's edited collection *Cinema and the City* (2001), and from a cultural studies perspective James Donald's *Imagining the Modern City* (1999).[22] These texts focus on the recognition within film studies of the city as the archetypal ground for examination of visual experience. The shift in emphasis towards a joint film/urban studies model is one which complements a deeper analysis of Rhys's focus on visual experience as related to the urban landscape than has thus far been produced.

According to Shiel, 'formally, the cinema has long had a striking and distinctive ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism' of the urban environment, one that finds comparison with the writings of modernist thinkers on the subject.[23] Walter Benjamin stands as an influential figure whose acknowledgement of the correlation between cinema and the city is often overlooked. Benjamin recognised the relationship between visual sensations, the city and the cinema. Confronted by modernity, mass society and mechanical reproduction, he noted how cultural transformations registered shifts in sense perception, with film corresponding to these changes such that they could be experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street. As Clarke notes in a reading of Benjamin and the city: 'The new *technick* of cinema—the German term evoking 'technology' as well as 'technique'—registered such a shift in the field of human perception, one that worked to sensitize people to aspects of the world that had previously

[19] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p.56.
[20] Jean Rhys, 'And Paris—Sinister', *Jean Rhys Archive*, 1.1:6, p.1.
[21] Konzett, p.161.
[22] *The Cinematic City*, ed. by David Clarke (London: Routledge, 1997); James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. by Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
[23] Shiel, p.1.

gone unnoticed; that were not previously recognised or even recognisable as reality'.[24] Cinema acts in this instance as a sort of cultural leveller, bringing people and things into contact with one another in previously unimaginable ways.

So too in modernist fiction was the cinema frequently represented as part of the city landscape, and the city as a cinematic space. The following passage from the 'Present Day' section of Woolf's *The Years* is emblematic of this relationship:

> They were driving along a bright crowded street; here stained ruby with the light from picture palaces; here yellow from shop windows gay with summer dresses, for the shops, though shut, were still lit up, and people were still looking at dresses, at flights of hats on little rods, at jewels […]
>
> 'Where's he taking us?' she said, looking out. They had reached the public part of London; the illuminated. The light fell on broad pavements; on white brilliantly lit-up public offices; on a pallid, hoary-looking church. Advertisements popped in and out.[25]

Here the cinema is part of the public face of the city, and its patrons part of the spectacle of urban life. A frequently deployed image within modernist fiction is that of an audience waiting outside of the cinema, suggestive of the extent to which the city had become part of the cinematic space. Woolf continues:

> she saw the ruby-splashed pavement, and faces mobbed at the door of a picture palace; apathetic, passive faces; the faces of people drugged with cheap pleasures; who had not even the courage to be themselves, but must dress up, imitate, pretend.[26]

Like Woolf, Rhys's interwar fiction maps the city through various sites of spectatorship. In the process, she presents the cinema as a space that straddles the public/private divide, offering the opportunity for contemplative rest whilst simultaneously revealing the fragile existence of the female in the city, dependent upon imitation and identity performance. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* protagonist Julia Martin uses the cinema to find refuge from the labyrinthine streets of Notting Hill. Again, the cinema here acts as a retreat. Julia's passivity watching the film is a continuation of a spell she has felt under that forbids thinking as she walks the streets:

> At last she got on a bus and went to a cinema in the Edgware Road. A comic film was going on, and a woman behind her laughed, 'Heh, heh, heh.' A fat, comfortable laugh, pleasant to listen to, so that without looking round she could tell what the woman was like.
>
> After the comedy she saw young men running races and some of them collapsing exhausted. And then – strange anti-climax – young women ran races and also collapsed exhausted, at which the audience rocked with laughter.

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[24] Clarke, p.2.
[25] Woolf, *The Years*, pp.300-303.
[26] Woolf, *The Years*, p.350.

> She came out of the cinema at nine o'clock, ate something at a Lyon's tea-shop, went back to her bedroom, and slept. (84-85)

Julia uses the cinema as part of a strict regime of planning her day, finding a space to exist away from the spotlight of public life in much the same way Sasha did in the Paris of *Good Morning, Midnight*: 'Planning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminal. Sleep' (15). This meticulous diary-planning is adopted as a counter to the labyrinthine city where spaces seem to merge into one another and the Rhys woman is left without direction or purpose.

Female experiences in new public arenas including the cinema offered the opportunity for new methods of collective viewing. With cinemas frequently termed 'dream palaces' they were seen to present a location for the consumption of mass culture that appealed to female sensibilities. In film commentary of the time the cinema was often viewed as a positive female domain, and with her characters attempting to engage with cinema as a potential space of rest, Rhys appears at first glance to document cinema experience in a similar fashion to other contemporary female commentators. Below is an excerpt from film critic C.A Lejeune's essay 'On Enjoyment' which was published in the *Manchester Guardian* in October 1925:

> Last Saturday afternoon—it is always on a Saturday afternoon, towards tea and lamplight, that these pleasant things seem to happen—I paid sixpence for an incredibly uncomfortable seat next to an incredibly fat woman just under the screen of an incredibly soiled picture-house, watched an incredibly bad film, and was happy … If you would look for reasons—though it is ill work analysing enjoyment—I can give you two. It was partly the set of the heroine's nose and partly the hands of the assistant hero … Foolish? Yes. But enjoyment always is. Those of you who really find pleasure in moving pictures as moving pictures, who have been on good terms with them as entertainment before anyone thought of discovering them as an art, will understand me when I say that the things in the kinema I have most enjoyed have been the trivial things, the personal things, that react straight upon the fancy and let intelligence go by…[27]

Lejeune's position is one of engagement, of inclusion within the confines of the cinema. It provides her 'foolish enjoyment' that does not require significant thought for identification with the visual attractions of the film, thus providing a moment to detachment too. Unlike the visual processes discussed in my previous chapter on modernist painting, this is not about the aesthetics of what is viewed, but primarily about the act of spectatorship and what that provides for the women who are participating. In this respect Lejeune's commentary, like Rhys's, reveals an awareness of the attraction of detachment as gained

[27] C. A. Lejeune, 'The Week on Screen: Monochrome and Colour', *Manchester Guardian* (17 October 1925), in Marcus, p.303.

through a cinema visit. See this passage from her essay published in the *Guardian*, January 1926:

> [T]he kinema must please women or die. The vast majority of picture-goers are women and always will be. […] The warmth in winter, the coolness in summer, the darkness, the sleepy music, the chance to relax unseen are all women's pleasure which no man, however tired he may be, can ever quite appreciate or understand.[28]

There can be no doubt that the cinema (or 'kinema', as Lejeune termed it at this stage) held the ability to act as restorative sanctuary for some women. But in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Rhys again disrupts this notion as the text places its protagonist in a position of unease within the auditorium space.

Julia's detachment from the film, her inability to engage in its soothing properties, is related to her liminal identity within the urban sphere. As a single woman of ambiguous racial background, with no money, no job and no male support, the cinema (its darkness, warmth, the sleepy music) appears to suggest a suspension of agency within the act of viewing for Julia. With the cinematic experience described (both in Rhys's novels as well as the writings of female commentators like Lejeune) in terms of passivity, and because Rhysian agency is often expressed in terms of escape or refusal, the concept of agency to describe Rhys's protagonists' reaction to cinema seems at first to be problematic. But in the passages from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, as with the treatments of cinema in *Good Morning, Midnight*, it is possible to frame Rhys's discussion in terms of identification, or as providing the possibility of epistemological agency. What is sought for escape turns out to produce a form of self-recognition, even if this maintains a negative quality. Again, the mirror emerges as a useful way in to Rhys's depiction of this.

Having been left by the eponymous Mr Mackenzie six months previously and her stipend of 300francs ended, Julia is left to find anther man to provide her monetary support. Her first interaction with new suitor George Horsfield begins with a scene of spectacle. Horsfield catches a glimpse of Julia confronting Mackenzie with a weak slap across his face in a restaurant. Although Mackenzie hopes the 'ghastly incident had happened so quickly that it was long odds against anybody having seen it' (27), Horsfield does catch sight of it. His response highlights the familiar rhetoric of distorting overspill between cinematic fictional fantasy and everyday reality, described via the motif of the mirrored reflection: 'There had been something fantastic, almost dream-like, about seeing a thing like that reflected in the looking-glass. A bad looking-glass too. So that the actors had been slightly distorted, as in an unstill pool of water' (28). What Horsfield sees is action that is decidedly performative in nature; as Mackenzie describes it: 'The discarded mistress—the

[28] Lejeune, 'The Week on Screen', *Manchester Guardian* (15 January 1926), in Marcus, p.304.

faithful lawyer defending the honour of the client.… A situation consecrated as comical by ten thousand farces and a thousand comedies' (24). This restaurant scene finds numerous counterparts in films of the same period, where such a location facilitates urban spectacle and the observation of others. British-German production *The Golden Butterfly* (1926) is one such film, where the heroine is a cashier at a London restaurant and the film returns several times to her watching the various eccentric customers. So too Walter Ruttmann's silent film *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927), particularly Act 5, with the restaurant scene a significant part of the 'city symphony' genre.

Horsfield sits watching the scene unfold before him in a pose not unlike that produced in a cinema auditorium. He is seated in such a way that every time he looks up he is bound to see the mirrored reflection of Mackenzie's head and Julia's face, as if in an over-the-shoulder shot projected onto a screen. But Horsfield's view expands from the one-dimensionality of the mirror image (as it replicates a cinematic visual experience) into three-dimensional reality, because he can see both the image produced by the reflection in the mirror and the 'deliberately picturesque' sight of Mackenzie from the front.

In 1909 Roger Fry wrote briefly on the 'cinematograph', his comments first published in 'An Essay in Aesthetics' and then reprinted in 1920 for *Vision and Design*. Fry acknowledged the connections between cinema and city but made clear his distinction between the cinematograph and everyday street-scenes observed via the frame of a mirror. He presents a 'true spectator' that can watch street-life via a mirror with total detachment:

> A somewhat similar effect to that of the cinematograph can be obtained by watching a mirror in which a street scene is reflected. If we look at the street itself we are almost sure to adjust ourselves in some way to its actual existence. We recognise an acquaintance, and wonder why he looks so dejected this morning, or become interested in a new fashion in hats—the moment we do that the spell is broken, we are reacting to life in however slight a degree, but, in the mirror, it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole. It then, at once, takes on the visionary quality, and we become true spectators, not selecting what we see, but seeing everything equally […] The frame of the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life. The frame of the mirror makes its surface into a very rudimentary work of art, since it helps us to attain to the artistic vision.[29]

Rhys turns this argument around with Horsfield's response to the scene he watches in the mirror. His reaction to Julia slapping Mackenzie's face, and Julia looking as though she is about to cry, disrupts the spectator/actor boundary and places him as part of the scene, an uncomfortable position that, like Sasha, prevents him from continuing to watch. In this respect, Rhys appears to be commenting on the demands that the sights and sounds of the

[29] Fry, pp.19-20.

city make on the urban observer, through the way the detachment Fry speaks of seems impossible for her characters to attain. The frame of the mirror here at once creates an imaginative artistic space—the initial distorted reflection Horsfield comments upon—whilst simultaneously reinforcing its reflection of a more uneasy reality.

After leaving the restaurant Horsfield finds Julia sitting in a café, and after spending some time observing her he approaches and they eventually leave together to go into a cinema. Horsfield averting his eyes from the previous image before him in the restaurant is now mirrored in this passage, again connecting the spectacle of everyday life in the city with the images projected onto the cinema screen:

> A loud clicking noise filled the emptiness. The lights went out and a strange, old-fashioned film flickered on the white screen. Someone began to play on a cracked piano. 'Valse Bleue', 'Myosotis', 'Püppchen'…. Mr Horsfield shut his eyes and listened to the pathetic voice of the old piano. (33-4)

The description of the cinema focuses on its emptiness and anonymity. Julia and Horsfield have entered a large, bare hall where the patrons are scattered apart on wooden seats. The audience members do not interact with each other; watching the film is a solitary act which requires no engagement with others. Only the mechanical process of the film's projection breaks the silence of the film. The passage continues:

> On the screen a strange, slim youth with a long, white face and mad eyes wooed a beautiful lady the width of whose hips gave an archaic but magnificent air to the whole proceeding.
>
> After a while a woman behind them told the world at large that everybody in the film seemed to be *dingo*, and that she did not like films like that and so she was going out.
>
> Mr Horsfield disliked her. He felt that in that bare place and to the accompaniment of that frail music the illusion of art was almost complete. He got a kick out of the place for some reason.
>
> The film was German and rather good.
>
> The noise of Julia blowing her nose jarred him like a light turned on suddenly in a room in which one is trying to sleep. Then, a sharp intake of her breath.
>
> Of course, he might have known that that was what she would do. (34)

Opposing Lejeune's assertion that the cinema contains women's pleasures that are both unintelligible to and unappreciated by men, it is Horsfield who finds the images on screen and the accompanying music to contain pleasurable, restorative properties. Producing a play between mirror and movie, Horsfield closes his eyes, this time to become immersed in the film in a moment of passive relaxation akin to Adorno and Horkeimer's observations. Horsfield finds in the moment a sense of beauty, the 'illusion of art' producing an instance of aesthetic pleasure. The spectacle of a man wooing a beautiful lady leaves Horsfield entranced, a stark contrast to that which unfolded in the restaurant.

