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Jean Rhys Writing Back From ‘The Other Side, Always’

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Abstract

In her postcolonial masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Jean Rhys declared that ‘There is always the other side, always’. Published in 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* wrote back to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* by rewriting the character of Bertha Mason. As the mad Creole antagonist trapped in Rochester’s attic, Brontë’s depiction of Bertha was filled with descriptions of savagery and bestial lunacy. Bertha was pushed to the margins of *Jane Eyre,* completely voiceless within the narrative of her racialised, sexualised madness. Born in Dominica in 1890, Rhys felt a deep sympathy for Brontë’s madwoman from her first reading of *Jane Eyre* as a child. Her life as a Creole outsider in England strengthened this connection, as Rhys became more and more like Bertha through her own experiences as a similarly isolated, racialised woman, whilst writing *Quartet* (1928), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). In this thesis I argue that Rhys drew from her experiences of marginalisation, precarity and prejudice to illustrate a possible ‘other side’ of the colonial and patriarchal attitudes that formed Brontë’s madwoman, and that she did so long before the 1960s.

Previously, Rhys’s writing back to Brontë has been examined solely within the connections between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre.* Because of this limited scope of analysis, it is widely thought by academics and Rhys’s biographers that Brontë’s influence upon Rhys began and ended with *Wide Sargasso Sea.* However, this resistive act of writing back in fact began far sooner than previously recognised. My thesis argues that Rhys began her postcolonial and feminist criticism of Brontë and Brontë’s representation of the West Indies, in her earliest modernist works.

Analysing a selection of Rhys’s fiction, this thesis reads the Rhysian woman as a modern manifestation of Bertha. Tracing Rhys’s postcolonial inversion of Brontë’s

Eurocentric gothic, this thesis also examines the gothic modes and motifs within Rhys's modernist fiction. The echo of two of Brontë's other marginalised women, Céline Varens and Ginevra Fanshawe of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, are also read within Rhys's female characters. Like Bertha, these minor protagonists closely resembled Rhys's experiences as a mistress and demi-mondaine, and she was able to rewrite Brontë's contemptuous representation of Céline and Ginevra with the same lens of sympathy that she applied to the Creole lunatic. With attention to both textual evidence and the author's contextual experiences, this thesis traces how Rhys was continually motivated and influenced by Brontë's representations to write back from the 'other side, always'.

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Introduction: Maddening Isolation from the 'Other Side'

In her postcolonial masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Jean Rhys boldly declared 'There is always the other side, always'.[1] This 'other side' was Rhys's key concern when she wrote back to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* provided a postcolonial perspective to Brontë's representation of the Creole madwoman, Bertha Mason. By fleshing out Brontë's character as Antoinette Cosway, Rhys was able to give Bertha a backstory and voice. Antoinette's suffering and isolation under Rochester's control countered Brontë's depictions of savage, racialised lunacy and sexuality. Bertha's new identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* closely resembled Rhys's own upbringing in Dominica. Rhys felt a deep sympathy for the madwoman since her first reading of *Jane Eyre* as a child in the West Indies, and continually drew upon her own experiences of maddening isolation as a white Creole trapped in England to flesh out Bertha's own madness.

Rhys's revolutionary breach of textual borders has been closely examined by academics since *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s publication in 1966. Contemporary readers of *Jane Eyre* will find it difficult to read Brontë's Bertha without thinking of Rhys's response, since *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* have become inextricably linked in the literary canon. Rhys established a narrative dialogue that showed the clear connection to the influence of Brontë's work upon her own. However, the relationship between the two authors, and the scholarly analysis of Brontë's influence upon Rhys's work, has been examined strictly in the connections between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

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[1] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 106.
While *Voyage in the Dark* is occasionally praised as Rhys's best work, it is frequently overshadowed by her most well-known work, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* which has been labelled her 'masterpiece' for both its overall excellence and immense contribution to the post-colonial literary field:
Urmila Seshagiri in 'Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century' – an insightful read, and specifies *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Rhys's 'masterpiece' and most widely-read novel.
Elizabeth Vreeland, Jean Rhys, 'The Art of Fiction,' The Paris Review, 1979, p. 220 – an excellent interview with Rhys that I draw upon for Rhys's own perspective throughout this thesis; in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* is called her 'most famous novel' and rightfully credited for bring Rhys back into the literary spotlight.

It is this knowledge gap I aim to fill, as I argue that Rhys was influenced and inspired by Brontë far earlier than previously recognized. This thesis will widen the previous scholarly scope of analysis by considering the influence of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* upon Rhys's earlier novels. I have selected three novels from Rhys's early literary career to examine Brontë's impact: *Quartet* (1924), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). As I will show, Rhys's distinctive feminist and postcolonial methods of writing back from the 'other side' that she later employed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are evident in these earlier works.

I will begin my analysis by tracing Brontë's lunatic within the Rhysian woman. In chapter one, I argue that Marya of *Quartet,* Anna of *Voyage in the Dark* and Sasha of *Good Morning, Midnight* are each extensions of Bertha as much as they represent Rhys herself. Rhys rewrote the Creole madwoman in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* but her revisions and extensions of Bertha within these earlier novels establish an engagement with Brontë that predates this widely acknowledged influence. Then in chapter two, I consider Brontë's gothic themes and motifs, which Rhys used as a springboard for her postcolonial criticism. Influenced by Brontë's portrayal of the West Indies as a place of danger and madness in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Rhys inverts this European gothic representation to show her own understanding of maddening isolation. Rhys's gothic instead formed England as the land of danger, contrasting English constraint as truly terrifying against her warm memories of Dominica. In chapter three I turn my attention to two of Brontë's secondary characters, Céline of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*'s Ginevra, to trace Rhys's refashioning of these adulterous 'coquettes'. Rhys fleshed out Céline and Ginevra with her own experiences as a demi-monde mistress. Like her refashioning of Bertha, Rhys was likewise influenced to respond to negative depictions of women so closely resembling herself, which overlapped with her experiences of marginalisation due to her sexuality and race as a white Creole in England. Ultimately, what each of these chapters establishes is that Brontë's influence, both subconscious and conscious, inspired Rhys to 'write back' long before she even began drafting *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

'What is Underneath What One Writes'

In 1977, Jean Rhys wrote to a friend on the subject of her novels: 'It is impossible to be quite certain of what is underneath what one writes, perhaps unconsciously. Or indeed, what is underneath anything'.[2] As she so aptly stated here, it is impossible to know for certain what serves as the influence, the 'underneath', of Rhys's writing – particularly when Rhys herself seems unsure of exactly where her inspiration has come from. Despite Rhys's own uncertainty, her body of work contains an immense network of connections of influence, which reveal both the conscious and unconscious 'underneath'.

While *Wide Sargasso Sea* was obviously influenced by *Jane Eyre,* I readily acknowledge that Rhys's earlier works could have been influenced by many other authors besides Brontë. In her autobiography *Smile Please,* Rhys credits her love of words, 'especially beautiful words', to her literature teacher from Dominica who gave lessons on English poetry. This teacher introduced Rhys to reading Shelley and Shakespeare beyond dull classroom analysis.[3] Rhys's wider reading tastes were varied and fickle. While she enjoyed poetry, Rhys also admitted in conversation with David Plante 'with no sign of great regret, that she hadn't read Balzac, Proust, Fielding, Trollope, George Eliot, James, Conrad, Joyce. She couldn't read Austen, she had tried. She had read a lot of Dickens. She had read, and remembered in great patches, the English Romantic poets, and Shakespeare'.[4] This distinctly English influence is affirmed by Rhys herself, as she states in her autobiography that her childhood was spent reading 'everything I could get hold of. […] A rather odd selection of poets, Milton, Byron, then Crabbe, Cowper, Mrs Hemans, also *Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, Gulliver's Travels, Pilgrim's Progress*'.[5] Given the themes of travel and adventure here, written from a colonial perspective, it is easy to see how Rhys could have been influenced by these novels to write back to their exoticized depictions of the world outside England with her own postcolonial point of view.

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[2] Jean Rhys, 'Letter to Helen Nebeker', 1977, cited from R. McClure Smith, 'I Don't Dream about It Any More': The Textual Unconscious in Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea", *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26 (1996), 113-136, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30225445> [accessed 8 November 2021] (p. 113).

[3] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography,* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2016), pp. 44-45.

Rhys's proclivity for scandal in her novels could also be credited to her early reading habits. She writes in her autobiography that she had always:

> Liked books about prostitutes, there were a good many then, and I vividly recollect a novel called *The Sands of Pleasure* written by a man named Filson Young. It must have been well written otherwise I would never have remembered it so perfectly to this day. It was about an Englishman's love affair with an expensive demi-mondaine in Paris.[6]

The plot of this novel, which Rhys still 'vividly' recollected even in her old age, sounds remarkably similar to the plot of many of her own works – specifically the 'demi-mondaine' who so often served as her central character and mirrored her own experiences. Likewise, the ill-fated affair with an emblem of English patriarchy mentioned here is also prominent within her writing. Given these links between her early reading and fiction, the kind of connections I make between Rhys and Brontë could be made between Rhys and Young – an interesting area for further exploration perhaps, to continue to fill the gaps in our knowledge of Rhys's writing.

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[4] David Plante, 'Jean Rhys: A Remembrance', *Paris Review,* 1 September 1979, <https://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=25231424&S=R&D=hlh&EbscoContent=dGJyMNLr40Sep7Q4zOX0OLCmsEmep7dSsqi4SLKWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGqtkiyqbZIuePfgeyx44Dt6fIA> [accessed 10 November 2021], p. 277.

[5] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography,* p. 48.

[6] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography,* p. 48.

Certainly, the influence of other authors upon Rhys's works beyond Brontë's obvious impact in *Wide Sargasso Sea* remains a relatively new territory for exploration. Those who have made links make them rarely or speculatively, such as Elsa Lorphelin's study of intertextuality within Rhys's short stories. As a sidenote Lorphelin lists in parenthesises some possible authorial presences within Rhys's fiction, listing: 'Baudelaire, Colette, Maupassant, Walt Whitman'.[7] Academics who have turned their attention away from the connections between Rhys and Brontë within *Wide Sargasso Sea* usually emphasise the influence of French poet Charles Baudelaire within Rhys's early writing, as noted by Lorphelin in her aforementioned list. Tracing Baudelaire's impact, Rebecca Colesworthy writes that Rhys was well-versed in the French literary canon.[8] This included the poems and essays of Baudelaire, and Colesworthy writes that Rhys stated his works brought her 'horrible pain'.[9] Despite her apparent dislike of Baudelaire, Rhys's work apparently shares many similarities to his, as Colesworthy asks:

> Perhaps his portraits of modern life were uncannily familiar, or perhaps they missed the mark. Rhys's own portrait of modern life in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* certainly shares thematic and formal features with Baudelaire's prose poems—from the novel's

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[7] Elsa Lorphelin, 'The Voices of Others: Intertextuality and Authorial Presences in Jean Rhys's Short Fiction', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 31 (2020), 162-172 <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1080/09574042.2020.1779440> [accessed 30 November 2021], p. 164.

[8] Rebecca Colesworthy, 'Jean Rhys and the Fiction of Failed Reciprocity', in *Returning the Gift: Modernism and the Thought of Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 106-146 (p. 123).

[9] Colesworthy, p. 123.

> episodic tableaus (e.g., Julia’s first and second encounters with “unknowns” in the street) to the sometimes wry and even humorous narrative voice.[10]

In a similar vein of analysis, Juliette Taylor-Batty cites Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* as a ‘silent intertext’ to Rhys’s work.[11] Although this is excellent analysis of influence beyond Brontë, the links between Baudelaire and Rhys also remain largely confined to studies of *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

In the early 1920s, Rhys’s writing was encouraged, shaped and published by fellow modernist Ford Madox Ford. Through Ford, Rhys was afforded access to the major modernist literary circle of Left Bank Paris. This circle of writers included some major literary figures, such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein, and Rhys could have easily found inspiration within her contemporaries here.

With any number of influential authors to write against in this era, along with her varied tastes, it could seem a difficult (and perhaps foolish) task to trace one particular authorial presence within Rhys’s works. However, these possible influences from other authors and the influence of Brontë do not necessarily have to exist separately. It is perfectly reasonable to assume Rhys was influenced by many authors throughout her lifetime of reading and writing. To say that there can only be one possible influence upon Rhys’s work would only isolate Rhys’s works from the contexts and canons from which they arose, and do her fiction an even greater disservice than our current knowledge gap. While I read Brontë’s influence as the most significant, it is still important to be aware of the many other influences present within Rhys's work. Reading these various sources together offers the most insight into the 'underneath' of her writing.

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[10] Colesworthy, p. 123.

[11] Juliette Taylor-Batty, ‘“Le Revenant”: Baudelaire’s Afterlife in Wide Sargasso Sea’, *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 27 (2020), 665-688 <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/article/775645> [accessed 2 December 2021], p. 666.

While these cases for other authorial influences upon Rhys's works are compelling, I still argue that Brontë influenced Rhys more than Baudelaire and far more than what is realised by academics and readers. This is both a conscious and subconscious influence that predates the immediate links between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* and extended across Rhys's decades of writing. I will here outline how this earlier and wider influence of Brontë's works continually motivated Rhys to write back with her own representations, both before and beyond her writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the 1960s.

Early Engagement

Because academics, and even Rhys herself, are so divided on what or who was 'underneath' her writing, it may seem odd that I argue Brontë's influence is such an important one. At first glance, mine may seem a fairly speculative claim. However, we do have clear evidence that Rhys engaged with Brontë's writing as early as her childhood and that her work clearly remained on her mind long afterwards. In an interview with Elizabeth Vreeland in 1979, Rhys discusses her early reading of *Jane Eyre*:

> When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life. Charlotte

> Brontë must have had strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books, like *Villette*.[12]

Jane Eyre's representation of the Creole 'awful madwoman' clearly resonated with Rhys long after her first reading.[13] We know with certainty that the representation of Bertha deeply affected Rhys, as she states she felt 'immediately' motivated to write her story, 'as it might have really been'.[14] Rhys also mentions the depictions of the West Indies in Brontë's *Villette,* establishing her wider engagement with Brontë's works beyond *Jane Eyre*. Rhys clearly read Brontë many times in her life, as she wrote in a letter to her editor and friend Diana Athill that 'I came to England between sixteen and seventeen, a very impressionable age and *Jane Eyre* was one of the books I read then'.[15] From Rhys's own words here, we know for a fact that she engaged with Brontë's works again when she arrived in England, and during this time she formed the basis for many of her novels.

In addition to Rhys's early engagement with Brontë, we also know that Rhys's writing process was a long one. Her stories were developed over the span of several years as she wove her lived experiences and emotions into her novels decades after they initially occurred. Rhys wrote endlessly and throughout her entire life, drafting stories as well as writing journals, poetry and letters. These writings have been kept safe in the Jean Rhys Collection at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma.[16] Unfortunately for my research here in New Zealand, the remnants of Rhys's journals and drafts that have survived the decades and

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[12] Elizabeth Vreeland, 'The Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review,* 1979, 218-237, <https://web-a-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=f8fc9aad-7bfd-4a38-b868-9b67dcb4164c%40sdc-v-sessmgr01> [accessed 21 August 2021] (p. 235).

[13] Vreeland, p. 235.

[14] Vreeland, p. 235.

[15] Maroula Joannou, 'From Black to Red': Jean Rhys's Use of Dress in Wide Sargasso Sea', *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches,* ed. by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) 123-145, (p. 125).

[16] 'Jean Rhys Archive, 1920-1991', McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections & University Archives, *The University of Tulsa,* <https://utulsa.as.atlas-sys.com/repositories/2/resources/56> [accessed 20 August 2021].

Rhys's own culling are quite out of reach in the age of Covid-19 restrictions and my lack of funding for a such a large research trip from New Zealand to the United States. Given the inaccessibility of these journals and drafts, I have drawn upon the works of other academics and biographers who have accessed the Jean Rhys collection for their own research.

Rhys's biographers Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran are two of the aforementioned scholars. In the introduction to their biography of Rhys, Johnson and Moran state that sentences published in *Wide Sargasso Sea* were first drafted in the 1930s, as they appear in Rhys's diaries from this period. While Johnson and Moran do not provide specific examples of these sentences, they do highlight how Rhys's long practice of 'crafting a passage over many years, and [the] shifting material between the registers of autobiography and fiction, makes her corpus a comprehensively and thoroughly intraconnected one'.[17] Given Rhys's engagement with Brontë from her childhood, as well as her long writing process that evolved passages and ideas over decades before their eventual publication, we can see how Brontë's influence could have easily permeated Rhys's other works. Considering the fact that she was drafting *Wide Sargasso Sea,* her most direct engagement with Brontë, in the 1930s alongside writing *Quartet, Good Morning, Midnight,* and *Voyage in the Dark,* I argue Rhys was always writing back to Brontë.

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[17] Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, 'Introduction: The Haunting of Jean Rhys', *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) 1-18 (p. 3).

Influence and Manuscripts

The earlier and wider influence from Brontë becomes apparent when we consider 'Le Revenant', Rhys's original manuscript of *Wide Sargasso Sea* dated from the early 1940s. The few surviving pages of this manuscript are also held in the Jean Rhys Collection. I was able to find important information about 'Le Revenant' from Catherine Rovera's 'The "Seeds of Madness" in Wide Sargasso Sea: The Novel and its Avatars', a paper that examines the earlier influence of Brontë upon Rhys's drafting of *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Rovera also provides letters from Rhys that prove that this initial version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was 'half finished' as early the 1940s.[18] In a letter to her publisher while writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the 1960s, Rhys declared:

> I wrote this book before! – Different setting – same idea. (It was called 'Le Revenant' then). The MSS was lost when I was moving from somewhere to somewhere else and I wonder whether I haven't been trying to get back to what I did (An impossible effort). […] I tried to rewrite 'Le Revenant' but could not. However I discovered two chapters (in another suitcase) and have used them in this book [*Wide Sargasso Sea*]. But 'Le Revenant' came to life or back again.[19]

Despite being incomplete, this manuscript is vital evidence of the connection between Rhys and Brontë's writing, as it predated her drafting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the 1960s.[20] It is also important to note that during this period of drafting Rhys was also writing her earlier novels, and it is not hard to imagine her first direct instance writing back to *Jane Eyre* blurring into her other works. The title of this manuscript is similarly significant in its reference to Bertha. Denoting a sense of revival, ‘Le Revenant’ means to literally return, referring to ‘“one coming back,” either from another place or from the dead’.[21] Like the aptly-titled manuscript, Rhys’s wider fiction was aimed at similarly ‘reviving’ Bertha from Brontë’s representation, and I examine Bertha’s revival through the Rhysian woman further in chapter one.

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[18] Catherine Rovera, 'The "Seeds of Madness" in Wide Sargasso Sea: The Novel and its Avatars', *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 32 (2009), 110-120, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/759082089?pq-origsite=primo&accountid=17287> [accessed 10 November 2021], (p. 112).

[19] McClure Smith, p. 122.

[20] Rovera, p. 112.

In addition to the early drafting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in ‘Le Revenant’, Rhys’s writing back to Brontë is prominent within two other early manuscripts from the mid-1930s: namely ‘Mr Howard’s House – Creole’, and the original version of *Voyage in the Dark*’s closing chapter.[22] I have primarily drawn upon Rovera’s research for information on the ‘Mr Howard’s House – Creole’ manuscript, as very little has been written on it and the Jean Rhys Collection holds the remaining few pages. Much like ‘Le Revenant’, sections of these two manuscripts were later used in the published version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* according to Rovera, demonstrating Rhys’s long process of writing and rewriting. While she reflected upon her ideas over several years, Rhys continually used her old drafts in new works. In Rhys’s own words, here cited by Rovera, she used her ‘prior material to serve her present purpose – to give a voice to Brontë’s “monster”’.[23]

Rovera states that the ‘Mr Howard’s House – Creole’ manuscript contains the central themes of *Wide Sargasso Sea,* asserting that ‘Guilt, defloration and confinement appear almost verbatim’.[24] According to Rovera, this manuscript:

> Could well be the earliest fragment of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. If it does not prove that Rhys had already started her last novel as early as 1938, it nevertheless testifies to the

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[21] *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revenant?src=search-dict-hed> [accessed 11 April 2022], s.v. revenant, n.

[22] Rovera, pp. 110-111.

[23] Rovera, p. 111.

[24] Rovera, p. 113.

> fact that, by the late thirties, she had started to collect material for her subsequent work.[25]

More specifically, the manuscript contains a draft of Antoinette's dream, which appeared in Part One of *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Rovera believes this dream to be a direct 'transposition' of Jane Eyre's dream before her doomed wedding to Rochester.[26] Rhys even takes words directly from Brontë's novel here: when Jane Eyre 'wandered, on a moonlight night, through the grass-grown enclosure within: here I stumbled over a marble hearth, and there over a fallen fragment of cornice.'[27] In the published version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys revives Brontë's imagery when she writes: 'We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. […] I stumble over my dress and cannot get up'.[28] The word 'enclosure' is repeated by Rhys to emphasise the sense of imprisonment and isolation. Rhys draws upon the same sense of decay and gloom as both protagonists 'stumble' through the ruins.

Tracing this connection back further, Rovera describes the drafted version of this dream in 'Mr Howard's House – Creole', as Rhys began writing back to Brontë's imagery long before the overlaps of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Rovera states that the early parallels between 'Mr Howard's House – Creole' and *Jane Eyre* are made even more direct with Rhys's initial use of phrases like 'huge enclosure', which she feels not only establishes it as a draft of *Wide Sargasso Sea* but also brings the passage even closer to Brontë's prototext.[29] This early version of Antoinette's dream in 'Mr Howard's House – Creole' is not the first time Rhys drafted *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as Rovera reveals that a similar dream appears 'in an even more primitive state' in Rhys's 'Black Exercise Book'. This exercise book was used by Rhys to write down her drafts and ideas in the 1930s, and is also currently held in the Jean Rhys Collection.[30] This early development of ideas further establishes Rhys's long engagement with the postcolonial act of writing back to Brontë.

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[25] Rovera, p. 113.

[26] Rovera, p. 113.

[27] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 370-371.

[28] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 50.

[29] Rovera, p. 113.

The earlier influence of Brontë is even more prominent in Rhys's original version of *Voyage in the Dark*'s ending, written in the early 1930s before the revised version was published in 1934. The section in question, which Rhys nicknamed her 'Mad Part III,' occurs when Anna of *Voyage in the Dark* verges on madness from the pain of a botched abortion. In a dream-like state Anna recalls her home in Dominica before her death through a vision that frees her from the constrictive English surroundings.[31] The dreams of Dominica that Rhys wrote into *Voyage in the Dark* are transposed to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For example, Rhys writes of the 'melancholy negro tunes' that Anna recollects while spiralling into her memories, singing the verse 'Now all good times I leave behind, Adieu sweetheart adieu'.[32] In her hallucination, Anna discusses the song with her English stepmother, Hester:

> That one's very melancholy Hester said and the words don't seem to me to make any sense. I said it means "My beautiful girl is singing to her mother. The little ones grow old. The little ones grow old." A very melancholy tune Hester said a very melancholy tune. It astonishes me how melancholy some of these negro tunes are I thought they were gay tunes.[33]

In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Antoinette refers to the same 'melancholic' tune, recalling her maid Christophine singing:

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[30] 'Black Exercise Book', McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections & University Archives, *The University of Tulsa*, <https://utulsa.as.atlas-sys.com/repositories/2/archival_objects/8156> [accessed 10 November 2021], qtd. by Rovera, p. 113.