But Horsfield's reverie is disrupted twice. First by the woman's negative comments on the film and then by Julia's crying which disrupts the illusory vision, bringing them both back into reality. Julia stands as the audible distraction in opposition to Horsfield's visual attention. In the restaurant Horsfield disrupted his own vision because his discomfort at seeing Julia about to cry forced him to look away. Here the visual paradigm is shifted. Julia has seen enough of the film to be moved. The scene of a young man wooing a beautiful lady reminds Julia of her now isolated position as a lone female without male companionship. Her ability to disrupt the act of vision for Horsfield is based on her recognition of her own precarious position, so while cinematic pleasure is appreciated by the male viewer, the film becomes almost too comprehensible for the female spectator.

This allusion to speech and silence sees Rhys following the pattern of other contemporary female commentators on film, including Dorothy Richardson, who was a significant contributor to the film journal *Close Up* which began publication in 1927. Central concepts in Richardson's writings for *Close Up* were speech and silence, the way audiences responded to varying viewing practices, and how audible commentary within the space of the cinema refused the position of passive spectator. Laura Marcus notes that in her writing 'Richardson began to gender silence as feminine, sound/speech as masculine and to portray women's film spectatorship as a negotiation of the terms of speech and silence' and thus a negotiation of the power structures within spectatorship.[30] Early cinema was from the start essentially a silent medium, with what was viewed on screen and what was heard in the cinema space clearly demarcated. In making its primary appeal to the eye, cinema was heavily reliant on an understanding of the power relations within the processes of looking; the supply of pleasure in early film was through visual spectacle with actors frequently looking at the camera providing a direct address to the audience. With the coming of sound and the shift to narrative form the relationship between sound and the image on screen was made complex, as audiences were discouraged from interaction with each other and guided towards watching longer films in relative silence.

Shelley Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture culture After the Nickelodeon* (2000) notes in general terms the historical and gendered dimensions to the practice of conversation within the cinema auditorium during screenings, which 'was replaced by viewing practices that de-emphasized both the theater space and the viewer's

[30] Laura Marcus, 'Introduction: Continuous Performance: Dorothy Richardson', in *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp.149-159 (p.156).

body […] a model of silent, absorbed spectatorship became the norm'.[31] Analysis of conversation occurring within cinema space leads naturally to discussion of the complex relationship between active and passive viewing positions, particularly in regards to gender differences, the agency of female audience members and the role of female film critics. Richardson often addressed the question of woman who talked in the cinema. With the (audible) modern woman apparently refusing the position of passive (silent) spectator, her speech seemingly destroys the power of what is projected before her. According to Richardson, there is agency in speech, because the vocal, female viewer is neither absorbed nor subsumed into the spectacle. As Marcus writes, 'such a woman, in refusing a position of identification with the "silent, stellar radiance" of the female star shining from the 'surface' of the screen, also refuses the position of the passive spectator', and Marcus accurately reads Richardson's article as a counter to Kracauer's 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies'.[32]

And yet the ability, or otherwise, to utilise the position of spectatorship in the cinema moves the characters in Rhys's writings away from notions of agency and power. Contrast Horsfield's initial engagement with the cinema with a later description of cinema-going practices as related by Julia:

> It was three o'clock, and before each of the cinemas a tall commissionaire was calling: 'Plenty of seats. Seats at one-and-two. Plenty of seats.'
>
> Vague-looking people hesitated for a moment, and then drifted in, to sit in the dark and see *Hot Stuff from Paris*. The girls were perky and pretty, but it was strange to see how many of the older women looked drab and hopeless, with timid, hunted expressions. They looked ashamed of themselves, as if they were begging the world in general not to notice they were women or to hold it against them. (50)

The final sentence of this passage resonates with a sense of shame felt by the older women of Rhys's novels, connecting back to Julia's tearful reaction to the cinema experience she shared with Horsfield. The women in this passage, like Sasha and Julia, all share a desire for anonymity and an escape from their exhibition in the streets of the city. The cinema may offer a sanctuary from the spectacle of the streets, the chance to immerse oneself into the collective of an audience. But for Rhys's protagonists, any hint of agency gained as a spectator is diminished by an over-identification with what is presented on screen as a mirrored reflection. The overspill between cinematic fantasy and every reality facilitates a process of self-recognition, of painful acknowledgement of a marginalised status within the

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[31] In Britain this audience was almost exclusively working-class, watching films that often addressed class-specific pain and indignation. Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.27.

[32] Marcus, pp.358-9.

social sphere for Julia, one that is likewise replicated by Sasha's engagement with the cinema.

Women Writing Film

As Laura Marcus states, '[f]ilm then, as a mass entertainment art form, appeared to be a cultural leveller that had brought into being a new collective subject'.[33] But, as Marcus continues, the cinema's 'uncertain cultural status' meant that 'commentating voices ended up adopting a variety of vantage points and perspectives, inclusionist and exclusionist, ironic and otherwise.'[34] Even as the contributions of critics like Richardson broadened awareness of the intricacies of female film spectatorship, what often set these critics apart from the women they described as inhabiting the cinema auditorium was social class. Once again, this also distinguishes Rhys's writings associated with film from her contemporaries. Marcus points out that critics such as Lejeune (who entered the journalist profession through family connections) and Richardson, frequently used the collective pronoun 'we' in articles to act as a cultural leveller.[35] In reality however, there was a clear class distinction operating within the cinema, with the commentating voice most often operating from a middle-brow position while it sought to speak of and for all. As Marcus continues, "'talking in the cinema" was very much a question, though it was often confused or occluded, of who was talking, or appeared to be talking, to whom, and in what mode of address'.[36]

Jeffrey Richards, in his near-encyclopaedic study of cinema and society in the 1930s, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, provides a comprehensive analysis of cinema attendance in the period. Working through a multitude of studies and surveys undertaken at the time, Richards presents cinema as *the* visual art of the people, with audiences primarily comprised of young, working class, urban females. In 1934 statistician Simon Rowson undertook one of the first major surveys of cinema-going in Great Britain.[37] Among his findings was the conclusion that 'about 43 per cent of all cinema admissions were at prices not exceeding 6d. each and about another 37 per cent paid not more that 10d.'—his research suggesting that the majority of cinema-goers were working class, filling the cheap seats.[38] Similarly, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* from 1935 noted that women tended to go to the cinema in the afternoon, with housewives attending after shopping and before their

[33] Marcus, p.298.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] This is three years before the founding of the Mass Observation project, which documented everyday life in Britain as part of a comprehensive social research exercise.
[38] Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.12.

children returned home from school, with the evenings dominated by a more youthful audience.[39] Switching between Paris and London, it is amongst those children, young people and working class families identified by the numerous enquiries and commissions that took place in the interwar period that Rhys sits her protagonists, using cinema-going to interrogate the power dynamics operating within the act of looking and to question the notion of cinema as a social leveller through the eyes of what Konzett terms her 'déclassé middle class' female protagonists.[40]

Commentators like Lejeune held privileged professional status within the cinema stalls, and as such their analysis of female audiences was, as Marcus succinctly notes, 'often predicated on the imagined experiences of the working-class woman, so that the exploration of film-going often became a form of cultural ethnography, with the writer on film becoming a 'participant observer,' watching the audience as much as, or to a greater extent than, the images on the screen'.[41] Marcus quotes Dorothy Richardson's first 'Continuous Performance' article for *Close Up* as an example of how the working-class audience became a curious form of subject to be studied:

> It was a Monday and therefore a new picture. But it was also washday, and yet the scattered audience was composed almost entirely of mothers. Their children, apart from the infants accompanying them, were at school and their husbands were at work. It was a new audience, born within the last few months. Tired women, their faces sheened with toil, and small children, penned in semi-darkness and foul air on a sunny afternoon. There was almost no talk. Many of the women sat alone, figures of weariness at rest. Watching these I took comfort. At last the world of entertainment had provided for a few pence, tea thrown in, a sanctuary for mothers, an escape from the everlasting qui vive into eternity on a Monday afternoon.[42]

Despite it being washday, the women Richardson shares the cinema with have sought to forego their household duties in the pursuit of a passive form of entertainment which enables them 'rest', 'silence', 'sanctuary' and 'escape'. Richardson's description of the dark, foul-smelling auditorium here is very similar to Anna Morgan's narrative of her trip to the cinema in *Voyage in the Dark*, which 'smelt of poor people, and on the screen ladies and gentlemen in evening dress walked about with strained smiles' (93). Anna's position as a member of the audience is a complex one. Once again the cinema acts as a sanctuary from

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[39] Richards, p.15.

[40] Konzett, p.128. Konzett further describes Rhys's heroines as exemplifying 'the common, though often overlooked status of the *Angestellte*, the clerical worker or service industry employee who occupies a tenuous middle position between the urban proletarian and the established middle classes. […] The *Angestellte*, Kracauer noticed, was particularly prone to the seductions of commodity culture, with its appeal to bourgeois style and taste. Adapting bourgeois mannerisms, however, could not hide the fact that socially and economically, the[y] resembled the despised working class. The *Angestellte* thus embodied from its inception an alienated and dislocated consciousness within an emerging mass culture'. p.154.

[41] Marcus, p.305.

[42] Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance' (July 1927), pp.35-6, in *Close Up*, pp.160-1.

her exposure in the public spaces of London, but not just as a single young woman, also as a colonial. Anna visits the cinema with her new acquaintance Ethel Matthews in order to see Ethel's friend who is an extra in the film. Anna is using the cinema as a means of killing time, of filling the day while she waits to be contacted by her current lover. The use of cinema as a means of escape or sanctuary from 'the everlasting qui vive into eternity' connects Richardson's narratorial voice above to Rhys's protagonist, whose personal ennui and complex social status forces her to find respite in the act of cinema going.

What is interesting in Richardson's commentary is the awareness of who is looking at what, and indeed who. Richardson identifies that even as the gaze is focused on the screen, it likewise is directed towards those who fill the auditorium seats. Despite the darkness of the halls, the female cinema spectator is also on show. Note another of Richardson's 'Continuous Performance essays from December 1927, titled 'The Increasing Congregation':

> There's pictures going on all over London always making something to do whenever you want to go out, specially those big new ones with orchestras. Splendid. It's the next best thing to a dance and sure to be good you can get a nice meal at a restaurant and decide while you're there and if the one you choose is full up there's another round the corner nothing to fix up and worry about. And it's all so nice nothing poky and those fine great entrance halls everything smart and just right and waiting there for friends you feel in society like anybody else if your hat's all right and your things and my word the ready-mades are so cheap nowadays you need never go shabby and the commissionaires and all those smart people about makes you *feel* smart. It's as good an evening as you can have and time for a nice bit of supper afterwards.[43]

Richardson speaks of an awareness of being viewed; in the entrance hall the congregation are at once being looked at and returning that gaze. The before and after moments of cinema spectatorship are just as important as the actual film. This draws me back to Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, the performance of identity and the identifications she makes with her fellow audience members and the actress presented on screen. With *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys addresses issues of spectatorship in terms of both class and race.