[31] Rovera, p. 114.

[32] Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Voyage in the Dark: Part IV (Original Version)' *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology,* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990) 381-389 (p. 382).

[33] Kime Scott, p. 382.

> The music was gay but the words were sad and her voice often quavered and broke on the high note. “Adieu.” Not adieu as we said it, a dieu, which made more sense after all. The loving man was lonely, the girl was deserted, the children never came back. Adieu.[34]

With the same specific references to the lyric ‘adieu’, as well as the same emphasis on the tune’s contrasting sad lyrics with the lively music and the perceived lack of sense, the song of *Voyage in the Dark* is written into *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Within Rhys’s long process of creation, we can trace how the novel that directly responds to Brontë was clearly being drafted throughout Rhys’s writing career.

According to letters from Rhys, she originally planned to write the whole of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in a style closely resembling the end to *Voyage in the Dark.*[35] Both the original and published versions of *Voyage in the Dark* cross dreams with reality with a rambling, modernist stream-of-consciousness to convey Anna’s slipping sanity:

> Are you afraid of dying Beatrice said no I said I don’t believe I am are you yes she said I am but I never think about it I said haven’t you ever wanted to die you know when you look down into deep water and see the trees upside down haven’t you ever wanted to quickly like that.[36]

Wanting to likewise give Bertha’s madness shape and substance, Rhys planned to reframe Brontë’s madwoman entirely through Antoinette’s dreams, exactly how she portrayed Anna’s loss of consciousness in *Voyage in the Dark*. In a letter cited by Rovera, Rhys discusses this draft:

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[34] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 18.
[35] Rovera, pp. 114-115.
[36] Kime Scott, p. 384.

> I started, ages ago, with a different idea, another kind of idea. The book began and ended with a dream (though I didn't get the last dream right for a long time). All the rest was to be a long monologue. Antoinette in her prison room remembers, loves, hates, raves, talks to imaginary people, hears imaginary voices answering and overhears meaningless conversations outside. The story, if any, to be implied, never told straight. I remembered the last part of "Voyage in the Dark" written like that – time and place abolished, past and present the same – and I had been almost satisfied. Then everybody said it was "confused and confusing – impossible to understand etc." and I had to cut and rewrite it (I still think I was right, and they were wrong, tho' it was long ago). Still I thought "if they fussed over one part of a book, nobody will get the hang of a whole book written that way at all" or "A mad girl speaking all the time is too much!"[37]

Here Rhys explicitly connects *Wide Sargasso Sea,* her novel most obviously influenced by Brontë's, with the draft of *Voyage in the Dark* written in the 1930s. This engagement indicates not only an early influence, but a wider influence that extended beyond *Wide Sargasso Sea* and into Rhys's other works. Even the published version of *Voyage in the Dark* still closely resembles Antoinette's fall into madness, but the original ending detailed the life of a Caribbean woman lost in herself with greater depth. Her editor had trouble with the feeling of hopelessness that Rhys wrote into the original end to *Voyage in the Dark*, believing that Anna's madness and death would be too depressing for readers. Rhys begrudgingly changed it to the published version, which has Anna 'starting all over again', instead of dying.[38] While the published version recalls two major events from Anna's childhood in Dominica – watching the mardi gras and falling from a horse – Rovera states that the original version ‘encapsulates the whole life of the nineteen-year-old heroine’.[39] This was a life that Rhys was able to eventually rewrite into Antoinette’s narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea* after first writing it in *Voyage in the Dark.*

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[37] Rovera, pp. 114-115.

[38] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 159.

We have looked at the version of this dream from both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the first ending to *Voyage in the Dark*. However, only when we read these with Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in mind can we understand why Rhys sought to rewrite the narrative, as it provides the reasons underneath this influence. In *Jane Eyre* the reader sees Bertha entirely through Jane’s perspective and Rochester’s stories, through which the Creole madwoman is reduced to a figure of racialised madness. Unlike Rhys’s account the life behind Antoinette’s fading sanity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Brontë’s Bertha is merely a gothic figure of racialised horror: her features ‘fearful and ghastly’ to English Jane:

> It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments. […] The lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes.[40]

Through her own imagery of dreaming and madness, Rhys was grappling with Brontë’s racialised madwoman even from writing *Voyage in the Dark* in the early 1930s. These connected sections prove an influence from Brontë prior to Rhys’s drafting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the 1960s. Additionally, I argue these undeniable connections between *Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea,* and *Voyage in the Dark* prove Brontë’s influence extended into Rhys’s other works. These are the kind of links I aim to trace much further with this thesis.

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[39] Rovera, p. 115.

[40] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 372.

Wider Analysis of Influence

The links between Brontë and Rhys have been mapped extensively between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* but Rhys's wider engagement with Brontë has not received nearly as much attention from academics.[41] Although the early drafts of *Wide Sargasso Sea* ('Mr Howard's House – Creole' and 'Le Revenant') from Rhys have been examined in connection to Brontë, as in Rovera's paper for example, this study of early influence remains embedded in the *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* connection. Subsequently, Brontë's influence upon Rhys's other, earlier novels has been overlooked. Links have also been made between Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the post-colonial, modernist, and feminist characteristics of her earlier works. Specifically, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark* are often studied in connection for their shared commentary on race and colonialism. Likewise, Rhys's early novels *Quartet, Good Morning, Midnight,* and *Voyage in the Dark* are linked by their shared themes of women's isolation and treatment under patriarchal powers.[42] Despite connecting these novels to *Wide Sargasso Sea,* in which Rhys directly writes back to Brontë, Brontë's authorial influence within these wider connections remains unexamined.

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[41] For great examples of this kind of analysis of the connections between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* I recommend consulting:
-*A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* by Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger
-'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' by Gayatri Spivak, from *Postcolonial Criticism,* ed. by Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton and Willy Maley
-'The Other Stage: from Jane Eyre to Wide Sargasso Sea' by Sylvie Maurel

[42] J. Dillon Brown, 'Textual Entanglement: Jean Rhys's Critical Discourse', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 56 (2010), 568-589 <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/article/392857> [accessed 1 December 2021], (p. 568).

Conscious and Unconscious Influence

Here I want to consider the mode of influence in greater depth, while thinking about authorial agency in Rhys's writing back to Brontë's hypotext. The question of agency within the act of writing a 'countertext' is important to consider. As we ask what exactly Brontë's influence looks like within Rhys's own writing, is it fair to Rhys to credit Brontë with so much power and presence within these early novels? Considering this question within the connection between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* in 'I Don't Dream about It Any More': The Textual Unconscious in Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea", McClure Smith writes:

> Rhys is not so much an object of Brontë's literary influence as she is an authorial agent shaping a countertext through the adaption, assimilation, transformation, through the systematic and intentional revision of the precursor text. […] *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies how processes both conscious and unconscious come to traverse the textual scene of re-writing. But further, Rhys's re-writing of the precursor text provides evidence of how revision implicates an author in a dialectic of textual transference, in the intertextual play of a *textual unconscious*, that may be ultimately more subversive than any conceivable authorial intention or positionality.[43]

This concept of 'textual unconscious' that McClure Smith examines here is particularly important to my thesis, as I argue Brontë's influence upon Rhys takes the form of both a conscious writing back to Brontë and an 'unconscious' mode of influence that motivated Rhys's feminist and post-colonial thinking.

I agree with McClure Smith's claim that Rhys is not an object of Brontë's literary influence, as she instead serves as an agent of rewriting and transformation. Placing Rhys as a mere 'object' of Brontë's influence undermines the agency and agenda in Rhys's "writing back". However, the textual unconscious is an important factor in Brontë's influence too, as Rhys herself has expressed that when writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* there were occasions when 'I felt as though I were a pen in someone else's hand', and that 'I'm not quite in control of it [my writing] now. It's in control of me'.[44] The feeling Rhys describes here of the writing being in 'control' is at odds with the actively resistive act of 'writing back' to Brontë's prototext. However, it demonstrates the power of unconscious influence at work underneath her writing.

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[43] R. McClure Smith, p. 114, p. 117. Italics mine.

In 1959, Rhys wrote in a letter that Brontë's work was influencing her own, stating 'one stupid thing I did was read *Jane Eyre* too much. Then I found it was creeping into my writing. A bad imitation – quite dreadful. All had to be scrapped'.[45] Interestingly, McClure Smith states that 'this problem of precursor influence was never resolved to Rhys's satisfaction', as the goal of creating something new was at odds with the unconscious influence that drove the project – a fine line between 'writing back' and simply rewriting perhaps.[46] I argue that Brontë's works permeated Rhys's unconscious, and so her resistive writing was often intuitive. This influence of Brontë was embedded in Rhys's distinctive feminist and postcolonial perspective, which formed the basis for her entire writing career as she always sought to write her own 'other side' of English, patriarchal standards.

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[44] R. McClure Smith, p. 116.
[45] R. McClure Smith, p. 115.
[46] R. McClure Smith, p. 115.

Autobiographical Influence

If the influence from Brontë extends beyond *Wide Sargasso Sea* and can be examined in Rhys's other texts, as I argue here, then why has it been disregarded for so long? When tracing matters of influence and the sources of ideas in Rhys's earlier novels, like *Good Morning, Midnight, Voyage in the Dark,* and *Quartet* in particular, the possible links to Brontë have been overlooked in favour of the more obvious autobiographical links between Rhys's works and her own life. It is widely recognised that Rhys drew inspiration from her own experiences by transcribing events, places and people directly from reality into fiction. Because these contextual links are so prominent, and often undeniably fascinating, they seem to overshadow any other possible tracing of influences in her work.

Rhys's affair with Ford Madox Ford, for example, usually takes centre-stage when academics examine the inner workings of Rhys's debut novel *Quartet.* Published in 1928, Rhys undoubtedly drew inspiration from her relationship with Ford, as the events of Ford's seduction and subsequent shaming of Rhys were directly transposed into *Quartet.* Rhys simply changed the names of Ford and his wife to Heidler and Lois while writing herself into the perspective of the abjectly isolated Marya. Likewise, *Voyage in the Dark* becomes nearly autobiographical with the story of Anna, a Creole chorus girl alienated by English society, much like Rhys herself.

It could seem strange to put aside such clear external links when thinking about influences, and I do not deny that Rhys's biography is still one well worth examining. Rhys's life and personal experiences were major factors in why Brontë had such an impact upon her writing. Rhys's very existence as an alienated, Creole madwoman is a lived 'writing back' to Brontë's depiction of Bertha. As Rhys writes herself into every one of her novels, she writes a response to Brontë, one based in her own experiences of alienation within the English society that Brontë represents. By tracing the patterns of influence within Rhys's works we can understand the overlaps between Rhys's experiences and Brontë's influence, which are both heavily present within the pages of each of Rhys's novels. I argue that this autobiographical influence can be examined alongside authorial influence, as Rhys's life played an enormous part in influencing her writing the 'other side' to Brontë's narratives – this thesis will read the influence of Rhys's library, as well as her life. Here, I will move from the biographical context and influence underneath Rhys's writing to textual analysis of Brontë's influence to demonstrate the patterns of influence that this thesis utilises to analyse Rhys's responsive modes of writing back.

Patterns of Influence

In the final pages of her unfinished autobiography, Rhys wrote that 'I have not written for so long that all I can force myself to do is to write, to write. I must trust that out of that will come the pattern, the clue that can be followed'.[47] It is these patterns that form the basis of the examples throughout this thesis: using the body of scholarship on Rhys's novels and Rhys's own life alongside textual analysis of Rhys's writing back and refashioning of Brontë's works. I aim to fill the knowledge gap within our understanding of Brontë's influence upon Rhys's works by tracing the patterns of influence between each author and their novels.

Like the earlier examination of the links between Rhys's early drafts and Brontë's prototext, we can examine the many connections to *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* to better understand how and why Rhys was motivated to rewrite these representations of her home and herself. On the surface, the consideration of each small connection provides only a tentative link between the two authors, and does little to prove a wider influence that spanned decades of Rhys's writings. However, my argument is cumulative, as each of these small connections adds up to form a wider picture of intertextuality and authorial influence. Only when we consider the sheer number of connections can we see just how much is missed by only thinking about Brontë and Rhys between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea.* This is also why I have chosen to incorporate Brontë's *Villette* into my analysis. This novel has not yet been examined for its impact on Rhys's writings, despite sharing many similarities with *Jane Eyre* and Rhys having read both of these novels.[48]

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[47] Rhys, *Smile Please*, pp. 147-148.

An example of this model of influence can be read within Rhys's isolated, marginalised female characters. The Rhysian woman defied gendered expectations of behaviour as Rhys modelled them upon her own breaking of conventionality. Preceding Rhys's solitary women, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* voiced their dismay with the gendered constraint of the Victorian period. With these characters, Brontë flipped the expectations of the pretty, upper-class main character, seen in Jane's rich romantic rival Blanche Ingram, and Lucy's beautiful friend Ginevra Fanshawe. This model of inversion was later used by Rhys to criticise to blind spots of Brontë's feminism, but first I will outline how exactly Brontë broke from convention with Jane, Blanche, Lucy and Ginevra.

The ideal female protagonist of the Victorian period was one who embodied the conservative social norms of the era, and readers expected her to be 'submissive, dutiful, selfless, disinterested, kind and spiritually pure'.[49] As cited by Mary Waldron, the heroines of the 'Novels of Manners' from this era were praised by literary critics, who wrote that female readers ‘may peruse these volumes not only with satisfaction but with real benefits, for they may learn from them, if they please, many sober and salutary maxims for the conduct of life’.[50] Preceding Brontë’s own novels of manners were the works of Jane Austen, who personified the ideal heroine with her titular protagonist Emma. Austen describes Emma to the reader as ‘handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition’.[51] Suiting this model of central character, Brontë’s Blanche and Ginevra are similarly beautiful, accomplished and wealthy. As a beautiful socialite vying for the attention of Rochester, Blanche of *Jane Eyre* fits the ideal female protagonist of this era. While Ginevra’s coquettish flirting with the gentlemen of *Villette* detracts from her position as the demure ‘ideal’ Victorian woman, her good looks and concern with status mean she more closely resembles the traditional heroine than plain and poor Lucy.

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[48] Vreeland, p. 235.

[49] Aycan Gökçek, 'Social Position of Victorian Women: *Villette* and *Emma'*, *Comparative Literature - East & West*, 4 (2020), 143-155, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2494054457/fulltextPDF/D53EAB7589F5427EPQ/1?accountid=17287 > [accessed 14 December 2021], (p. 144).

On the periphery of this ‘model girl’ heroine stood the plain, reserved friend or sister. Embodying this trope were characters such as Elizabeth Bennet’s bookish and reserved sister Mary, or her pragmatic friend Charlotte Lucas of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. With Jane and Lucy, Brontë reversed the type of woman who was central to the Victorian novel. The stories of women who would have usually been secondary characters were brought to the forefront, while the beautiful traditional heroines were moved to the margins. The intelligent and plain Jane and Lucy became the leads, and in bringing these women to the forefront Brontë was also giving herself a voice, as her protagonists embodied their authors’ own intellectuality and morality.

As well as flipping the formula on the kind of characters that were central to the novel, Brontë also broke from the conventions of what stories were being told. As Nancy

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[50] Mary Waldron, ‘Introduction’, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

[51] Jane Austen, *Emma,* (London: Transatlantic Press, 2012), p. 11.

Armstrong explains in ‘Gender and the Victorian Novel’, upper-class stories of marriage, wealth and status were the conventional concerns of female protagonists:

> Marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must, such novels as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816) seemed to say, or else face the degradation of impoverishment or, worse, the need to work for a living.[52]

Further marking them as the typical upper-class heroines, both Ginevra and Blanche are chiefly concerned with making suitable matches and raising their wealth and status through marriage. Brontë moved their narratives to the side and opted to instead tell the stories of plain and pragmatic governesses. Jane and Lucy are unconventional protagonists as middle-class working women, far less fortunate and beautiful than typical heroines like Austen’s Emma. By changing the kind of woman that formed her central character, Brontë illustrated lives much closer to the reality of herself and many of her readers. However, while bringing English, middle-class women like Jane and Lucy out from the margins, Brontë further marginalised women like Bertha. Serving as merely Jane’s mad opposite, Brontë shunned the Creole to the attic and the margins of the wider narrative when telling the stories of English middle-class women like Jane and herself.

In her own works, Rhys extended Brontë’s model of bringing marginalised woman centre-stage even further, seeing value in the women that Brontë did not. Influenced by Brontë’s tendency to bring cast-aside women to the fore and motivated by the representation of the Creole madwoman, Rhys wrote the ‘other side’ of Brontë’s initial story to give Bertha a voice and a background that closely matched her own. Speaking of Bertha and her writing process behind *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Rhys stated that ‘I had *always* wanted to write about her.

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[52] Nancy Armstrong, ‘Gender and the Victorian Novel’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel,* ed. by Deidre David, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97-124 (p. 97).

I was annoyed about the poor lunatic West Indian, she's not a true character at all, unlike Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, so I wrote her life'.[53] I argue she did exactly this throughout her novels by writing Bertha into each of her marginalised and anxious female characters. With the same nationality, and in many ways, the same temperament as Brontë's most marginalised woman, Rhys rewrites her own narrative by rewriting Bertha.

Brontë's representation of Bertha as the 'Creole lunatic' was embedded in the notions of 'moral madness'.[54] As Helen Small explains, this supposed moral insanity was perceived as 'A morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, and moral dispositions, without any notable lesion of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties and particularly without any maniacal hallucination'.[55] Aligning with Small's description of the temper and mania of moral madness, Brontë describes how Bertha 'grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal'.[56]

Within moral madness, Small also explains that 'Women and "savages" were generally held to be the more vulnerable to this type of derangement, since in both the will was held to be notoriously weak'.[57] Writing to W.S. Williams, Brontë elaborated upon the mental and moral state of her madwoman shortly after the publication of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë links Bertha's morality and insanity in her letter, here cited by Small:

> The character [of Bertha] is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-like nature replaces it. The

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[53] Peter Burton, 'Jean Rhys: Interviewed by Peter Burton', *The Transatlantic Review*, 36 (1970), 105-109, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41514293?read-now=1&seq=4#page_scan_tab_contents> [accessed 17 October 2021] (p. 108), italics mine.

[54] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.

[55] Helen Small, 'The Hyena's Laughter: Lucretia and Jane Eyre', *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140-178 (pp. 163-164).

[56] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.

[57] Small, p. 164.

> sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end. […] Mrs Rochester indeed lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity: the truly good behold and compassionate it as such.[58]

While likely still white, Brontë's madwoman is distinctly racialised in her depictions of madness, described as having a dark 'discoloured face – it was a savage face'.[59] As a Creole woman, who had what Brontë described as a 'sinful life' prior to her marriage, Bertha's madness was rooted in her race and sexuality.[60]

This understanding of moral madness had shifted by the turn of the century. As Rhys was writing her own novels of abject madness, the contextual understanding evolved into 'the "female illnesses" of hysteria and neurasthenia'.[61] Unlike moral madness, which was believed to stem from excess sexuality and racial susceptibility, the neurasthenic was thought to be a woman with depleted 'nervous energy'. [62] This energy was a force within the nervous system, supposedly produced by digestion.[63] David G. Schuster outlines the symptoms of the "female illness", stating that:

> Neurasthenia's symptoms varied and included insomnia, depression, fatigue, indigestion, muscle pain, headaches, an inability to concentrate, and general anxiety. Reflecting the lack of standardization in nineteenth-century medicine, the illness had

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[58] Charlotte Brontë to W.S Williams, qtd. Helen Small, 'The Hyena's Laughter: Lucretia and Jane Eyre', pp. 165-166.

[59] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 372.

[60] Charlotte Brontë to W.S Williams, qtd. Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington, eds., *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* (The Shakespeare Head Brontë), 4 vols. (Oxford, 1933), ii. 173-4.

[61] Elaine Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Insanity', *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, ed. by Andrew Scull, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 313-336 (p. 316).

[62] David G. Schuster, 'Personalizing Illness and Modernity: S. Weir Mitchell, Literary Women, and Neurasthenia, 1870–1914', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 79 (2005), 695-722, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/article/190783> [accessed 15 April 2022], p. 696.

[63] Schuster, p. 696.

> many names, among them “nervous prostration,” “nervous fatigue,” and “nervous exhaustion.” Today, physicians commonly compare the diagnosis and its collection of symptoms to a range of disorders including chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, clinical depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and postpartum depression.[64]

Much like Brontë’s madwoman, Rhys’s female characters are also similarly marked with contemporary perceptions of female madness as they are each recognisably neurasthenic within their various states of depression, anxiety and fatigue. Through her own conception of madness, Rhys reimagined the Creole madwoman as not a ‘sinful’ savage, but as the Rhysian woman, who experiences maddening heartbreak and loneliness. In *Voyage in the Dark,* Rhys denotes Anna’s declining mental state through descriptions of her melancholy and immense fatigue:

> When I got home I lay down without undressing. Then it got light and I thought that when Mrs Dawes came in with my breakfast she would think I had gone mad. So I got up and undressed. “This is no way for a young girl to live,” Mrs Dawes said. That was because for a week after Walter left I hadn’t gone out; I didn’t want to. What I liked was lying in bed till very late, because I felt tired all the time, and having something to eat in bed and then in the afternoon staying a long time in the bath. I would put my head under the water and listen to the noise of the tap running.[65]

Conveyed through first-person perspective, Anna’s madness is close at hand for the reader, countering the distanced and scathing depictions that Brontë uses to convey her inhuman maniac. Rhys provides possible reasons for the mental state of the ‘West Indian lunatic’ through Anna, her own Creole madwoman trapped in England. Like Anna, Marya of *Quartet,* and Sasha of *Good Morning, Midnight* suffer from neurasthenia, and are all labelled 'hysterical' for their own nervous dispositions.[66] Writing back to Brontë's attribution of Bertha's madness to her race and sin, Rhys showed the maddening realities of isolation and powerlessness as she refigured Bertha into her own madwomen.

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[64] Schuster, p. 696.

[65] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 77.

The transition from moral madness of the Victorian era to the 'female illnesses' of the twentieth century allowed Rhys to illustrate possible reasons beneath the Creole madwoman's lunacy. Showalter comments upon the movement of female madness in literature from the Victorian to the modern era:

> In literature, the madwoman who made fleeting and ominous appearances in the Victorian novel has become the heroine; tensions and anxieties that were at the edge of female experience in the nineteenth century have moved to the centre, and the visit to the psychiatrist, or the nervous breakdown, has become a standard, even obligatory, episode in the fictional life of women in the twentieth century.[67]

Rhys demonstrates the exact movement that Showalter describes, moving the experience of Brontë's madwoman from the margins of *Jane Eyre* to the centre of her own works. Like her writing back to the representation of herself and her home, in this movement of madness Rhys brought herself from the margins of English society. By writing a possible 'other side' to Brontë's representation of the West Indian lunatic, the patterns of influence extend beyond the page and into the personal. The connections between the Rhysian woman and Rhys herself have been explored in great detail by biographers and academics, since the 'chief character in almost all her [Rhys's] work is a woman who seems to follow in her creator's path step by step: from a West Indian childhood, through the ordeal of life in the provincial theater in pre- World War I England'.[68] This voice and backstory that Rhys gives to Bertha is not restricted to *Wide Sargasso Sea,* or even her other novels, but in fact extends to the liberation of the author herself. Refiguring Bertha across her works through the lens of her own life as a Creole madwoman, Rhys continually brought racialised and maddened others into the spotlight to tell her experiences of the 'other side'.