The Empire on Screen

My study of Rhys's engagement with cinema has focused on a time when the medium (itself an emerging technology) held the ability to dramatise as spectacle the profound impact of new technologies on society and culture. Cinema finds its origin at a moment when the development of an urban consumer culture intersected with the accelerating impact of new

[43] Richardson, 'Continuous Performance VI: The Increasing Congregation' (December 1927), in *Close Up*, pp.170-1.

visual technologies. These technologies altered the way perception was produced and conceived, they were new forms of spectacle that blurred the boundaries between reality and fictional representation. New modes of communication, travel and mass entertainment were becoming global, and politics seemingly more national. Indeed, 'from around 1880 to the outbreak of WWI,' Stephen Kern notes, 'a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space'.[44] Anxieties about the perceived compression of space and time often found focus in racial and cultural otherness. Running concurrent with declining imperial power, the build-up to the First World War and significant changes in the social makeup of Britain, cinema presented a challenge to its spectators to learn how to read and interpret the information on screen through new articulations of vision and identity. As Dorothy Richardson noted, audiences were learning to become world citizens, joining 'the world-wide conversations now increasingly upon us in which the cinema may play, amongst its numerous other rôles, so powerful a part'.[45] Rhys's engagement with the visibility of otherness in contemporary visual media is a distinct part of her colonial identity as well as her modernism. Her narratives address the politics underlying cinematic identifications, particularly as they are constructed via the exhibition and ethnographic display of 'foreignness' on the early cinema screen.

Film critic Tom Gunning's notion of the 'cinema of attractions' proves insightful here. In 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant Garde' (1986), Gunning proposed that cinema made within the first ten years or so of the medium's history was comparable with other popular entertainments such as variety theatre. This, to quote Gunning, can be defined as cinema that 'directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself'.[46] Gunning views early cinema as attracting its spectators with something exclusive to the medium, and was less about telling a story than 'presenting a series of views to an audience' that were 'fascinating because of their illusory power […] and exoticism'.[47] Cinema was exciting precisely because of its ability to produce impact through spectacle; the exhibitory quality of turn-of-the-century popular art was what made it attractive to audiences. To quote from David Trotter's comments on Gunning's model, what counts in these early films 'is not that

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[44] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p.1.
[45] Richardson, 'Continuous Performance XII: The Cinema in Arcady' (July 1928), in *Close Up,* p.186.
[46] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in *Early Film: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: BFI, 1990), pp.56-62 (p.58).
[47] Gunning, p.57.

absorption of the spectator into diegesis[...]: cinema as voyeurism, or unacknowledged scopophilia, in Christian Metz's terms. What counts, instead, is exhibitionism: the display of views or accomplishments to an audience authorised, in turn, to exhibit itself'.[48]

The idea that cinema is a form of exhibition—both of the actors on screen and spectators in the cinema seats—buys directly into cinematic theories of power, theories that have been driven by feminist film criticism, most famously Laura Mulvey's active/male|passive/female paradigm. In Rhys's fiction this takes on an added dynamic, not just by her incorporation of race into the equation, but also her recognition of the ambiguities of racial classification. As discussed earlier, the relationship of the cityscape to the cinema is an integral part of this. London's picture palaces as depicted in *Voyage in the Dark* offer a space in which films can both uphold and support racist imagery (caused, in part, by the reconfiguration of imperial boundaries), as well as assist in knowledge-development of those labelled racially or culturally 'other'.

New media in the early decades of the twentieth century produced a shift in emphasis so that empire was equated with connectivity. The world was seemingly more reachable with the advent of airmail, telephone, and telegram networks, and cinema documentaries and newsreels that facilitated sight of the corners of empire previously hidden from view. *Contact* (1933) was directed by Paul Rotha, a promotional filmmaker for the Empire Marketing Board, and was chiefly financed by British Instructional Films and Imperial Airways. The film's images of a plane's shadow tracking across the screen exemplified the capacity of such technological advancements—air travel and cinema—to produce new ways of seeing the globe. The aerial shots from an aeroplane depict African natives, treetop huts and drumming circles, and were a simulation of aerial vision, a virtual travel apparatus that constructed new visual possibilities.[49]

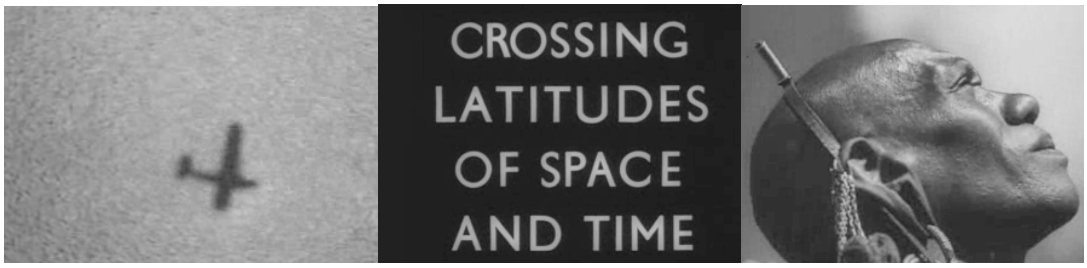

Fig. 10: *Contact*, dir. by Paul Rotha, (British Instructional Films and Imperial Airways, 1933) © British Airways

[48] Trotter, p.8.

[49] Martin Stollery views Rotha's film series for Imperial Airways as the most significant contribution to new ways of seeing the empire at the time. Martin Stollery, *Alternative Empires: European Modernist Cinemas and the Cultures of Imperialism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p.161.

In 1926 the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) was set up by the Colonial Secretary Leo Amery as one of a host of organisations established during the interwar decades to engage in cultural and commercial propaganda—others included the British Council in 1934 and the Colonial Film Unit in 1939. The EMB's raison d'être was to promote the empire through posters, exhibitions, films and shopping events that aimed to persuade consumers into buying products from the empire. 1927 saw the creation of the EMB's film unit led by Stephen Tallents and filmmaker John Grierson to 'sell the idea of Empire'.[50] As a mobile method of exhibition—films shown in public spaces such as station concourses and in mobile cinemas—the EMB was vital to the furthering of colonial ideals to a mass audience. The unit produced around one hundred films that promoted and publicised imperial trade, and signalled the start of the documentary movement in Britain. The early years of documentary filmmaking in Britain were, in this respect, 'directly connected to the visual illustration and elaboration of imperial economic relations, and thus to the sustenance of an imperial political economy'.[51]

Two such titles were *Cargo from Jamaica* about the Caribbean's banana industry, and *Windmill in Barbados* (both 1933), which provided an outline of the island's history in the context of sugar cane production. *Windmill in Barbados* can be aligned with Bournville's Cocoa pamphlet mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, presenting as it does a narrative of British industrial primacy in the Caribbean with shots of locals working the cane fields, overseen by plantation owners on horses. The opening of the film shows a map of the island with a voice-over outlining its history, stating: 'Barbados is the only island which has always remained British since its settlement in name of King James'.[52] The factual presentation of the histories of colonial lands' on screen is mirrored by Rhys's allusions in *Voyage in the Dark* to the documented history of British rule in Dominica. If the EMB's assumption that film's appeal to children meant it could be deployed as a 'pedagogical technology' was accurate, the colonial rhetoric of the narratives and images presented could have greatest effect through the suggestive and persuasive powers of cinema'.[53]

Rhys hints at this type of imperial persuasion through publicity and pedagogy by placing a guidebook passage describing Dominica in conjunction with Anna's memory of her first impression of England:

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[50] Lee Grieveson, 'Empire Marketing Board', *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/empire-marketing-board [accessed 29 October 2013], (para. 6).
[51] Grieveson, para. 1.
[52] *Windmill in Barbados*, dir. by Basil Wright (Empire Marketing Board, 1933) http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6734
[53] Grieveson, para.13.

> Lying between 15° 10' and 15° 40' N. and 61° 14' and 61° 30' W. A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods,' that book said. And all crumpled into hills and mountains as you would crumple a piece of paper in your hand – rounded green hills and sharply-cut mountains.
>
> A curtain fell and then I was here.
>
> … This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else—what are those things—those are haystacks—oh are those haystacks—I had read about England ever since I could read—smaller meaner everything is never mind—this is London—hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along (15)

Rhys refigures the travel journal quotation by incorporating the visually suggestive images of the paper crumpled into hills and the theatre curtain falling. With Anna's descriptive, personal, almost childlike depiction of England following with an undulating form, we see how Rhys chronicles everyday life in fictional terms, blurring the boundaries between documented 'fact' ('I had read about England ever since I could read') and fictive representation. This blurring of fact and fiction spills into her cinema scenes too, working to undercut some of the veracity of the filmic moments described.

Through the EMB, British audience's primary cinematic engagement with representations of empire was through propagandist documentaries and travel industry marketing exercises, shown both in cinemas and open public spaces (film screenings of the time tended to show documentary or news items in the same showing as a fictional narrative, blurring the lies between the two cinematic representations; Julia watching running races in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* alluding to such practice). But the film industry was also important for the employment of black people in London as supporting actors and extras in popular narrative films, often hired to play Africans in films that praised the imperial project.[54]. Paul Robeson's performance in *Sanders of the River* (Zolta Korda, UK, 1935) is perhaps one of the most well known instances of this. The film was Robeson's first, putting him on the map in terms of commercial cinema in Britain, but it was edited without his knowledge to include additional scenes glorifying British colonialism and was met with hostile criticism from black critics:

> Whoever sees this picture will be shocked at the exaggeration of African mentality, so far as superstitious beliefs are concerned, not to speak of the knavery and chicanery of some African chiefs. I feel that what is being paraded in the world today as art or literature is nothing short of propaganda. (Nigerian scholar Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1937)[55]

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[54] Stephen Bourne provides an excellent analysis of this history in his chapters 'Lonely Road: Paul Robeson on Stage and Screen in Britain, 1922-40' and 'A Guinea a Day: Film Extras and Bit Players' in Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television* (London: Continuum, 2001).

[55] Bourne, p.16.

Sanders of the River almost certainly inspired Jamaican Una Marson's treatment of film extras in her play *London Calling* as a result of her presence in London at the time of filming, a play that addresses the overtly stereotypical mechanisms of identification that are problematic precisely because fiction portrays itself as fact.

Such mechanisms as they exist in cinema produce a comparison with the struggle between competing identifications at the heart of the colonial experience. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon discusses watching Tarzan on screen to comment on how the power structures of cinema spectatorship facilitate an internalised colonisation in the viewer. Fanon writes of how 'a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs', and here again the mirror becomes a prescient symbol of this.[56] The footnote to this statement continues thus:

> I recommend the following experiment to those who are unconvinced: Attend showings of a Tarzan film in the Antilles and in Europe. In the Antilles, the young negro identifies himself *de facto* with Tarzan against the Negroes. This is much more difficult for him in a European theatre, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen.[57]

Spectatorship in a colonial context in this instance denies self-identification with the white hero because the gaze from the surrounding audience forces the viewer into an identification with the colonised 'savage'. As Robert Stam comments on this passage in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media* (2003):

> While feminist film theory has spoken of the to-be-looked-at-ness (Laura Mulvey) of female screen performance, Fanon calls attention to the to-be-looked-at-ness of spectators themselves, as Fanon puts it, of their own appearance: "Look, a Negro! … I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed".[58]

I return back to this mirrored identification with my analysis of Anna's cinematic viewing practice in *Voyage in the Dark*, but first I want to focus on what appears as a precursor to Fanon's theory via Marson's 1934 poem 'Cinema Eyes'.

The poem's title and its accompanying phrase 'cinema mind' exemplify the complexities of visual representation—first determined visually through the construction of set ideologies as presented on screen, with this 'false illusion' then reproduced psychologically through its repetition external to the cinema, in everyday social interactions.

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[56] Fanon, p.152.
[57] Fanon, pp.152-3.
[58] Robert Stam, 'Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema: The Politics of Identification', in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, ed. by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (New Brunswick, N.J; London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp.18-43 (p.26).

Marson's poem queries 'idealised' identities as constructed by the mechanisms of cinema through her narrator's tragic story, revealing cinematic representation to be a false reflection or performance that misleads its impressionable audience. Marson's poem in this way facilitates new ways of thinking about Rhys's engagement with cinema. Rhys's primary connection with the representation of *cultural* otherness on screen (and I am careful to acknowledge that Rhys, unlike Marson or Fanon, is not dealing with the fact of blackness on screen) comes through Anna Morgan's cinema trip in *Voyage in the Dark*. Read alongside Marson's poem, the identifications Anna makes exemplify the complex associations with on-screen representations of 'foreignness' for those audience members who are themselves culturally marginalised.