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[66] Jean Rhys, *Quartet*, (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 117.
[67] Showalter, p. 330.

Biographical and Textual

As I discussed briefly prior to the patterns of influence section, the biographical and contextual elements from Rhys's life have often dominated discussion of her influences. While I do believe authorial influences are most prominent in the texts themselves, it is still important to understand Rhys's life for a balanced and in-depth analysis of her novels – particularly since she wrote so much of herself into each of her characters. Because of this, I felt it important to include some discussion of Rhys and Brontë's lives, since both authors blurred the lines between their fiction and reality. I have opted to not provide a summary of their novels and will instead move straight into analysis of relevant textual evidence after a brief biographic outline for both authors. This is because Brontë's works are widely known to readers already, particularly *Jane Eyre,* and therefore does not require a reiterating here. Likewise, Rhys's novels all follow a very similar plots, and do not need individual summaries. All immensely autobiographic, *Quartet, Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* each follow anxious and outcast women attempting to survive in an apathetic and prejudiced society. In fact, studying Rhys's life can provide more insight to these works than a simple plot summary possibly could, as I will do here.

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[68] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 220.

Rhys's Life in the 'Other Side'

Brontë's character Bertha Mason had a profound impact upon Rhys. In 1966, Rhys wrote to her editor and friend Diana Athill:

> Of course Charlotte Brontë makes her own world, of course she convinces you, and that makes the poor Creole lunatic all the more dreadful. I remember being quite shocked, and when I re-read, it rather annoyed. "That's only one side – the English side" sort of thing.[69]

Physically embodying the very figure Brontë vilified in *Jane Eyre,* Rhys was born in Roseau, Dominica in 1890. She spent her childhood in the West Indies, the location that served as the exotic and barbaric 'other' for Brontë in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.[70] This upbringing in Dominica played a crucial part in her determination to write the other side of 'the English side' that Brontë depicted. Elaine Savory, biographer of Rhys, argues that Rhys cannot be read without the context of her Dominican upbringing, and it is only from her heritage that readers can understand and 'extrapolate the class, race, religious and gender formations which were laid on Rhys at birth'.[71]

Rhys left Dominica for England in 1907, attending university and then a dramatic arts school before her father's death in 1910. After his passing, Rhys was unable to afford to stay at school, although it has also been speculated by some biographers that Rhys was rejected by the school because of her Dominican accent and her failure to conform to English expectations of performance. Her accent identified her as an outsider, and massively impacted her employability as an actress or singer.[72] She then performed as a chorus girl before the First World War, touring England in a musical comedy show called *Our Miss Gibbs.*[73]

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[69] Joannou, p. 125.

[70] Elaine Savory, 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write', *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 1-35 (p. 4).

[71] Savory, 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write', p. 4.

Throughout her extraordinary and precarious life, Rhys continued to write. In an interview with Vreeland in 1979, shortly before her death, Rhys said that she wrote whenever she was unhappy, which was quite often. Her books contained very little 'invention', as she wrote from her own singular perspective: 'What came first with most of them was the wish to get rid of this awful sadness that weighed me down. I found when I was a child that if I could put the hurt into words, it would go. It leaves a sort of melancholy behind and then it goes'.[74] This immense sadness, as well as a series of affairs, served as raw material for Rhys's fiction - particularly her novel *Voyage in the Dark,* which plotted a very similar series of events to her own life. After she met Ford in Paris in 1924, her grief for their ill-fated affair served as inspiration for Rhys's novel *Quartet*.[75] Although Rhys married several times throughout her life, she remained an immeasurably lonely figure – embodying the staple figures of her own fiction. She both depicted and experienced the difficulties of navigating the changing social structure of the early 1920s – a period of rupture often still rooted in Victorian traditions of patriarchy.

Within turn of the century the first wave of feminism arose and the 'New Woman' emerged. This was a figure who personified the period's concern and questioning of gender roles, breaking from the conventions of Victorian traditions. In *Professions for Women,* a lecture given by Virginia Woolf in 1931, she explained how the metaphorical 'killing the "Angel in the House" was part of the occupation of a woman writer', speaking to the death of Victorian notions of gender that restricted modern women.[76] This "Angel in the House" that Woolf refers to was the figment of ideal Victorian womanhood, documented in a series of poems by Coventry Patmore in 1854. Patmore's poetry was aimed at perpetuating gender ideals of women as subservient and domestic, as he saw women fit only for roles as 'Angels' inside the domestic sphere.[77] As the values embodied by the 'Angel in the House' that beleaguered Brontë and her own female characters were "killed" by the tide of feminism in the early 1900s, the 'New Woman' of Rhys's era and fiction was born. As Marianne Dekoven explains, this New Woman rejected Victorian traditions of femininity, becoming 'independent, educated, (relatively) sexually liberated, oriented more towards productive life in the public sphere than towards reproductive life in the home'.[78]

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[72] Carole Angier's 1985 biography of Jean Rhys stipulates that she was made to leave for her accent. This account at odds with Rhys's own version of events in her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please,* in which she claims she had to leave after her father's death as her mother could no longer afford to keep her there.
Elaine Savory gives a balanced account of the events of Rhys's life in *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature;* I found the 'Chronology' and 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write' chapters particularly helpful for establishing a timeline of Rhys's fascinating life.

[73] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography,* (Berkeley: Donald S. Ellis/Creative Arts, 1979), p.85.

[74] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 224.

[75] Savory, 'Chronology', p. xxii.

While the New Woman was able to achieve agency free from the constraints of the past, the reality for many women within modernist society remained a life hindered by traditions of their gender. It was this difficult reality that Rhys wrote into her female characters. They embodied the isolated, liminal status that Rhys experienced in England; marginalised due to her heritage while living in a society concerned by 'the radical implications of the social-cultural changes feminism advocated', continuing to isolate difference due to fear of change.[79] Much like Rhys defied traditional notions of gender, as a modernist and postcolonial author her writing continues to defy periodisation and categorisation – much like her own characters, who live as outsiders to what Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* describes as ‘you, who represent society’.[80] Rhys drew upon this status as an outsider repeatedly, throughout her novels and most famously when she vindicated the vilified outsider of *Jane Eyre* by writing back to Brontë in *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

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[76] Virginia Woolf, *Professions for Women*, <https://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Woolf.pdf> 9 [accessed 6 June 2021], p. 4.

[77] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, (London: John W. Parker, 1854), <https://archive.org/details/angelinhouseboo00patmgoog/page/n6/mode/2up> [accessed 30 October 2021].

[78] Marianne Dekoven, 'Modernism and Gender', *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 212-231 <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/FE0BF841B4FA8F1AA2ECC30ECEAC96AB/9780511862496c9_p212-231_CBO.pdf/modernism_and_gender.pdf> [accessed 27 October 2021], (p. 212).

[79] Dekoven, p. 212.

A Brief Brontë Biography

In the subheading to her novel, Charlotte Brontë described *Jane Eyre* as ‘An Autobiography’.[81] While this is a conceit used to imply that Jane Eyre wrote *Jane Eyre,* both *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* trace a series of events parallel to the life lived by Brontë; her characters Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre follow the path Brontë paved for herself in reality.

Born in England, 1816, Brontë was the third child of five siblings. Her father, Patrick Brontë, wrote several poetry anthologies, and the Brontë children developed their imaginations and gift for storytelling after he gifted them a set of toy soldiers. With these toys, the Brontë children created a fictional world called the ‘Glass Town Confederacy’. This world formed the basis for Charlotte’s very first work in 1834, *Tales of Angria*.[82] She continued to write about this fantasy world into her early twenties, eventually writing her ‘Farewell to Angria’ in 1839 when she feared for her sanity. Charlotte became worried she was going mad when she (unsurprisingly) began to prefer this imagined exotic world of drama, violence, and lust over her dull reality. The characters in this early series form the basis of her major novels, particularly the character of Elizabeth Hastings as a figure that mirrored both Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe and Brontë herself as a woman of strong morals and reason.[83] Her father's work as a minister also influenced Brontë's Christian sense of morality and righteousness. These themes saturate her novels and influenced her morally-upstanding heroines like Jane and Lucy.[84]

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[80] Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2019), p. 20.
Johnson and Moran, pp. 1-2.

[81] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* (London: Service and Paton, 1897), <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1260/pg1260-images.html> [accessed 14 November 2021].

[82] Patsy Stoneman, ‘Biographical Outline’, *Charlotte Brontë: Writers and Their Work,* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2013), p. ix.

Much like her characters Jane and Lucy, Brontë had a narrow life; knowing very few people and places, while experiencing a great many misfortunes.[85] Her mother died when she was five, and two of her five sisters died of tuberculosis while at school when Brontë was only nine. These events were woven into *Jane Eyre* with the character's mother passing before the novel's beginning, and Jane's loss of a sister-like figure at the appalling Lowood school. Brontë worked as a teacher at Roe Head School, where she and her sisters Anne and Emily had been educated, and as a governess for two households. These working roles appear in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette,* as both Lucy and Jane work as teachers. She and her sisters wished to open a school for girls, which their aunt agreed to fund, and Charlotte and Emily moved to Brussels in 1842 to improve their French and German.[86] Brontë continued to weave autobiography and fiction, as she fell in love with her married tutor M. Heger while working in Brussels as a pupil-teacher. She would later write this ill-fated affair into *Villette*, in which Lucy similarly develops feelings for M. Paul while teaching abroad.[87]

Likewise, Brontë's brief positions as a governess informed Jane's position within the Thornfield household structure, illuminating the isolation and boredom that came with the options for work available to Victorian women. She lamented the oppressive and dependant nature of her work in letters to her sister Emily: ‘I see more clearly than I have ever done before, that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living rational being, except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil’.[88] After two positions as a private governess, and leaving both within a few months, Brontë sought a new freedom from the ‘rigid restraint’ of gendered work.[89]

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[83] Emma Butcher, 'The Secret History of Jane Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's Private Fantasy Stories', *The Guardian,* 21 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/21/the-secret-history-of-jane-eyre-charlotte-Brontës-private-fantasy-stories> [accessed 14 November 2021].

[84] Stoneman, 'Biographical Outline', p. ix.

[85] Arthur Pollard, 'Charlotte Brontë – Her Life and Works', *Charlotte Brontë: Routledge Library Editions,* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

[86] Joyce M.S. Tompkins, 'Charlotte Brontë: British author', *Britannica,* <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlotte-Brontë> [accessed 15 November 2021].

[87] Tompkins.