Connections can also be made between Marson's narrative in 'Cinema Eyes' and *Good Morning, Midnight*. Structured around a mother's explanation of her refusal to allow her daughter to visit the cinema, Marson's poem begins thus:

> I used to go to the Cinema
> To see beautiful white faces
> How I worshipped them!
> How beautiful they seemed –
> I grew up with a cinema mind.[59]

Here the 'cinema mind' forces favourable identification with the 'beautiful white faces' through its effects on the mental subjectivity of the viewer. This idea is replicated by Rhys in *Good Morning, Midnight*.[60] As Sasha returns through memory to a previous relationship, she recounts how, despite the man's ill-treatment of her, she feels as though her life and her happiness are dependent upon him:

> He often brings home other women and I have to wait on them, and I don't like that. But as long as he is alive and near me I am not unhappy. If he were to die I should kill myself.
> My film-mind. … (For God's sake watch out for your film-mind. …') (147)

A youthful Sasha and the mother in Marson's poem have been taught to find their ideal man in what Marson terms a 'cinema type', which professes to encompass typical masculine virtues and European physical ideals. Marson's narrator relates how she saw 'no beauty in black faces […] they were black / And therefore had no virtue'.[61] The mother's own 'tragic past', brought about through her reliance on a cinema mind that taught her to value the

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[59] Una Marson, 'Cinema Eyes', *The Moth and the Star* (Jamaica: The Gleaner, 1937), p.87.

[60] And Katherine Mansfield also does something similar in *Je ne parle pas Francais* (1918). The following passage is spoken by narrator Raoul Duquette:

> Query: Why am I so bitter against Life? And why do I see her as a rag-picker on the American cinema, shuffling along wrapped in a filthy shawl with her old claws crooked over a stick?
> Answer: The direct result of the American cinema acting upon a weak mind.

Katherine Mansfield, *Je ne parle pas Francais (A Sketch)* (Hampstead: Heron Press, 1919), p.2.

[61] Marson, *The Moth and the Star*, p.87.

appearance of a 'dream lover', is chronicled by a filmic melodrama plot—love and jealousy which ends tragically in murder. Here too, the mirror and movie connection can be made. Marson's protagonist undertakes a kind of acting out, with what appears on screen via a familiar narrative replicated in the everyday.

As Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* warns herself to watch out for her film-mind, so too does Marson's narrator speak of her recognition of the dangers of cinema's power over judgement and self-identification, knowledge she wants to pass on to her daughter:

> I know that love
> Laughs at barriers,
> Of race and creed and colour.
> But I know that black folk
> Fed on movie lore
> Lose pride of race.
> I would not have you so.
>
> Come, I will let you go
> When black beauties
> Are chosen for the screen;
> That you may know
> Your own sweet beauty
> And not the white loveliness
> Of others for envy.[62]

In Marson's poem, film works to enforce identities of its suiting. An audience 'fed on movie lore' is manipulated into desiring cinema to act as a mirror, leading to a tendency to play out what they watch on screen. Rhys's treatment of cinema in *Voyage in the Dark* acts as a sort of inverted response to Marson's final stanza. The envy of the black viewer for the white actress in Marson (and the identification of the black viewer with the white hero in Fanon) can be re-read by introducing to the analysis the reception of a more general 'foreignness' on screen. Rhys refigures the envy of the black viewer towards white actors into hostile receptions of non-British actors by white British audiences, with Anna reinforcing her own resistance to her 'Britishness' by identifying and aligning herself with the foreign actress on screen.

Anna is taken to the cinema by Ethel Matthews to see her friend who has been cast as a crowd-scene extra in *Three-Fingered Kate, Episode 5. Lady Chichester's Necklace*. Rhys's fictional title actually references a real series of films, merging fiction with reality and in the process providing a critique of cinema's identification processes by accentuating contemporary society's treatment of troublesome women. The first in the original series, *The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate*, was released in October 1909, and its success in the cinema led to a further six episodes being released over the following three years up to

[62] Marson, *The Moth and the Star*, p.88.

October 1912 by B&C (British & Colonial Kinematograph Co.).[63] Kate was played by French actress Ivy Martinek who began life as a circus performer and whose brother, H.O. Martinek, directed most of the series.[64] The original Episode 5 was called *Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents* (1912), and is the only one to survive today. The films featured a master criminal—the eponymous Kate—pitted against the hapless detective Sheerluck. A recurring image found throughout the series is a single shot of Kate breaking the fourth wall as she thrusts her three fingers towards the camera. As Marlow-Mann points out, with only one episode now remaining there is no clear indication as to the cause of Kate's disfigurement, but it does make apparent her 'defiant' nature (as she raises her hand to the camera), and her outsider status ('flaunting social ettiquette' by her smoking, for example).[65] In his analysis of British serials in the silent era, Alex Marlow-Mann correctly identifies this shot as helping to build a sense of Kate's identity, creating continuity in the series.[66] But it also aligns Kate with Gunning's model of the 'cinema of attractions'—the look to camera reinforcing her exhibitory quality.[67] Her image becomes a clear part of the spectacle of watching the film, the female actress acknowledging the to-be-looked-at-ness of Mulvian fame.

Anna's initial response to the cinema as she enters is that it 'smelt of poor people, and on screen ladies and gentlemen in evening dress walked about with strained smiles' (93), once again acknowledging the specificities of class in the relationship between what is being watched on screen and by whom. Anna tries to dissociate herself from the 'poor people' in the cinema, separating herself from the rest of the audience even as she takes a seat amongst them in the auditorium. But by emphasising the class divide via the aspirational viewing of the ladies and gentlemen on screen by the poor people in the audience, Anna alludes to her own ambiguous social status. She is young woman in England from a West Indian colonial family already in decline. Having been cheated out of her father's inheritance by her stepmother Hester, Anna embodies the history of white Creoles descending from a class that no longer exists, a history that is far removed from her now precarious social position in the imperial metropole.

The passage continues with Anna's narration of the film on screen:

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[63] Alex Marlow-Mann, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/727128/ [accessed 03 December 2013], (para. 1.).
[64] Ibid.
[65] Marlow-Mann, para.2.
[66] Alex Marlow-Mann, 'British Series and Serials in the Silent Era', in *Young and Innocent?: The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930*, ed. by Andrew Higson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), pp.149-162 (p.155). Marlow-Mann also sees the series as significant 'because Kate anticipates the strong, dominant female protagonists that […] embody the idea of the 'New Woman'. p.149.
[67] I am aware that Gunning places the 'cinema of attractions' between 1896-1906, with other film historians as well as Gunning terming 1906-1913 as a period of 'narrative integration'.

> 'There!' 'Ethel said, nudging. 'D'you see that girl—the one with the band round her hair? That's the one I know; that's my friend. Do you see? My God, isn't she terrible? My God what a scream!' 'Oh, shut up,' somebody said. 'Shut up yourself,' Ethel said.
>
> I opened my eyes. On the screen a pretty girl was pointing a revolver at a group of guests. They backed away with their arms held high above their heads and expressions of terror on their faces. The pretty girl's lips moved. The fat hostess unclasped the necklace of huge pearls and fell, fainting, into the arms of a footman. The pretty girl, holding the revolver so that the audience could see that two of her fingers were missing, walked backwards towards the door. Her lips moved again. You could see what she was saying. 'Keep 'em up….'
>
> When the police appeared everybody clapped. When Three-Fingered Kate was caught everybody clapped louder still.
>
> 'Damned fools,' I said. 'Aren't they damned fools? Don't you hate them? They always clap in the wrong places.' (93)

Here again is an instance of double-identification. Like Sasha's initial identification with the mercenary mistress in the film she watches, Anna is annoyed by the audience's joy at Kate's capture, associating herself with the anti-hero, the outcast of society who she repeatedly describes as beautiful. Clapping in the 'wrong places' reconnects with Sasha laughing in the 'right place', with Rhys subtly commenting on the misdirected connections cinema audiences make. In relation to identity-formation through on-screen imagery, Anna's alliance with Kate is made more complex when Ethel reveals that the actress who played Kate was foreign (melodrama plots are naturally dependent upon a polarisation of good and evil, a dichotomy into which 'British' and 'foreign' easily fits).[68] As Mary Lou Emery writes of white Creoles, 'they feel close to a black culture that they cannot be part of […] and they may still look to a "mother" country that long ago abandoned them and still considers them inferior'.[69] This position of double-outsiderness is replicated by Anna's position in relation to the film: she connects herself with the socially-marginalised criminal whilst simultaneously aligning herself with the 'ladies and gentlemen' who are representative of a British social decency she can no longer fully associate with. As with Rhys and the gilt compact mirror in *Smile Please*, Anna's attempted mirroring of social respectability is denied, leading instead to a closer affinity to the "otherness" presented on screen.

Anna and Ethel leave the cinema and discuss Kate's performance:

> 'Well,' she said, 'that girl who did Three-Fingered Kate was a foreigner. My friend who was working in the crowd told me about it. Couldn't they have got an English girl to do it?' 'Was she?' I said. 'Yes. Couldn't they have got an English girl to do it? It was just because she had this soft, dirty way that foreign girls have. And she stuck red curls on her black hair and she didn't care a scrap. Her own hair was short and black,

[68] John MacKenzie speaks in terms of popular theatre, but in this instance can also be translated for the cinema. John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.31.

[69] Emery, *"World's End"*, p. 13.

> don't you see? and she simply went and stuck red curls in. An English girl wouldn't have done that. Everybody was laughing at her behind her back, my friend said.' 'I didn't notice,' I said. 'I thought she was very pretty.' 'The thing is that red photographs black, d'you see? All the same, everybody was laughing at her behind her back all the time. Well, an English girl wouldn't have done that. An English girl would have respected herself more than to let people laugh at her like that behind her back.' (94)

In repeatedly admitting that she finds the actress playing Kate pretty, Anna sides with the outsider, the foreigner who is being mocked by the English extras—their laughter mirroring Anna's fears throughout the novel that people are sneering and laughing at her. Ethel's comment that red photographs black alludes to the way images can both manipulate and be manipulated; what is visually rendered as 'real' or fixed can in actual fact be misinterpreted through the same process of vision. Anna states that she hadn't noticed the difference, the subtleties of the difference so inconspicuous so as to be insignificant. Ethel only knows about it through her friend, and has used this acquired knowledge to form her judgement: that Martinek's 'soft, dirty way' has won her the role and this is resented. But having experienced at first hand that these subtleties of difference do matter, Anna already knows that it is the signified that comes to carry more weigh than the visual sign. Returning to Fanon and the Tarzan film, this points to the awareness of 'possible negative projections of other spectators [triggering] an anxious withdrawal from the film's programed pleasures'.[70] As Stam continues with Fanon's example, the 'conventional self-denying identification with the white hero's gaze, the vicarious acting out of a European selfhood, is short-circuited through the awareness of a "screened" or "allegorized" colonial gaze within the movie theater itself'.[71] Like Fanon's spectator, Rhys portrays her protagonist as experiencing an internalised reflected gaze within the seats of the cinema auditorium, but complicates this aspect via Anna's ambiguous ethnic background. Her colonial past now located in Edwardian London disables identification with anyone other than the foreigner and induces an 'acting out' of English selfhood.

In melodrama crime films such as the *Three-Fingered Kate* episodes, film's visual form intersects with a 'scopophilic turn in the narrative representation of female criminals'.[72] Films of the genre often overtly sexualised their female criminal characters, with the depiction of socially and morally transgressive women offering apt subject matter for an erotic gaze.[73] When Ethel and Anna leave the cinema their conversation reconnects sexual promiscuity and foreignness, an association that has been made earlier in the novel when

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[70] Stam, p.26.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), p.106.
[73] Miller also provides a reading of Rhys's use of the *Three Fingered Kate* episodes in the same study, highlighting some of the textual inaccuracies of Rhys's description of the film (pp.121-22).

Anna is called a Hottentot by some of the other chorus girls at the theatre. As Ethel accounts for her own dubious enterprise as a masseuse, she states:

> 'I'm a masseuse—I'm a Swedish masseuse. And, mind you, when I say I'm a masseuse I don't mean like some of these dirty foreigners. Don't you hate forgeigners?'
>
> 'Well,' I said, 'I don't think I do; but, you see, I don't know many.' (95)

Anna's non-committal response produces suspicion in Ethel; Anna is visually white, but the associations have been made. When Anna later refers to Ethel's rascist attitudes in reponse to her demand for Anna to leave their apartment, the narrative turns back to how 'blame for the Empire's decline fell on "foreigners" like Anna who remind the English [in this case Ethel] of their troublesome [relationship with their] colonized "other"'.[74] We can turn to the start of the cinema section of *Voyage in the Dark* to draw this out further. Ethel has heard from their landlady that Anna is in trouble. As she sits watching Anna dress for the cinema, Anna recognises the power behind Ethel's gaze: 'she sat […] and watched. Her eyes were cleverer than the rest of her' (92). Ethel wants to go to the cinema to see what her friend looks like, staring at Anna all the while. After Anna quite obviously associates herself with the foreigner on screen, the two women's trip to the cinema merges with the narrative that is viewed on screen. Anna, seated in the audience, is on show as much as Ivy Martinek on screen, and Ethel's response to the latter eventually folds into her opinion of the former.