By 1846 Charlotte had begun to work with her sisters Emily and Anne, writing an anthology of poems together under the male pseudonyms ‘Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell’.[90] These male pseudonyms were utilised to avoid prejudiced reviews of their work as “authoresses” and “female quill-drivers”.[91] This narrow-minded viewpoint was aptly summarised in a letter from poet Robert Southey, who Charlotte wrote to asking for literary advice and feedback in 1837: ‘Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it even as an accomplishment and a recreation’.[92] Despite her proto-feminist viewpoint that ‘women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer’, Charlotte occasionally felt at odds with her role as a woman writer.[93] She replied to Southey ‘I have endeavoured to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil’, but confessed that ‘I don’t always succeed, for sometimes when I am teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing'.[94] Elizabeth Gaskell, friend and biographer of Brontë, described the conflict Brontë faced between her duties to the 'domestic sphere' and her creative career:

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[88] Lauren Owsley, ‘Charlotte Brontë’s Circumvention of Patriarchy: Gender, Labour and Financial Agency in *Jane Eyre’, Brontë Studies,* 38 (2013), 54-65, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1179/1474893212Z.00000000052?needAccess=true> [accessed 30 July 2021] (p. 57).
[89] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 146.
[90] Stoneman, ‘Biographical Outline’, p. xi.
[91] Greg Buzwell, ‘Women Writers, Anonymity and Pseudonyms’, *British Library,* <https://www.bl.uk/womens-rights/articles/women-authors-and-anonymity> [accessed 12 November 2021].
[92] Robert Southey, ‘Letter from Robert Southey to Charlotte Brontë, 12 March 1837’, *British Library,* <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letter-from-robert-southey-to-charlotte-Brontë-12-march-1837> [accessed 12 November 2021].
[93] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 146.

> A woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice, nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents.[95]

Because creative pursuits like writing took place outside of the domestic role and were considered a masculine profession by Victorian standards, Brontë was in 'direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal'.[96] Despite her guilt about her defiance of Victorian gender roles, Brontë continued to write and question the values and norms responsible for her apprehension through her female protagonists.

The agency and morality of Brontë's characters may seem tame by contemporary standards, but Brontë's women were every bit as subversive within the Victorian period as Rhys's women were to society in the 1920s-40s. While her characters' morals deviated from Victorian ideals of feminine behaviour, they followed Brontë's own spiritually-driven moral values, as she summarises in her preface to *Jane Eyre*: 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. […] Men too often confound them: they should not be confounded: appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ.'[97] Brontë's depiction of struggles against Victorian gender roles, despite the ardent

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[94] Sangeeta Dutta, 'Charlotte Brontë and the Woman Question', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 26 (1991), 2311-2316, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/pdf/41625509.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A878a8ae3d9be0059e3265f17c4d91b84> [accessed 13 November 2021] (p. 2311).

[95] Dutta, p. 2311.

[96] Dutta, p. 2311.

[97] Brontë, 'Preface', *Jane Eyre,* pp. 3-4.

Christian beliefs beneath, garnered criticism from her contemporaries; in a letter from 1853, poet and critic Matthew Arnold asked ‘Why is *Villette* disagreeable? Because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage, and therefore that is all she can, in fact, put into her book’.[98] It is this hunger, rebellion, and rage of Brontë’s proto-feminism that Rhys expanded upon in her own writing, and that modern readers continue to celebrate.

Her first novel, *The Professor,* was based on her experiences in Brussels and Brontë later reworked this content into *Villette*. While *The Professor* was repeatedly rejected by publishers, *Jane Eyre* was an instant success when it was accepted by Smith, Elder & Co. publishing in 1847.[99] After the success of Charlotte’s novel, as well as Emily’s *Wuthering Heights* and Anne’s *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the Brontës proved their identities behind the male pseudonyms in 1848.

The years after this point in Brontë’s life were marked with tragedy, as her remaining siblings died within months of each other. Her brother Branwell died of bronchitis in September of 1848, Emily died of tuberculosis in December that year, and Anne also died of tuberculosis in May 1849.[100] While suffering from protracted illness and depression, Brontë published *Villette* in 1853 and married Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1854. She died in 1855 after intense medical complications with her pregnancy, at only 38 years old.[101]

Brontë’s conflict with Victorian gender roles and own sense of morality, a complicated division between proto-feminism and alignment with the ‘domestic sphere’, has not impeded Brontë from being lauded as one of the greatest early feminist voices in English literature. Themes of isolation and independence permeated both her fiction and reality, blurring the lines between autobiography and storytelling within her novels – an aspect of storytelling Rhys incorporates into her own novels, but her experiences vastly differ from the narrow English scope of Brontë's life. However, in giving Jane Eyre and *Villette's* Lucy Snowe a voice, Brontë created a voiceless and disempowered 'other' to stand opposite to her ethical English protagonists. Thus, Bertha Mason, the voiceless Creole madwoman of *Jane Eyre*, was formed. The following chapters of this thesis will show that Rhys wrote back against this Creole lunatic continually, inarguably influenced by Brontë's representation of a figure so closely resembling Rhys herself.

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[98] Miriam Allot, ‘Matthew Arnold, from a letter: 14 April 1853’, *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 201.
[99] Stoneman, ‘Biographical Outline’, p. xi.
[100] Stoneman, ‘Biographical Outline’, p. xi.
[101] Tompkins.

Chapter One: Rewriting Bertha

Charlotte Brontë famously expressed her contempt for Victorian gender constraints in a monologue which has since become known by readers as one of *Jane Eyre*'s most courageous, feminist moments. She denounced the isolating metaphorical imprisonment of women, describing Jane's feelings of restlessness under these restrictions:

> I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. […] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; […] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.[1]

While the criticism of custom Brontë expresses here was fairly revolutionary for the era, it is worth considering the fact that Jane's complaint of metaphorical imprisonment takes place only a floor below the literal incarceration of the madwoman in the attic. As Rochester's 'mad wife', Bertha is quite literally restrained for her 'restless' and 'agitated' subversion of female conduct: her behaviour an extension of what Jane describes and criticises, yet Bertha is wholly condemned by Brontë.[2] Although it was Jane who voiced her 'restless restraint' in *Jane Eyre*, it was Bertha who truly embodied it.

It was in part this hypocrisy that drove Jean Rhys to write *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Inverting the sympathy that Brontë had for Jane and placing it instead upon the antagonist of *Jane Eyre*, Rhys was determined to 'write the story as it might really have been'.[3]

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[1] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* pp. 145-146.
[2] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 146.
[3] Vreeland, p. 235.

However, this ‘writing back’ that motivated Rhys in the 1960s to write *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as my introduction has argued and as this chapter will show, began far sooner as Rhys rewrote the madwoman within each of her earlier novels. In this chapter I argue Rhys was so influenced by Brontë’s subversive madwoman that she wrote Bertha’s struggle against gender constraints into her Rhysian women – Anna, Marya, and Sasha – in *Voyage in the Dark, Quartet,* and *Good Morning, Midnight.*

The pattern of Bertha’s influence upon the Rhysian woman is both textual and autobiographic. Similar to Rhys’s transformation of Bertha into Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Rhys drew upon Brontë’s madwoman whilst being motivated by her own experiences as a Creole ‘madwoman’ to reshape the figure of Bertha into her characters. Even at a surface level, each of Rhys’s women bares remarkable similarity to Bertha: all of them are madly depressed outsiders, similarly trapped in an unfamiliar country. And like Bertha, they are all made to live in isolated rooms provided by their love interests, all of whom are, like Rochester, controlling English patriarchal figures.

While her novels are set long after Brontë wrote her madwoman, Rhys and her characters still endure the constraints of gender roles and oppressive societal norms. Both Brontë and Rhys depicted defiance, but given the difference in eras their rebelliousness takes drastically different forms. The subdued quest for agency that Jane and Lucy embodied in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, while still important, became outdated by the turn of the century. Thus, Rhys extended and translated Bertha’s desperate fight for freedom into her modernist heroines, who were likewise shockingly subversive in their affairs, illegal abortions, sex work, drinking and drug use. Rhys incorporated Brontë’s wider protofeminist criticisms of gender roles, but was able to extend them into the modernist era by transforming Bertha into each of her own abjectly rebellious women, who too loudly defy and struggle against patriarchal forces while experiencing maddening isolation.

This subversion that Brontë embedded in Bertha is extended through Sasha's abject isolation, Marya's 'immorality' as Heidler's mistress, and in Anna's sex work and illegal abortion. The Rhysian woman challenged the moral values of the period, shocking the reader like Bertha shocked Victorian readers with her 'bestial' violence and lunacy. Through the voice of Marya of *Quartet*, Rhys imparts the sense of being societally shunned to her reader as she writes 'she was certain that every woman she passed was mocking her gleefully and every man she passes was mocking her contemptuously'.[4] Marya's isolation embodies the shunning and separation of Bertha, the ostracised outsider exiled to the attic, and subsequently, the margins of the novel. Bertha is wholly voiceless throughout the novel, scorned by Rochester as 'the true daughter of an infamous mother, […] a wife at once intemperate and unchaste'.[5]

Tracing Brontë's madwoman across each of Rhys's women, this chapter will firstly examine how Rhys took Rochester and Bertha's relationship and used it as a model for writing her own experiences of imbalanced and ill-fated affairs. Tied into these relationships is the nature of Rhys's women as dependents, which mirrors Bertha's lack of financial and literal agency. From here, I study the anxiety around appearance that Bertha exhibited, which Rhys translated into her deeply modernist sense of 'frock consciousness'. Then the body language of Bertha is examined, with attention to how Rhys wrote the wild movements of the madwoman into her 'loose' demi-mondaines. Finally, I consider the sexualised, racialised depiction of Bertha as the Creole lunatic of *Jane Eyre,* and how Rhys revised this representation of a figure so close to herself into her own sexualised outsider characters.

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[4] Jean Rhys, *Quartet,* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 119.

[5] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 403.

Rochester and Bertha Repeated

Within every relationship in her earlier novels, we can find the pattern of Bertha and Rochester rewritten through Rhys's lens of sympathy and experience. Each Rhysian woman bears immense similarity to Bertha in their relationships with men. Antoinette was written to directly embody the power imbalance within Bertha and Rochester's marriage, but Bertha's powerlessness against Rochester is equally evident within Marya, Anna and Sasha's relationships and affairs prior to *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Experiencing similar situations of imbalance as a Creole woman in relationships with English men motivated Rhys's deep sympathy for Bertha. This personal connection to Brontë's madwoman influenced a rewriting long before *Wide Sargasso Sea,* as the relationship between English Rochester and his maltreated Creole wife was deeply embedded in Rhys's affair and fallout with Ford Maddox Ford in the 1920s. As Marya closely connects with Bertha, Heidler can be read as the embodiment of Rochester. Brontë's model of male control influenced Rhys's own patriarchal figures, as she overlapped Rochester and Ford into the character of Heidler and his treatment of Marya. Subsequently, Rhys wrote this romance into the events and characters of *Quartet,* weaving fact and fiction as she drew upon Bertha and Rochester as a model through which to write out her own tumultuous relationship. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the Rhysian woman is one widely considered to follow in her writer's footsteps; as a textual embodiment of both Bertha and Rhys herself, Marya of *Quartet* is no exception, as I will explore here.[6]

While scholars have noted that *Quartet* is a roman à clef, the reality of Rhys's relationship with Ford is blended with the fictional figure of Rochester into the character of H.J. Heidler.[7] Seemingly avuncular when Marya is left on her own in an unfamiliar city with no income or home following her husband's sudden arrest, Heidler takes Marya in with a patronising sense of compassion and pity. He summarises her difficult situation and subsequent reliance upon him when he bluntly informs Marya: 'I'm merely trying to save you from a very dreadful existence, an unthinkable existence […] Have you imagined what your life will be? You'll career about Europe without any money or any friends in a perpetual and horrible insecurity'.[8] Mirroring Rhys's patronage under Ford, Marya is lured into Heidler's home under the guise of sympathy, led to believe that he and his wife, Lois, will help her find a means of income and agency. Instead, Heidler seduces Marya before casting her aside. Their affair closely resembles Bertha's captive marriage to Rochester in its pattern of control and shaming.

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[6] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 220.