Anna's complex status is exacerbated in the novel by gender and class concerns. Positioned between a West Indian and white British identity that through declining imperial power in the colonies had altered in terms of social standing, she is driven to the sexual promiscuity that further enforces negative racial connotations. The metropolitan fantasy of foreignness, highlighted by Ethel Matthew's racism towards the *Three-Fingered Kate* actress, is a construct reinforced by the fictional representations on screen. But while the film and Anna's identification with the protagonist emphasises society's treatment of troublesome women, in this instance it also facilitates the formation of an identity for Anna in an arena where agency is suspended, even if—as the quotation at the start of this chapter alludes to—the reflection in the 'mirror' of the cinema screen remains different from the real thing. What is sought for escape, from the streets outside, from themselves, turns out to produce a moment of self-framing, a form of self-recognition for all of Rhys's heroines. The play between mirror and movie in Rhys's fiction in this instance reworks the misrepresentations of visual culture, opening a brief moment of personal representation, however negative in connotation. That this is but a fleeting moment however underscores that visual sign and personal reality never fit together; Rhys's heroines remain fixed by their cinema minds.

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[74] Emery, *"World's End"*, p.93.

5. Conclusion—'This Way to the Exhibition': Mapping Empire and the Visual

This thesis has addressed, in turn, the multiple visual media represented within Rhys's interwar fiction. From analyses of Rhys's utilisation of theatre, public performance and the spectacle of the stage, the sartorial constructions of English femininity, and the representation of colonial (mis)representation via cinema and the visual arts, my readings identify Rhys's alternative mode of modernist representation—focusing on the interface between text and image—as speaking directly to the (internalised) manifestations of 'in-betweenness' that are such a vital aspect of her authorial identity.

The visual media listed above—although separated in this thesis for the purpose of analytical clarity—are in fact woven together. They can be united under the umbrella term 'visual culture' as we read Rhys's depiction of human experience in the modern metropolis; untying themselves from each other as her characters shop, perform, pose, watch, only to merge once more as *Good Morning, Midnight* draws to a close with reference to Paris' 1937 *Exposition Internationale*. Rhys's preoccupation with modernist visual cultures becomes an over-arching motif through which critics can begin to draw out her finer analysis of the experience of everyday life as it is governed by the visual. In this concluding part of my thesis, I want to show how global exhibition space becomes a means to bring together in a more totalising way the multiple disciplines of visual culture that litter Rhys's fiction. Such an approach reveals firstly that the processes of vision within the exhibition—like those occurring in the theatre, the fashion house, the artist's studio, the cinema—spill out of its borders, that the modern city in its entirety *is* the exhibition. But just as that happens, Rhys highlights that what professes to provide a full representation instead reveals its lack. The exhibition cannot represent everything. It is from this element of lack, of absence, of invisibility, that Rhys most forcefully finds her own representational identity.

Exhibition practice (both as an all-encompassing concept as well as the physical space of exhibition) seeks to divide human experience into distinct categories for the purpose of representational clarity. If an exhibition is meant to represent everything, it

needs to find a way of ordering that everything so as to contain it. James D. Herbert has argued that the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Modern* (Sasha Jensen's destination at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*) and its accompanying museum and art installations compartmentalised its representation of the world on display within four disciplines: historical, commercial, ethnologic and aesthetic.[1] Rhys reconstructs this process of categorisation in her texts precisely to question its usefulness. In their engagement with modernist visual culture, Rhys's characters find themselves assigned identities that are predicated on historical, commercial, ethnologic and aesthetic reasoning; they are viewed as a certain 'type' because that is what society labels them as (the *what*, as opposed to the *who* being of crucial importance here). In *The Human Condition* (1958) Hannah Arendt writes of speech and action as modes of self-disclosure that bring into view an invisible world of relationships that she characterises as an in-betweenness. Arendt states that while it is possible to say (or tell) *what* someone is, *who* one is can only be shown (disclosed) in speech and action, implying a degree of agency or self-identification. This of course carries greater emphasis when placed alongside the apparent voicelessness or paralysis of Rhys's protagonists as they engage with modernist visual practice.[2] But just as the space of the 1937 *Exposition* would prove insufficient to provide a totalising representation of the world—with the additional exhibitions and installations extending outside of its boundaries—so too Rhys's characters exceed the categorisations imposed upon them. It is through the formalist spaces between the verbal and the visual within her fiction that Rhys focuses our attention on the in-between space between visual representation and individual identification.

In my introductory chapter I turned to Mary Lou Emery's extension of Bhabha's 'contra-modernity'—what she terms a *contra-modernism*—as I began to place Rhys as a Caribbean modernist. In *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature* (2010), Emery calls for recognition of the *contra-modernism* of Caribbean modernist writers, their simultaneous participation in and sometimes resistance to the tenets of modernist aesthetics'.[3] Anglophone Caribbean authors represent, for her, an alterity that situates them at once inside and outside of modernism. This framework opens discussion on how Rhys's 'in-betweenness' facilitates her interpretation of the complexities of modernist representation as related to the visual. As I noted in my introduction, critically Rhys's writing has stood at the intersection of multiple strands of literature: modernist, Caribbean, feminist, post-

[1] James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp.3-4. Herbert lists two museums (The *Musée des Monuments Français* and *Musée de l'Homme*) and two art exhibitions (*Chefs-d'œuvre de l'Art Français* and *Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant*), as well as the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, as forming the 'totality' of the *Exposition Internationale*.
[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999) pp.181-192.
[3] Emery, *Modernism*, p.100.

colonial, with each one laying claim to aspects of her work. This multiplicity of styles and voices has also made her a marginal literary figure within those critical fields; the interwar texts find themselves spread across fields of categorisation without being fixed to any one. In the opening sections of my first chapter I argued that both the form and content of Rhys's novels afford her a somewhat peripheral place within modernism, even as modernism itself is aligned with outsider tendencies. Similarly, with her colonial background and her 'white Creole' identity finding their way into her work, the Caribbean provides an obvious contribution to the tone and perspective of her writing. Indeed, the presence of the Caribbean in Rhys's literature (most concretely through the carnival allusions in *Voyage in the Dark* and of course later with *Wide Sargasso Sea*) shares similarities with its modernist traits (particularly issues of alienation and dislocation), and yet these two vital strands of her writing seemingly never quite align. A sense of personal disjunction, removed from the colony of her childhood, never achieving acceptance in the imperial centre, helped shape an alternate view of modern life within Rhys's writing. The exhibition, as it manifests in her interwar fiction, becomes a way for Rhys to articulate these dislocations between colony and European urban life as related through the visual. The exhibition is used by Rhys to link, and then collapse, colony and metropole together, revealing that the modernist visual cultures of interwar Europe are inextricably linked to colonial practices.

I want to begin this concluding chapter with exhibitions in their most concrete form, returning later to Rhys's frequent use of the singular 'exhibition' as she stressed the importance of visual display and spectacle both metaphorically and literally pervasive in everyday life. Rhys ends *Good Morning, Midnight* with Sasha and René's visit to the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Modern* (hereafter *Exposition Internationale*) in October 1937, what Christina Britzolakis terms an unusually specific date reference that also brings to a close Rhys's portfolio of interwar fiction.[4] The *Exposition Internationale* was 'devised by the Popular Front government to boost a stagnant national economy, and to promote peaceful cooperation and trade in the face of Depression and gathering international tension'.[5] This was highlighted by the architectural face-off between the imposing pavilions of the USSR and Nazi Germany which stood as a precursor to the political turmoil that was soon to follow. The *Exposition Internationale* aimed to present to its visitors the world, with over forty nations and empires participating, their flags adorning the *Monument de la Paix* which was positioned just outside of the walls of the exhibition in the

[4] Britzolakis, p.464.
[5] Ibid.

new opening through the old Palais du Trocadéro and to which Rhys explicitly refers in *Good Morning, Midnight*.[6]

In attempting, as James Herbert argues, to present the 'real', whole world as an assortment of objects and images (manufactured, historical, ethnographic and aesthetic), the *Exposition Internationale* claimed representation in its entirety, and in doing so revealed the impossibility of such an enterprise. Herbert writes:

> No, the world obviously would not make an appearance in the French capital; only its representation could. And that representation stood in relations of both insufficiency and excess to the world itself: insufficient, to the extent that it lacked the fullness and completeness commonly attributed to that world; excessive, to the extent that it supplemented that world with something beyond itself, that it abstracted from the world a duplicate image to be viewed in Paris.[7]

The years spanning Rhys's arrival in England in 1907 and the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1939 saw numerous global exhibitions, including the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley in 1924, to which Rhys also refers, and the 1931 *Exposition Colonial Internationale*; both of which—as their names suggest—were dominated by imperial concerns. Paris' 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* focused heavily on the visual arts, and historian Paul Greenhalgh has noted that one of the main issues arising from the exhibition was the definition of 'colonial art'. Greenhalgh draws attention to the provision of the following definition in its main catalogue:

> There are three types of colonial art. The first, in exact meaning of the word, is the indigenous art; another is the art practiced by the colonials of European origin, who incorporate or juxtapose their own needs, their own science and aesthetic with the primitive civilizations. Lastly the same is convenient for works of Europeans influenced by exoticism. The three types of art figure in the exhibition.[8]

The demarcation made here between colonial and Western art replicates, in one instance, similar classifications that emerge through critical readings of Rhys and the visual. It identifies how exhibitions (as a totalising visual concept) could be utilised as a literary device to address (and query) the labelling of 'art' in the modernist period, as its discourse of primitivism replicated eighteenth-century aesthetic hierarchies so integrally tied to imperial concerns.

Indeed, exhibitions provided a conceptual frame for contemporary social commentaries on multiple aspects of modernist visual culture, not just the visual arts. As

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[6] Herbert, p.31.

[7] Herbert, p.5.

[8] *Encyclopédie des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes au XXeme Siecle*, 12 vols., Paris 1925. Facsimile edition available from Garland Publishing, NY, 1977. Quoted from Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.68-69.

Britzolakis relates, two years before the *Exposition Internationale* and four years before Rhys published *Good Morning, Midnight*, Walter Benjamin in 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (1935) wrote of the imminent demise of the Universal Expositions as he connected the fairs 'to the emergence of commodity culture, with its reliance on spectacle and advertising'.[9] Since the 1851 *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* at London's Crystal Palace, the Universal Expositions had been a spectacle of cultural and economic competition, described by Benjamin as 'sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish'.[10] They were also a crucial measure of national identity between the nations of Western Europe. But by the time of Benjamin and Rhys's writings, these spectacles of consumer capitalism were open to more critical interpretation, even as they return to popularity in the thirties.[11] While the 1937 *Exposition Internationale* aimed, as stated by its full title, to celebrate the unity between the arts and new technological advancements, the overriding theme was commerce: with the fair devoted to kick-starting the global economy, it became an event of mass-scale commercial production and exchange, showcasing new products by global companies.[12] The forms and (commercial) aims of the exhibitions mimicked the department stores of the time, those bastions of consumption whose focus on comfort and entertainment for their visitors influenced the ideology and construction of modern exhibition practice. In France, department stores such as Le Printemps and Le Bon Marché collaborated on the building of *Exposition* pavilions, turning the arenas into 'a massive display unit, a shop window arranged and constructed in the way the stores themselves were'.[13] The importance of glass in the connection between exhibition space and consumer practice cannot be overlooked here, beginning with the famous Crystal Palace construction of 1851, its wide spans of glass window originating from Parisian arcades. According to Susan Buck-Morss, the crowds of fair-goers at the World Expositions were conditioned to the principles of advertising in a similar fashion to metropolitan window-shopping activities: '"look, but don't touch", [they were] taught to derive pleasure from the spectacle alone'.[14]

This blend of new technologies, commodities displayed as works of art, and mass entertainments uniting business and pleasure, synthesised exhibitions into a fantastical visual experience. More than anything else then, the *Exposition Internationale* was about