[7] For information on the roman à clef aspect of Rhys's works, I found the chapter 'The Coterie as Commodity

While Rochester keeps his 'mad' wife in the attic, Heidler confines depressed and maddened Marya to a series of isolated hotel rooms. Thinking about her space of confinement, Marya thinks "A bedroom in hell might look rather like this one. Yellow-green and dullish mauve flowers crawling over black walls."[9] Rhys's descriptions of the rooms Heidler keeps her in are marked with references to Bertha and her confinement, such as the flowers 'crawling' across the black wall, suggestive of Brontë's description of how Bertha crawled and 'grovelled, seemingly, on all fours' around her attic prison.[10] The 'crawling' wallpaper imagery here also links closely with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The 'Yellow Wall-Paper', the story of a woman confined to a small room like Marya and Bertha.[11] In her secluded state, Gilman's character imagines figures crawling behind the wallpaper, then

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Huxley, Lawrence, Rhys, and the Business of Revenge' of Sean Latham's *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* helpful for its insights into the context behind *Quartet* and how Rhys wove fact into fiction, particularly the 'Gender, Genre, Power: Jean Rhys' section.
'The Narrative Mood of Jean Rhys' Quartet' by Octavio Gonzalez likewise identifies *Quartet* as a roman à clef, but draws a distinction between the text and its context – arguing for an immanent reading, which I thought was a unique take on a text that's often recognised as autobiographic.

[8] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 100.

[9] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 92.

[10] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 384.

[11] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories,* 3-20, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

crawling around herself once her isolation leads to total insanity. Like the protagonist of 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', Marya and Bertha both succumb to madness under English patriarchal power: Bertha under Rochester's control, and likewise Marya under Heidler's. Rhys continues to conjure Bertha within the spaces that contain Marya and Heidler in Marya's imagination, writing that 'The dim room smelt of stale scent. She began to imagine all the women who had lain where she was lying. Laughing. Or crying if they were drunk enough'.[12] The 'women' that Rhys refers to here, who have lain where Marya is currently positioned, represent both Bertha and Rhys herself as previous figures experiencing the same situation of being controlled and confined by men.

Writing Marya as a direct extension of Bertha, Rhys uses the same sense of maddened pacing that Brontë wrote to emphasise her madwoman's rage. Brontë introduces her reader to the madwoman, describing:

> In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.[13]

Just like Bertha running 'backwards and forwards' in her attic prison, Marya sympathises with a panicked, pacing fox trapped in a zoo enclosure.[14] She sees her position in her relationship with Heidler mirrored by the poor creature as it paces, trapped in:

> A cage perhaps three yards long. Up and down it ran, up and down, and Marya imagined that each time it turned it did so with a certain hopefulness, as if it thought

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[12] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 93.
[13] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.
[14] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.

> that escape was possible. Then, of course, there were the bars. It would strike its nose, turn and run again. Up and down, up and down, ceaselessly. A horrible sight, really.[15]

Further linking Marya to her prototextual madwoman, Rhys draws upon the animal imagery Brontë used to describe Bertha as the 'strange wild animal'.[16] Marya emotes the same sense of being a caged beast when she tells Stephan that 'If anybody tried to catch me and lock me up I'd fight like a wild animal; I'd fight till they let me out or till I died'.[17] Rhys uses the same description for Marya, 'wild animal', that Brontë used for Bertha.

Following the pattern established by Rochester, Heidler casts Marya aside once he perceives her as a sexual body. Heidler is disgusted by the lust that he created within Marya, just as Rochester was offended by the sexual bodies of Bertha and Céline (his previous mistress, who I examine in-depth in chapter three). Rochester voices his shame when he tells Jane of his time with mistresses after imprisoning Bertha: "I longed only for what suited me – for the antipodes of the Creole: and I longed vainly. […] I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Céline, Giacinta, and Clara."[18] The shaming of 'intemperate and unchaste' bodies personified by Rochester of *Jane Eyre* is expanded upon in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with sympathy for Bertha.[19] However, Rhys's extension of Bertha and Rochester began much sooner, as evident in the shamed and isolated body of Marya under the control of Heidler. Using Brontë's prototextual relationship of abuse and power imbalance, Rhys drew upon Bertha and Rochester to write her own experiences of being shamed and isolated within her affair with Ford, a figure of patriarchal, colonial control that mirrors both Heidler and Rochester closely. The impure, 'maniac' Bertha is punished in the attic for neither 'modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners'.[20] Rochester shamed Bertha for being impure, without manner or refinement:

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[15] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 126.
[16] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.
[17] Rhys, *Quartet*, pp. 106-107.
[18] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 408-409.
[19] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 403.

> What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed on me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste.[21]

Likewise, Heidler punishes Marya for her position as his own mistress, as he addresses Marya in her internal monologue:

> Now then, don't get hysterical. Besides, Lois was there first. Lois is a good woman and you are a bad one; it's quite simple. These things are. That's what is meant by having principles. Nobody owes a fair deal to a prostitute. It isn't done. My dear girl, what would become of things if it were? Come, come to think it over. Intact or not intact, that's the first question.[22]

Heidler chastises Marya for being 'a prostitute' and 'bad' woman – both Rochester and Heidler shaming the 'bad' bodies that they initially pursued, as Rhys experienced with Ford. The use of 'hysterical' is worth noting here also, as it connects closely with Bertha's madness. Marya echoes the madwoman within the label of hysteria here, as both women are maddened and isolated by emblems of the English patriarchy.

Rochester is rewritten quite directly from *Jane Eyre* into *Wide Sargasso Sea.* In *Jane Eyre,* Rochester embodies patriarchal power as the master of Thornfield Hall, Jane's employer, and the imprisoner of his wife. He physically restrains Bertha and controls Jane's movements through financial control and threats: "Jane! will you hear reason?" (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); "because, if you won't, *I'll try violence*."[23] Despite his temper and sense of superiority, Brontë writes Rochester as the romantic lead, which Rhys inverts to show the true 'other side'. His character changes very little, if at all, from Brontë's violent male lead, as Rhys uses his position of power to transform Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* into the 'immediate manifestation and enforcer of the network of patriarchal codes (sexism, colonialism, the English Law, and the "law" which demarcates and creates sanity and insanity) that imprisons Antoinette Cosway'.[24] He remains the suppressor of female agency, but is transformed from a figure of romance into one of oppressive horror.

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[20] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 401.
[21] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 403.
[22] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 127.

This reimagining of Rochester as an antagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea* resounds across her earlier novels. Rochester served as a literary base for Rhys's weaving of fiction and reality when she wrote Ford into Heidler, and Rhys continued to write Bertha's husband into each of the male characters in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* before writing him directly into her reimagining of *Jane Eyre.*

This connection is particularly evident when Rhys directly transposed Rochester's feelings of disgust at Antoinette into Heidler's feelings of shame towards Marya. Describing Heidler's revulsion, Rhys writes 'I have a horror of you. When I think of you I feel sick'.[25] Rhys's use of the word 'sick' in *Quartet* directly parallels Rochester's treatment of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea:* as Rhys wrote Rochester's 'sickening swing back to hate' once he feels nothing but contempt and disgust towards Antoinette's sexualised body.[26] Tracing this pattern of abject women and horrified men further backwards, Rochester's treatment of Antoinette's body is, of course, based upon the cruelty of Rochester in Brontë's prototext, as he imprisons the rageful and sexualised body of Bertha. I examine the full extent of Brontë's use of the gothic in her depiction of Bertha in chapter two, but it is relevant here that Bertha is described as a figment of horror: a demon, goblin, vampire, who fills Rochester with 'disgust, horror'.[27] The horror that Brontë wrote into Bertha in descriptions of her as a 'vampire', directly drawing upon the gothic horror when she sucks Mason's blood, is inverted by Rhys when Heidler becomes the 'vampire' as he drains Marya of emotion: 'It's as if all the blood in my body is being drained, very slowly, all the time, all the blood in my heart'.[28] I read the 'horror' Heidler holds towards Marya's body, and his subsequent actions of casting her aside and isolating her in small hotel rooms as an extension of Rochester's treatment of Bertha in *Jane Eyre.*

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[23] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 397. Italics mine.

[24] Robert Kendrik, 'Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wide Sargasso Sea', *Papers on Language & Literature,* 30 (1994), 235-256 < https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=ffc9b050-0f46-4ed3-88a9-b811e515365e%40redis> [accessed 28 December 2021], (p. 235).

[25] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 117.

[26] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 139.

The Price of Independence

Socioeconomic status is a key concern across Rhys's fiction, and within these reoccurring anxieties and precarious circumstances, I argue that we can read another mode of Brontë's influence upon Rhys's work. Rhys's women exhibit the same exploitation and vulnerability of Bertha within their own relationships to 'Rochesters'. In *Quartet* and *Voyage in the Dark,* Rhys illustrated the 'other side' of Bertha's exploitation through Marya's relationship with Heidler and Walter's manipulation of Anna. In the same way that Rochester wanted Bertha's fortune for himself and cast her aside once it was his, Heidler and Walter each want something from Marya and Anna. Once they have gained access to their bodies through manipulation of both the woman and her financial precarity, they drive them mad through isolation and societal shaming.

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[27] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 279.

[28] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 123.

Central to the socioeconomic status of both Rhys and Brontë's female characters is their nature as dependents. Jane is first a dependant of the Reeds and then Rochester, and Lucy of *Villette* is likewise dependent upon Madame Beck for income (and M. Paul for approval). Rendered dependent by her isolation and maddened state, Bertha is easily Brontë's most dependent character. She is made wholly at the mercy of her husband as Bertha's fortune becomes his under the Victorian marriage laws that saw women as little more than property. The relationship between Rochester and his helpless 'lunatic' wife dwelled upon Rhys's mind long after her first reading, as evident in a letter to Selma Vaz Diaz in 1957 while writing *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Rhys wrote that:

> The novel [*Wide Sargasso Sea*] was founded on fact or rather several facts. At that date and earlier, very wealthy planters did exist, their daughters had very large dowries, there was no married women's property act. So a young man who was not too scrupulous could do very well for himself and very easily. He would marry the girl, grab her money, bring her to England – a faraway place – and in a year she would be an invalid or mad. It did happen and more than once.[29]

Here Rhys summarises the events that take place in both Brontë's prototext and her imagined account of Rochester and Bertha's relationship, fictionalised versions of what she witnessed growing up in the West Indies. Daughters of rich families, like herself and Bertha, were rendered helpless through such relationships. In her biography of Rhys, Helen Carr examines why this aspect of Rochester and Bertha's marriage would have dwelled upon Rhys's mind. Citing correspondence between Rhys and Vaz Dias, Carr explains:

> There were historically, she [Rhys] was sure, "several Antoinettes and Mr Rochesters', West Indian heiresses married for their money, brought to England and

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[29] Taylor-Batty, p. 683.
Quoted from Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London: Arnold, 1995), p. 21.

> neglected or worse by husbands who were happy to take the profits that had accrued to the slave-owners, whilst remaining convinced of their own moral superiority.[30]

Consistent with the description of marriage that Carr provides from Rhys's letters, Brontë makes it clear that Rochester's marriage to Bertha was aimed at gaining her fortune for himself, as he tells Jane his goal was to 'be provided for by a wealthy marriage'.[31] Deeply affected by the financial inequality of Brontë's madwoman, a figure so close to herself and the history of "Berthas" taken from the West Indies, Rhys wrote Rochester's actions with far more sympathy for Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Given how impactful Brontë's depiction was upon Rhys, it is not hard to see how she would have been inspired to write this relationship of inequality and dependence from her own perspective in her earlier works. Stemming from Brontë's illustration of Rochester taking possession of Bertha's agency, both financial and literal, are the relationships of dependence and procurement that the Rhysian woman often becomes tangled in. While *Wide Sargasso Sea* might be the most direct embodiment of Rochester and Bertha, Rhys's previous novels hold the same pattern of exploitation, dependence and destruction.