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[9] Britzolakis, p.465.
[10] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (1935), in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p.151.
[11] Popular in that they provided a means of enhancing business, creating jobs and providing state-subsidised mass entertainment. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p.323.
[12] Britzolakis, pp.464-5.
[13] Greenhalgh, p.190.
[14] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.85.

visibility. Take, as an example, the advertisement for the *Exposition* that appeared on the cover of the May 1937 issue of *Vendre*, a marketing periodical (fig. 11). The image consisted of one enormous eye, its pupil a three-dimensional globe with Paris marked at its centre, the lashes presented as letters spelling out the exhibition's name. This striking image implies that 'all of the world could be seen at the exposition […] but also the exposition is the eye that captures all of the world' in a process of surveillance-like observation.[15] Rhys provides an image reminiscent of both this advertisement and contemporary photographs documenting the *Exposition*'s buildings and night-time illuminations at the close of *Good Morning, Midnight* (fig. 12):

> All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes—others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me.… (156)

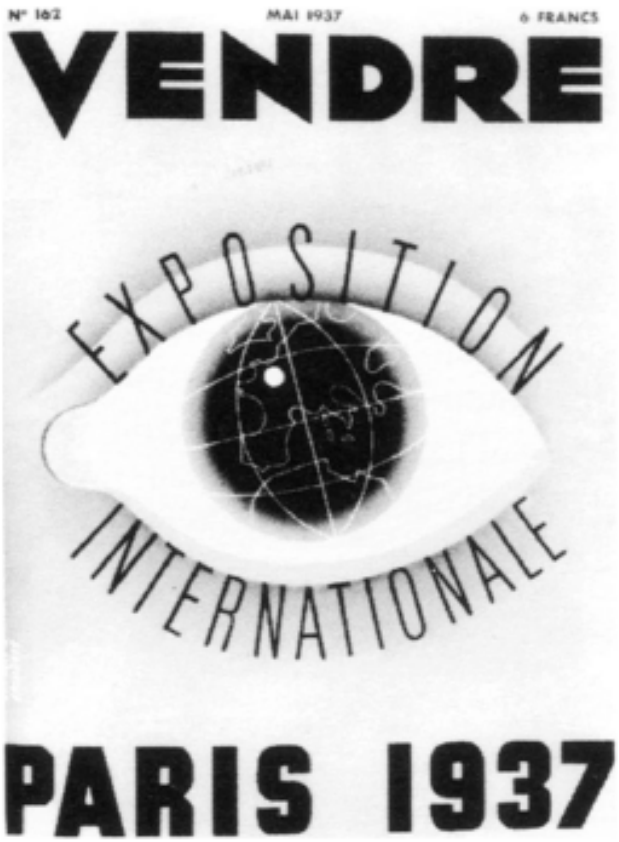

Fig. 11: Cover, *Vendre*, No.162 (May 1937)[16]

[15] Emery, *Modernism*, p.156.

[16] Reproduced from Herbert, fig.7 © Cornell University Press, 1998. Mary Lou Emery also reproduces this image as she briefly refers to the connection between the *Exposition*'s advertisement and the Paris 1937 setting of *Good Morning, Midnight*, but she does not elaborate on the associations that can be made

Fig. 12: La Tour Eiffel de nuit, François Kollar, 1937 (71L02558)
Photo: © Donation François Kollar Ministère de la Culture (Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine).

The *Vendre* cover suggests a double process of vision occurring at the *Exposition Internationale*: that it is possible to see the world at the exposition, but that the exposition (and importantly it is Europe presented within the pupil of the eye as the force of power behind it) is able to produce and possess a vision of the world as a whole. The colonial connotations to *Vendre*'s image of a European eye enacting visual power over the rest of the world are difficult to ignore, particularly when placed alongside Sasha's description of her nightmare vision. This itself is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's provocative critique of empire, 'Thunder at Wembley' which likewise evokes nature as a terrifying force looming over the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, threatening its destruction.[17]

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between the eye of the magazine cover and the imagery of mechanical eyes at the close of the novel. Emery, *Modernism*, p.156-157.

[17] 'Dust swirls down the avenues, hisses and hurries like erected cobras round the corners. Pagodas are dissolving in dust. Ferro-concrete is fallible. Colonies are perishing and dispersing in a spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates. Ash and violet are the colours

My focus thus far on the commercial objects on show at the exposition overlooks the display of peoples, and it was the 'human showcases'—to borrow from Paul Greenhalgh's *Ephemeral Vistas* (1988)—that ordered and presented the resources (human and material) of empire for an urban public.[18] Their 'exhibition' proved one of the most popular, and controversial, attractions. Colonial subjects were present at the World Exhibitions from Crystal Palace in 1851, continuing up to the *Exposition Internationale* in 1937, in varying capacities. According to Greenhalgh, the 1867 *Exposition Universelles* in Paris was the first presentation of imperial subjects as part of the exhibition proper: as craftsmen selling their wares, as waiters and chefs serving the exhibition's visitors.[19] Between 1877 and 1887, France included 'Native American Indian, Ceylonese, Ashanti and Kalmouk [note Heidler's labelling of Marya as having 'a strange little Kalmuck face' (102) in *Quartet*] at the *Jardin d'Acclimation* in Paris which had been established in 1859 as a centre for the study and popularisation of botany and zoology'.[20] By 1889, colonial subjects were presented to the public purely to be looked at. This new approach to the presentation of human exhibits was influenced by the rise in anthropological research undertaken at the *Jardin d'Acclimation*.

The imperial dimension of this shift from visual entertainment to anthropology and back was underpinned, according to Greenhalgh, 'by the belief that it was possible to present complete knowledge, to create a physical encyclopædia capable of capturing and explaining a total world view'.[21] But in order to do this all aspects of empire needed to be visible, 'portrayed as realistically as possible', making the presence of colonised subjects a necessity.[22] By the 1930s, the rationale of such encyclopædic presentation was beginning to attract criticism. As Patricia Morton notes, while the 1931 *Colonial Internationale* presented people of the French colonies as exotica on display, it was faced with hostile opposition from groups such as the Surrealists, with Andre Breton, Louis Aragon and others urging a boycott of the event's evidently distasteful imperialism.[23]

1931 was the last time large areas of mock-villages appeared within an imperial context, but even in 1937 significant numbers of indigenous artisans were on show for the

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of its decay. From every quarter human beings come flying—clergymen, school children, invalids in bath-chairs. They fly with outstretched arms, and a vast sound of wailing rolls before them, but there is neither confusion nor dismay. Humanity is rushing to destruction, but humanity is accepting its doom. […] The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky.' Virginia Woolf, 'Thunder at Wembley', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie Vol.3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1988) pp.410-414 (p.413).

[18] Greenhalgh, p.82.

[19] Greenhalgh, p.85.

[20] Greenhalgh, p.86.

[21] Greenhalgh, p.87.

[22] Ibid.

[23] For more on the opposition to the 1931 colonial displays, see 'Challenging the Exposition: Anticolonial opposition' in Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), pp.96-129.

visual entertainment of exposition visitors. Paris 1931 can be directly linked to the imperial exhibition practices in Britain, particularly the 1924 Empire Exhibition (the 1931 exhibition was staged as a response to the events at Wembley). There too criticism was mounting, with the uneasy racism of the display difficult for organisers to uphold. As Greenhalgh relates, a brief section of 1924 Official Guide reads thus:

> Races in Residence. Every section of the empire is represented at Wembley. Many of the colonies have representatives of their local inhabitants at work in local conditions. The following list gives the name of the races and the approximate numbers actually living in the exhibition: Malays 20, Burmans 30, Hong Kong Chinese 160, West Africans 60, Palestinians 3. In addition there are Indians, Singhalese, West Indians, and natives of British Guiana, who live outside the exhibition, but attend their respective pavilions daily.[24]

Here the language is notably muted, gone are the references to 'savages' as per earlier exhibition descriptions.[25] The quotation above from the 1924 Official Guide alludes to the complex status of Caribbean subjects within the exhibition. It mentions a list of those living *outside* of the exhibition who attended their pavilions daily. The ability to exit the space of the exhibition, to flow across its boundaries, is in stark contrast to the more overt containment of colonial pavilions of Paris in 1937, floating on pontoons in the Seine.

We can refer this back to Rhys's protagonists and their oscillation between subject and object positioning; the gap between a character's visit to the imperial exhibitions as urban observer and their previous occupations within imperial metropolitan space as chorus girl, mannequin or artist's model. This oscillation also plays out in the contradictions they present between identities of European femininity and West Indian colonial heritage—recognising of course the lack of a fixed marker of colour. This connects with the exhibition performer's uncertain positioning as visual object, acting as 'themselves', or at least highly stylised, stereotypical versions of the same, in a similar manner to the theatrical performance of race as discussed in my previous analysis of Una Marson's play *London Calling* in Chapter One. The unstable nature of their classification as objects on display, yet able to leave the exhibition and merge into the everyday space of the imperial capital, undermines their containment as objects of vision. These colonial subjects were enlisted to perform a reinforcement of imperial history even as they continued to bear the colonial gaze.[26] The 1924 Exhibition existed in part to contain anxieties about the peripheries of the empire merging with the centre as it also aimed to represent the totality of empire in a structured, artificial whole. But this movement between the city and the space of the exhibition undoes the deliberate spectacle of the staged performance within Wembley's

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[24] Lawrence, George C., *British Empire Exhibition: Official Guide* (London: Fleetway, 1924), quoted from Greenhalgh, p.95.
[25] Greenhalgh, p.96.
[26] Emery, *Modernism*, pp.56-7.

border in the same way that Rhys positions her protagonists at once within and outside of the performative, exhibitory spaces of London and Paris, 1924-1937.

The display of colonial peoples as a major visual attraction seemingly legitimised, or upheld, the imperial enterprise. With the exhibitions so intimately tied to a commodity culture that relied on spectacle, the people contained within the exhibition became that spectacle. This focus on spectacular visibility and the power of the eye turns me back to the metaphor borrowed from poet and critic Dionne Brand by Emery in *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, which I first mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Brand's metaphor—'The eye has citizenship and possessions'—is seen by Emery 'as a summation of the power of vision itself', with Emery taking Brand's black|object/white|subject filmic gaze context to posit the eye as exercising the power of empire in a similar way to *Vendre*'s front cover.[27] Emery reads the metaphor as one that recognises the 'imagined community of an imperial nation as also an *imagined* nation, an entity made possible through the creation of images that interpellate, through various angles of vision, its citizens and its colonial, racialized other'.[28] As Emery continues, Brand's metaphor also facilitates a reading of the eye as 'exercising the powers of empire'; the eye obligates its citizens with an authoritative vision as it claims others (objects, places, people) as its possessions.[29] Brand's metaphor illuminates the complex construction of modern subjectivity that relied on the figure of a visible other in order to makes concrete its position as 'subject-who-sees'. For Rhys, such a construction of visual power inheres in everyday acts of seeing.

Emery's reading of Brand also pertains to the ambivalent visual politics of the white, female Creole, left without either the visual signifier of blackness or the stable vision of the European subject. When placed into the context of exhibition practice, where imperial powers would display their possessions (human and material) collated from across the globe, we see the eye (metaphorically and actually) enacting the mechanisms of imperial power, for as Patricia Morton explains, 'the key to maintaining power was absolute visibility of its hierarchies'.[30] This also extends to issues of gender, with the female exhibition-goer a recognisable, visible sight that could not be by-passed. Women occupied a double-role in the exhibition in a similar way to their status as fashionable consumers in the modern city, as both observer and observed. Both the 1924 Wembley Empire Exhibition and 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition had women's sections that took empire as their central theme. Indeed, Wembley contained in its Palace of Industry section a parlour fitted with robing rooms and a stage where mannequins paraded at set times of the day. Shop and department

[27] Emery, *Modernism*, p.37.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Morton, p.5.

store practices re-emerge in the exhibition, blurring the borders between exhibition and cityscape. Wembley's 'Palace of Beauty' was sponsored by Pears Soap, and here visitors could look at ten women made-up as 'historical beauties', contained within glass-fronted, sound-proof rooms.[31] Much in the same way that a 'vocabulary of containment and authenticity' was deployed to give aesthetic display-value to colonial subjects, women were similarly regulated by exhibition practice.[32]

But this preoccupation with visibility raises the question of invisibility: 'the world itself retreated into the invisibility of being that absent thing to which the objects [and people] on display referred only from afar'.[33] Indeed, as writer and art critic André Warnod commented on the *Exposition Internationale* in 1937: 'As soon as you pass through its gates […] you are […] in a land that is located nowhere and everywhere at the same time. A land where all notions of distance and time are confounded'.[34] The real now becomes something lying elsewhere, beyond the reach of representation, and my argument here turns back to that which lies outside the frame of representation, as addressed in Chapter Three on Rhys and the visual arts. Rhys was perennially preoccupied with the idea of an elsewhere, and the impossibility of its representation. I think back to the opening of *Voyage in the Dark*, where Anna Morgan tries to make the West Indies and England fit together: 'Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together' (7-8). The interpenetration of binary opposites in the passage speaks of a collapse of colony and metropole, a time/space compression that mimics the practices of imperial exhibition. Anna's failure to integrate the two landscapes addresses the nature of her divided self, revealing the problematics of her existence as an expatriate cast adrift in the imperial centre. As Rhys herself said of her protagonist: 'the girl is divided'.[35] The continual movement in *Voyage in the Dark* between two geographical locations, with memories of the West Indies punctuating Anna's present London reality, undercuts any notion of place as a fixed entity. It also represents Anna's paralysed position between two different sets of signifying systems that disable any sense of fixed selfhood.

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[31] Scott Cohen provides a reading of the Palace of Beauty where he quotes the Official Guide as follows: 'On each side of its richly decorated hall, glass-fronted, sound-proof rooms have been constructed to contain the 'beauty,' each furnished in accordance with the historical period it is designed to represent'. Scott Cohen, 'The Empire from the Street: Virginia Woolf, Wembley, and Imperial Monuments', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (2004), 85-109 (p.90).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Herbert, p.7.

[34] André Warnod, *Exposition 37: La vie flamboyante des expositions* (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1937), p.7, quoted from Herbert, p.16.

[35] Jean Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.241.

Rhys's utilisation of the *Exposition* reveals her critique of what Herbert describes as the 'inherent failure of visual semiosis […] ever to present—to make present—that which it represents, because it always only presents it again within the field of signification, from which the thing to be represented must remain absent'.[36] Notions of invisibility and the absent 'real' that lie beyond the scope of representation can also be applied to Rhys as a writer straddling systems of personal as well as literary representation. Rhys's out-of-joint narratives, shifting time and space, reflect the impossibility of claims of all-encompassing representational authority, and the exhibition becomes a means of showing the gaps between visual sign and reality, between modern European and Caribbean representational frames as governed by the visual.

This discussion of frames of representation and signification, and what lies beyond the frame, returns me to the 1937 *Exposition Internationale* and its physical space as navigated by Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The following passage contains the description of Sasha's trip to the Exhibition grounds:

> I want to get away. I want to be out of the place.
>
> 'I'm going to the Exhibition,' I say. 'I want to see it again at night before I go.'
>
> 'The Exhibition?'
>
> 'Haven't you been to it?'
>
> 'No, I haven't. What should I do at the Exhibition?'
>
> 'Well, I'm going. You needn't come if you don't want to. I'll go by myself.'
>
> I want to go by myself, to get into a taxi and drive along the streets, to stand by myself and look down at the fountains in the cold light.
>
> 'But of course,' he says. 'If you want to go to the Exhibition, we'll go. Naturally.'
>
> *
>
> We go in by the Trocadéro entrance. There aren't many people about. Cold, empty, beautiful—this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted.
>
> 'What's that light up there?' he says.
>
> 'That's the Star of Peace. Don't you recognise it?'
>
> He stares back at it.
>
> 'How *mesquin*! It's vulgar, that Star of Peace.'
>
> 'The building is very fine,' I say, in a schoolmistress' voice.
>
> We stand on the promenade above the fountains, looking down on them. This is what I wanted—the cold fountains, the rainbow lights on the water….
>
> He says again, 'It's *mesquin*, your Star of Peace.'
>
> We stand for some time, leaning over the balustrade. He puts his arm through mine. I can feel him shivering. When I tell him so he answers: 'Well, it's cold here after Morocco.'
>
> 'Oh yes, of course, Morocco.'
>
> 'You don't believe I've come from Morocco, do you?'

[36] Herbert, p.7.

> Whatever else is a lie about him, it's certainly true that he isn't dressed for this weather.
>
> The lights shimmering on the water, the leaping fountains, cold and beautiful.… (136-7)

Christina Britzolakis has produced a geographical mapping of the layout of the *Exposition*, building as she does from the more historical analysis of the same by Herbert in *Paris 1937*. She follows Herbert's reading of the *Exposition* grounds, paying close attention to Sasha and René's positioning on the 'promenade above the fountains, looking down' (136). This vantage point, according to Britzolakis, 'offered a panoramic view of the *Champ de Mars* and of Paris beyond, with the Eiffel Tower facing the viewer'.[37] From this perspective then, Sasha and René could oversee 'not only the city, but also the world itself, presented in microcosm' in the form of the *Exposition*'s pavilions.[38]

Britzolakis continues by focusing on Herbert's argument that 'the commanding visual panorama offered by the Trocadéro esplanade projected a totality of industrial production and consumption, assuming the spectator's identification with the nation as a transcendent subject'.[39] If this is the case, Britzolakis writes that:

> it is significant that neither Sasha nor René take up this identification. The passage effectively reverses the direction of the exhibitory gaze, as a specular structure modelled on the commanding view; it positions the couple as objects rather than subjects of the spectacle.[40]

Britzolakis reads Sasha's perspective as an undermining of any claims made by the exhibition for a totalising representation of the world. The layout of the *Exposition* should have offered the spectator the chance to be the subject of that object, to become the modern subject-who-sees. Sasha's perspective should therefore be an outward-facing act of vision, out onto the rest of the world, and yet also a gaze inwards, as an internal affirmation of national identity.[41] I want to draw this out further by turning back to Dionne Brand's metaphor of the eye claiming citizenship and possessions, placing it alongside museum official André Dezarrois' comment that [i]t is from the new terrace of the new Palais du Trocadéro that the eye takes possession of this ephemeral and Babylonian City', and also Warnod's recognition that visitors should regard themselves as 'citizens', 'belong[ing] to

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[37] Britzolakis, p.467.

[38] Herbert, p.19. It is important to also note that with the colonial section of the exhibition located on floating pontoons on the Seine, not quite everywhere could be seen from this position. This location on the edge of the *Exposition*, physically adrift of the city proper, appears as an iteration of the effort to erase a colonial past from the constructed present of the *Exposition*. As Camarasana writes, the 'colonial world is also the past confronted. […] It is the world the Exposition planners literally pushed to the margins of the fairgrounds and that Rhys's plot recuperates' (p.53).

[39] Britzolakis, p.467.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Herbert interestingly notes that there was no France pavilion at the *Exposition*; France was nowhere present as object of a global knowledge, but was everywhere presented as subject of that knowledge: 'and that transcendent viewer, like the real world, always resided elsewhere, beyond the representational surfaces of the globe and of exhibition grounds'. Herbert, p.19.

that multiple and diverse race of visitors to the *Exposition*'.[42] As the passage above from *Good Morning, Midnight* shows, neither Sasha nor René take up the status of Herbert's transcendent subject, Dezarrois' possessive eye, nor Warnod's citizenship. The narrative relates that Sasha and René are at first facing away from the *Exposition* grounds, looking instead at the *Star of Peace* (*Monument de la Paix*), which stood just outside of the boundary of the *Exposition*. As depicted in photographs of the exhibition grounds (figs. 13 and 14), this was a monument that barely filled the space between the two wings of the Trocadéro and which was overshadowed by the advertising hoardings that were mounted on the façade behind.

When they do eventually turn to the *Exposition* itself, it is the fountains that catch Sasha's attention. Sasha has not returned (she says she wants to go *again* to the exhibition, implying a previous visit) to be part of the collective, to look at the people, the pavilions or their contents, but to find an emptiness and beauty that she has not been able to locate during her movements around Paris. In this respect, Sasha averts her gaze from the exhibition only to reveal that the real exhibition she has already witnessed and participated in is the city itself. This ties with the fact that Sasha and René's location was not part of the

Fig. 13: Exposition Internationale; pavilion d'exposition. Baranger.
Photo: © Ministère de la Culture (France)—Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (EAT 637 N)

[42] André Dezarrois, *La Revue de l'art*, 71, (Sept. 1937), p.127, in Herbert, p.23; Warnod, pp.67-68, in Herbert, p.36.

Fig. 14: Monument de la Paix, vue de nuit, François Kollar, 1937 (71L02047)
Photo: © Donation François Kollar Ministère de la Culture (Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine).

Exposition proper; the space between the museum wings of the Trocadéro only helped to form part of a section of boundary for its perimeter. Sasha's location thus acts less as a destination—as a trip to 'the Exhibition'—than as a passage or threshold, a place to enter or conclude a trip (indeed, the space of the esplanade was suggested by official guide itineraries as a point of departure or conclusion for a tour of the grounds).[43] If this location was to act as a starting point, then Sasha and René's choice not to take a tour of this constructed world disrupts the act of exhibition-going because the passage ends before they begin. If an end point—and the relevant passage of the text is situated at the end of the novel—then this reaffirms that Sasha's movements around the city have been her 'tour' of the exhibition all along. Sasha, like all of the interwar protagonists, exists in the border space between the city proper and the fantastical world of commodity display as presented by the *Exposition* pavilions: once again this becomes movement within and between systems of representation. It is all the more interesting then that Rhys positions her characters here,

[43] To quote Herbert: 'This platform was a place of genesis and teleology, from which, godlike, recent arrivals at the exhibition could behold the newly created world and declare it to be good, and those departing could pass last judgment on the world overlooked by the esplanade of the Palais'. Herbert, p.22.

at night, when the *Exposition*'s grounds are almost empty. Where Sasha stands is neither fully inside the exhibition, nor external to its physical space. Likewise, the night-time visit and the near-empty grounds posit Sasha in a space that is a threshold between moments and spaces of representation. The exhibition remains incomplete.

Such geographical mapping of Sasha's trip to the *Exposition* can be related back to Sasha's internalised subject/object positioning. There were a total of thirty-four million visitors to the *Exposition Internationale*, both French and foreign (tourists as consumers *of* and *in* the city).[44] But with such vast numbers of visitors, the question remained who was left to consume the spectacle they produced of themselves?[45] As Herbert points out, the *Exposition*'s visitors were a crucial component of the visual experience, 'bear[ing] witness to the spectacle in which they themselves performed'.[46] Sasha's use of the singular 'exhibition' repeatedly throughout the text stresses the significance of such performative visual display, shifting from the Exhibition and into everyday life. This is reinforced by the concept of 'exhibition' as presented in multiple facets in the other modernist texts, from Anna's clothes shopping to Julia's artist modelling. In this respect, the notion of 'exhibition' reinforces its value as a device through which Rhys addresses and critiques multiple aspects of visual culture, across the body of work produced in the interwar period.

The all-encompassing network of commercial and social exchange that occurs in *Good Morning, Midnight*—and which likewise preoccupies Rhys's other modernist fiction—finally figures as the Exhibition at the close of Rhys's last interwar novel, but throughout the text Sasha repeats her belief that she already exists as a visual object within this system through her use of the singular 'exhibition'. While Sasha tries to distinguish herself from the tourists who are in Paris for the *Exposition*: 'And when the Exhibition is pulled down and the tourists have departed where shall I be?' (30), the extended exhibition passage above reveals her awareness that she has been there all along: "I want to see it *again* at night before I go" (my emphasis). Sasha's relationship to the city-as-exhibition is complicated by her status as both subject and object of visual processes in Paris' public spaces. Her previous employment as an American Express tour guide was, for example, a failure because the streets were illegible—'North, south, east, west—they have no meaning for me.…'(26)—and because she is unable to locate the fashionable commercial venues for her customers: 'she wants to be taken to the exhibition of Loie Fuller materials, and she wants to be taken to a place where she can buy a hat which will épater everybody she knows and yet be easy

[44] Herbert, p.18.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

to wear, and on top of all this she wants to be taken to a certain exhibition of pictures. But she doesn't remember the man's name and she isn't sure where the exhibition is' (27).

During her movements around Paris, Sasha acknowledges the outcasts that surround her, displaying an acute awareness of how they, like her, are held up as spectacle. The novel averts its gaze from the 'real' *Exposition* to focus instead on the figures who are caught up in a cycle of commercial and economic exploitation. One of Sasha's memories of Parisian life is of a trip to look at a group of café patrons who have paid to use the café as a place to sleep rather than drink:

> he said: 'I'll take you to see something rather interesting.' And, wandering along the streets at the back of the Halles, we came to a café where the clients paid for the right, not to have a drink, but to sleep. They sat close-pressed against each other with their arms on the tables, their heads in their arms. Every place was filled; others lay along the floor. We squinted in at them through the windows. 'Would you like to go in and have a look at them?' he said, as if he were exhibiting a lot of monkeys (35)

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, those at the fringes of society are 'converted, metaphorically, into ethnographic spectacle'.[47] This is a more overt replication of the nuanced processes of visual objectification that occur in the other interwar novels. Comparison can be made between the all-encompassing spectacle of the Parisian city-dwellers in Rhys's novel with Virginia Woolf's description of 1924 Wembley Empire Exhibition visitors from 'Thunder at Wembley':

> They pass quietly, silently, in conveys, in groups, sometimes alone. […] But what has happened to our contemporaries? Each is beautiful; each is stately. Can it be that one is seeing human being for the first time? In streets they hurry; in houses they talk; they are bankers in banks, sell shoes in shops. Here against the enormous background of ferro-concrete Britain, of rosy Burma, at large, unoccupied, they reveal themselves simply as human beings, creatures of leisure, civilization, and dignity; a little languid perhaps, a little attenuated, but a product to be proud of. Indeed they are the ruin of the Exhibition.[48]

The sectioned areas of theatrical performance within the pavilions, where the colonised subjects of empire become human exhibits, find themselves mirrored by the everyday living practices of Paris's working-class and migrant populations. As Carol Dell'Amico notes of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys is preoccupied with patterns of socio-political submission on a macro level, as well as, 'more narrowly in terms of a consolidating global market, [the] automatization' that renders Sasha a 'sad circus-lioness' (39).[49] Similarly, Woolf's exhibition-goers as 'products' speaks of an automatisation that shifts from those on show at the exhibition to those who go to 'see', and that creates spectacle in and of itself.

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[47] Britzolakis, p.469.
[48] Woolf, 'Thunder at Wembley', pp.411-12.
[49] Dell'Amico, p.30.

Mapping the city through the characters' relationships to spaces of spectacle reveals a continual struggle between constructed ('the Exhibition') and lived ('the everyday') experience, between real and imagined spaces. In doing so, Rhys undercuts the monumentalising formation of empire as exercised by the exhibition, because such 'controlled' landscapes are revealed to be open to contestation. Containment of the exhibition, of the empire, was a complex issue because the 'fusion of imperialist and cosmopolitan ideals' that underpinned the nature of the global/imperial exhibition—and indeed empire itself—left residual traces of empire across the cityscape.[50] As Cohen relates, in London in 1924, one architectural reviewer rather oddly suggested that a large wall should be built around the Wembley Exhibition so that it would 'endure' as 'a world club, a cosmopolis where we may rendezvous with our fellow citizens of every colour, creed, and race'.[51]

Similar rhetoric can be found in an advertisement in *Voyage in the Dark*, but here the imperial centre is contained behind a wall—not to maintain England's cosmopolitanism but to prevent contamination from the colonial peripheries. One of Anna's earliest memories includes a picture advertising 'Biscuits Like Mother Makes, as Fresh in the Tropics as in the Motherland, Packed in Airtight Tins' (127). Anna remembers the advertisement showed:

> a tidy green tree and a shiny pale-blue sky, so close that if the little girl had stretched her arm up she could have touched it. (God is always near us. So cosy.) And a high, dark wall behind the little girl.
>
> Underneath the picture was written:
>
> The past is dear
> The future is clear
> And, best of all, the present.
>
> But it was the wall that mattered.
> And that used to be my idea of what England was like.
> 'And it is like that, too,' I thought. (127)

The colonial rhetoric of the wall image enters the text of *Voyage in the Dark* through the biscuit tin reference, and here Rhys could well be referring to Huntley & Palmers, a company that had established itself globally as a symbol of Britain's colonising power. Huntley & Palmers—an exhibitor at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley—was also mentioned by Conrad in *The Heart of Darkness*, where Marlowe, while in the Congo, describes his boat as 'an empty Huntley & Palmers biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape'.[52] The freshness promised by a state-of-the-art biscuit tin draws a parallel back to the 1924 Exhibition's 'Palace of Beauty'

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[50] Cohen, p.97.
[51] Cohen, p.97, quoting Harry Barnes, 'The British Empire Exhibition, Wembley', in *The Architectural Review*, LV (June 1924), 206-217 (p.212).
[52] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Hesperus, 2002), p.32.

as mentioned earlier, where women were placed in hermetically-sealed, glass displays: 'glass-fronted, sound-proof rooms […] constructed to contain the "beauty"'.[53] This rhetoric of purity and the fear of contamination appear again in the advertisement from the novel I mentioned in my Introduction: 'What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa' (50). Here the virtues of an English lady (virtues Anna's stepmother believes she is lacking) are symbolised via consumer products obtained through imperialist exploitation. Anna's identity as a white Creole excludes her from categorisation as an Englishwoman, giving added resonance to the term 'purity'. Taken out of the West Indies by Hester, Anna is supposedly removed from the contamination of the colonies, only to become 'impure' as a chorus-girl, then prostitute, in London. The visual performance of Anna within the urban landscape underscores the racial and sexual exhibition produced through this exclusion, confirming the way in which her colonial identity, along with her poverty, distance her from such a concept, debasing her to the value of a commodity.

In the context of the crisis of cosmopolitanism that lay beneath the promotion of internationalism at the world exhibitions, I want to return to the idea that Rhys's characters engage with exhibition as a sort of threshold space, a threshold both physical and metaphorical. For *Good Morning, Midnight*, the time/space compression that exhibitions produced also figures on a personal level. Rhys here provides an alternative reading of the attempts to translate global space into local space, identifying the exhibition's inability to account for the experiences of one who sees empire from a position of in-betweenness. The 1937 *Exposition Internationale*, as it pushed its colonial exhibits to its peripheries, can be seen as attempting an erasure of the past, but in fact it achieved merely a repetition of the same. Sasha also attempts to erase her past, likewise without success. Her trip to Paris, to shop, to see the Exhibition, has been a plan to invent herself anew. But her understanding of its impossibility resonates as she utters at the close:

> You fall into blackness. That's the past—or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same. (144)

It is interesting then, that the novel closes with a return to the start. The 1937 *Exposition Internationale* is the second of the novel's references to the exhibitory practices of the early twentieth century. The narrative begins with an allusion to an exhibition held in London prior to Sasha's return to Paris, and given the time frame of the novel I take this to be the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. Sasha is trapped in a London tube station, unable to find the way out. Instead of the exit, she is confronted by signs pointing the way to the Exhibition:

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[53] Lawrence, *British Empire Exhibition: Official Guide*, quoted from Cohen, p.90.

> I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition—I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This Way to the Exhibition…. I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me. I say: 'I want the way out.' But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: 'Just like me—always wanting to be different from other people.' The steel finger points along a long stone passage. This Way—This Way—This Way to the Exhibition…. (12)

The claustrophobia and lack of space Sasha experiences in the cityscape is refigured in this passage into a nightmare of subterranean enclosure filled with mechanical forms, a labyrinth from which she can find no way out. Sasha's inability to locate the exit turns the tube station into a non-place. The passageway is not yet part of the city but a space in between spaces that signifies stasis and entrapment just as it hints at the possibility of movement to a somewhere else. In the station passageway the city and the exhibition are absent from view, hidden by the underground aspect, yet the knowledge of their existence is overbearingly present. Sasha is, to return to my earlier reading of her positioning on the esplanade at the 1937 *Exposition Internationale*, both absent and present from the exhibition, nowhere and everywhere at once.

This also connects back to Sasha's fear throughout the novel of making herself an exhibition—'isn't there something you can do so that nobody looks at you or sees you? Of course, you can make your mind vacant, neutral then your face also becomes vacant, neutral—you are invisible' (17). Sasha's age becomes a factor here too. She is an older woman out of place, unable to erase the past, no longer able to inhabit the same public spaces she used to. One could argue that Sasha's journey to the *Exposition* at the close of the text is at least her discovery of the 'Way to the Exhibition'. Both Paris-as-exhibition and the *Exposition Internationale* afford Sasha a gaze that the patriarchal power of London does not—'I can't bear to see you looking like this' (11)—but the trip at the close of the text only completes the hallucination she has at the start. In this respect the stasis Sasha desires because the past is too painful, the future inconceivable, is achieved. But this stasis is not without motion. Sasha's visit to Paris that serves as the body of the novel unites the two instances of exhibition practice, leaving Rhys's protagonist wandering between exhibitory spaces without direction. Sasha's assertion that she has no home, no country, that she belongs nowhere, is the mantra of the colonial subject who articulates the status of all of the outcasts in the novels. The return to the start at the close of the text brings into focus the colonial legacy that the Paris Exhibition attempts to obscure. *Good Morning, Midnight*

stresses that with exhibition and spectacle, moments of seeing and being seen or belonging and non-belonging are necessary contradictions of everyday modern existence. Sasha's engagement with exhibition as both practice and concept shows her awareness of being viewed as an outsider, with the text acknowledging that Sasha's alienation and dislocation are not just components of one marginalised women's experience but a wide-reaching condition that is a product of modern life.

Introduced in his 1967 lecture 'Of Other Spaces', Michel Foucault proposed the concept of heterotopias' to describe spaces that exhibit multiple layers of meaning, revealing tensions and contradictions within society: in short, spaces of otherness. Heterotopias are, according to Foucault, real spaces that act 'like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places'.[54] Heterotopias are capable of juxtaposing several, incompatible spaces into one single space, with this compression of multiple landscapes into one single space mirrored by the heterotopic ability to present a break in traditional temporal structures. Foucault designates museums and libraries as heterotopias of 'indefinitely accumulating time […] a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages'.[55] One could argue therefore that the combination of time and space compression and expansion as described by Foucault can find comparison in the modern imperial exhibition: 'the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes,' for as Foucault continues, 'the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity'.[56] The exhibition as utilised by Rhys acts as heterotopia as it creates 'a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory', with the illusion of its ability to represent the world in a totality identifying the exhibition found in *Good Morning, Midnight* as 'a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled'.[57]

The heterotopic sites and counter-sites of modernity—the exhibition, the mirror, the theatre, cinema and artist's studio—can be combined with the subversive nature of heterotopic language as seen in Rhys's modernist style. Foucault also uses heterotopia to describe a form of writing that undermines the ordering of knowledge; heterotopias 'dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its

[54] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22-27 (p.24).
[55] Foucault, p.26.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Foucault, p.27.

source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences'.[58] As Andrew Thacker comments, Rhys's modernist writing combines 'Foucault's twin senses of heterotopia: a form of writing that disorders grammar and syntax, and a disorienting location or "place without a place"'.[59] To return to my reading of the language, form and style of Rhys's writing begun in the first chapter of this thesis, the blank spaces created by single-sentence paragraphs, multi-sectioned chapters and gaps between passages of prose in the novels articulate Rhys's vision of urban spaces of spectacle. Exploring her writings within the context of modernist visual cultures is to make visible their countermarks to some of the central assumptions and ambitions of imperial representation in interwar London and Europe, undermining the colonial power that manifested in the metropolis through the representational systems of visual spectacle.

This thesis has addressed how Rhys's 'placelessness' within the coloniser/colonised binary affects her ability to see—and thus create—alternate subjectivities for her protagonists. Moments of double-identification appear throughout the texts, where the characters' engagements with various elements of visual culture—the theatre, fashion, visual arts, cinema, and exhibitions—speak of more internalised responses to visual mis-representation. This is undoubtedly informed by Rhys's own experiences, with the more complex voyaging in of the white Creole female to the imperial centre shifting racially coded, visual identifications. Rhys's texts adopt a multi-disciplinary artistic language that moves *within* and *between* frames of representation to complicate the binaries of inner/outer, seen/unseen. Rhys questions the very act of representation as she binds gendered, colonial relations to the politics of vision.

Rhys's interwar fiction traces a dialectic between cultural events on the stage, the screen, the canvas, the catwalk and the exhibition. In turn, these spaces of spectacle inform her modernist novels' vision of urban life. Rhys's engagement with the visual cultures of European modernism is refigured from image to text to provide a powerful critique of empire's appropriation of systems of visual representation. In doing so, she articulates most powerfully the ambivalence of those who exist in a state of 'in-betweenness', revealing as she does that the politics of vision and of empire are always intertwined.

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[58] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p.xviii.
[59] Thacker, p.213.

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