Within her exploited position, Rhys writes Marya as Bertha. Through the voice of Stephan, Marya's husband who leaves her reliant upon Heidler after his arrest, the events of *Quartet* and *Jane Eyre* are aptly summarised: 'It's better when a woman has some money, I think. It's much safer for her'.[32] This was the experience of Rhys herself when her own husband was arrested for embezzlement, which left her penniless and dependent upon Ford. While Rochester married Bertha for her money and Marya is dependent upon Heidler for money, the circumstance of dependence is the same: the abject 'Bertha' figure has something that the embodiment of English patriarchy wants and he isolates and maddens the woman once he has gained it for himself. Like Rochester's confinement of Bertha, Heidler evolves Marya's financial precarity into a psychological dependence. When she first bluntly informs him that she wishes to leave him and that he has been unfair, Heidler tells her "You've every right to be like that if you want to be like that, and I've every right to take advantage of it if I want to. That's truth, and all the rest is sob stuff." She thought: "Sob stuff, sex stuff. That's the way men talk."[33] Before Heidler isolates her from friends and her husband, Marya is able to see through his guise of sympathy and realises his kindness is simply in hope of sex.

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[30] Helen Carr, 'Intemperate and Unchaste', *Jean Rhys,* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2012) 82-93 (p. 88).
[31] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 400.
[32] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 12.

Slowly, through seduction, exploitation and isolation, Marya's compliance is exchanged for money before Heidler destroys her autonomy to the point of death. Confronting her husband about her affair with Heidler, Marya tells Stephan:

> "You left me alone without any money," she said. "And you didn't care a bit what happened to me. Not really, not deep down, you didn't. And now you say beastly things to me. I hate you" She began to laugh insultingly. Suddenly he had become the symbol of everything that all her life had baffled and tortured her.[34]

After confronting him, Stephan becomes the 'symbol' of Marya's repression and precarity, which overlaps with his patriarchal power and physical force to both figuratively and literally kill her. As Amy Clukey explains, Marya's death at the end of the novel results from 'conditions determined by her position as a historical subject, a member of the English lower class, and her consequent vulnerability to the economic discrepancies of imperial capitalism'.[35] The result of patriarchal English manipulation, Marya's death is an extension of the ending Brontë gave Bertha:

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[33] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 55.
[34] Rhys *Quartet,* p. 147.

> He gave an impatient click of the tongue and caught her wrist to swing her aside. She fought him wildly, with frenzy. […] He caught her by the shoulders and swung her sideways with all his force. As she fell, she struck her forehead against the edge of the table, crumpled up and lay still. "Voilà pour toi," ["That's for you"] said Stephan.[36]

The ambiguity Rhys wrote into Marya's death connects closely with the ending Brontë wrote for Bertha. It is unclear whether Stephan intended to kill Marya when he pushed her, or if it was an unplanned act of rage. Furthermore, it is ambiguous whether Marya is unconscious or truly dead, as Rhys states that she 'crumpled up and lay still'.[37] Bertha's death is similarly vague, as Jane is informed of the incident by an old butler who witnessed it from afar. Jane's bed was set alight by Bertha in a supposed act of spite, and the fire spreads rapidly across Thornfield. The butler states that Mr Rochester helped his staff out of the top floor before assisting his wife:

> "He went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of the beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell. And then they called out to him that she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off: I saw her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and

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[35] Amy Clukey, '"No country really now": Modernist Cosmopolitanisms and Jean Rhys's *Quartet*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 56 (2010), 437-461 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41413711?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents> [accessed 7 March 2022] (p. 447).

[36] Rhys *Quartet*, p. 147.

[37] Rhys *Quartet*, p. 147.
While the ending is intentionally vague, I personally think that Stephan intended to kill her since he says "That's for you" rather than expressing alarm or concern, and that Marya did in fact die here.

> several more witnessed, Mr Rochester ascend through the sky-light on to the roof; we heard him call "Bertha!" We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement."[38]

This ending denotes a similar ambiguity, as Rochester seems to push Bertha off the roof rather than assist her: he approaches her, she yells and either 'springs' or is thrown, before lying 'smashed' on the ground. Rhys twists Bertha's ambiguous death into Marya's own: while it is clear Stephan intended to throw Marya, it is unclear whether she died or not. Likewise, it is clear Bertha is dead, but unclear whether Rochester threw her or if she jumped as the butler suggests. I argue Rhys believed Rochester pushed Bertha, and as such we see the same behaviour in Rhys's English men. Given Rhys's sympathy for the madwoman and her interest in writing her own life, it stands to reason that she should wish to continually write protagonists like Marya. Like Bertha, Marya and Rhys's other heroines 'rebel against the patriarchal domination of their social milieu', but are subsequently beaten down, isolated, and further oppressed to extend the madwoman's own ending.[39]

Rhys continues to write Bertha into her heroines in *Voyage in the Dark.* As another Creole woman brought to England and made to reside in a series of depressingly isolated rooms, Anna is a direct rewriting of Bertha's socioeconomic 'worth' as an outsider to English society. She demonstrates an intense awareness of being 'cheap', thinking about how 'a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them'.[40] As a kept woman and prostitute Anna is effectively 'bought', trapped within an economy that saw her only 'worth' as a sexual commodity. Like Bertha being b(r)ought from the West Indies to serve as Rochester's wife and cast aside when it is revealed she cannot fulfil this role, Anna is similarly positioned.

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[38] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* pp. 560-561.

[39] Cristina-Georgiana Voicu, 'Jean Rhys and Intertextuality', *Exploring Cultural Identities in Jean Rhys' Fiction,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 75-85 (p. 76).

[40] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 40.

After being transported from her Dominican home, Anna must become a mistress of English men to survive, and is cast aside like Bertha once she has exceeded her use in this role.

The influence of Brontë's madwoman is particularly prominent here as Anna's dejected vulnerability is taken advantage of by the English men around her. Anna's position as a Creole woman trapped in England without money is manipulated by Walter when she wishes to leave: before she is able to do so, Walter places money in her purse to make her stay. What little agency Anna retains is bought from her here, as Rhys writes 'instead of saying "Don't do that," I said "All right, if you like – anything you like, any way you like."'[41] Anna becomes dependent upon Walter and Vincent as they exchange her body for money, clothes and decent accommodation in a relationship that closely resembles the union between Bertha and Rochester – taking both her economic and bodily agency as Rhys depicts her own experiences as a 'Bertha' through Anna. As Rochester wanted Bertha's fortune and Heidler wanted Marya's body, likewise Walter exchanges Anna's bodily autonomy for dependency and sex.

Much like the ending of *Quartet* rewrites the end of *Jane Eyre, Voyage in the Dark* likewise writes into the space of Bertha's demise. Oscillating between memories of the West Indies as she disassociates from the present pain, Rhys depicts Anna's slow slip into madness within her last moments through a rambling stream of consciousness that overlaps dreams and reality. Anna's fond recollections of dancing, music and masks in the West Indies closely connect her to Brontë's prototextual Creole madwoman through memories of their shared birthplace. Rhys blurs past and present before Anna's death:

> "You'll see, it'll be all right. It'll stop in a minute." "They die sometimes," Mrs Polo said. "Are you all right?" Laurie said. I'm not here I'm there I'm not here I'm there

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[41] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* pp. 33-34.

> they die sometimes […] I could hear them banging kerosene-tins "Get a basin," Laurie said, "and some water." "Here's the water, miss," Mrs Polo said. They ought to stop them banging the kerosene-tins Aunt Jane said because it's an awful noise but I don't see why they should stop the Masquerade.[42]

Within this stream of consciousness, Anna blends the discussion of her landlady and friend, who are caring for her after her botched abortion, and memories of her home in Dominica. The recollections of the West Indies within this section blend characters and author entirely, as these scenes are transposed from Bertha's heritage and Rhys's own memories: the opening to this dream state, for instance, when Anna is asked to 'Smile please' for a family photograph, is entirely autobiographical, eventually serving as the title for Rhys's unfinished autobiography.[43] In this weaving of memories, dreams and reality Rhys illustrates the mental decline of Anna, her own rendition of the Creole madwoman who comes to a similarly tragic end. In the published version of *Voyage in the Dark,* Anna does not die, but still remains a textual embodiment of Bertha as Rhys drew upon the themes of imprisonment and isolation for her Creole heroine. Although Anna lives, she is made to endure the repeated invasions upon her body 'all over again', embodying the prototextual madwoman within her own maddening repetition and despair.[44]

Bertha's powerlessness is also evident in Rhys's wider fiction, particularly in *Vienne.* Published in *The Transatlantic Review* in 1924, and again in 1927 within her literary debut *The Left Bank and Other Stories, Vienne* is one of Rhys's earliest works. Similar to the precarity that the Rhysian women experience in *Quartet, Good Morning, Midnight,* and *Voyage in the Dark, Vienne* illustrates the same themes of socioeconomic decline, here depicted through 'the interior monologue of a woman on the edge of hysteria'.[45] As she falls from high society, *Vienne'*s protagonist Francine reflects upon the importance of money to the safety and freedom of women like herself: trapped in relationships of reliance through male control of their finances. Rhys writes both Bertha's confinement and her own lived sense of economic precarity as a woman alone into Francine's isolated and hysterical state, lamenting:

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[42] Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Voyage in the Dark: Part IV (Original Version)' *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology,* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990) 381-389.

[43] Kime Scott, p. 381.

[44] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 159.

> Oh, great god money – you make possible all that's nice in life. Youth and beauty, the envy of women, and the love of men. Even the luxury of a soul, a character and thoughts of one's own you give, and only you. To look in the glass and you think I've got what I wanted.[46]

This idea that money makes 'possible all that's nice in life' is reflected throughout both *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's other novels, as their female characters can only afford independence through money, and are dependent on men without it. Agency had a price for women in the Victorian and modernist periods, both within and outside of fiction. In the same way that Bertha loses her sanity once Rochester has taken possession of her fortune, Francine loses her remaining grip on sanity due to the melancholy and loneliness of her socioeconomic decline. Rhys illustrates the slow rise of hysteria through Francine's rambling internal monologue, as she becomes more anxious 'not to be poor again. No and No and No. So darned easy to plan that – and always at the last moment – one is afraid. Or cheats oneself with hope. I can still do this and this. I can still clutch at that or that. So-and-So will help me. How you fight, cleverly and well at first, then more wildly – then hysterically'.[47] This 'hysteria' Rhys writes into the character of Francine reflects the maddening frustration of being unable to afford independence. Francine's desperate fight embodies Bertha in its wild madness, with the same desperation to escape the 'fear, loneliness, and cruelty' that threatens to overwhelm Bertha and the Rhysian woman.[48]

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[45] Katie Owen, 'Afterword', *Quartet,* p. 155.
[46] Rhys, 'Vienne', *The Collected Short Stories,* (London: Penguin, 2017) p. 101.
[47] Rhys, 'Vienne', p. 103.

A 'Frock Conscious' Bertha

In a diary entry from 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote that her 'present reflection is that people have any number of states of consciousness', such as 'the frock consciousness': an anxiety around appearance and the representation of the exterior.[49] As Lisa Cohen explains, Woolf's modernist fiction carefully considered how clothing was used:

> Not to represent character itself, but to think about the modernist problem of how to represent character. Her [Woolf's] attention to clothes has to do both with her desire to particularize female subjectivity […] and with her broad interest in rendering the relationships between various exteriors and interiors. These concerns intersect in her focus on how women negotiate public space—their public visibility and relationship to the commercial world. In fact, in her work, problems of character and of commerce cannot be separated.[50]

While this section was written with Woolf's use of fictional clothing in mind, this concept of 'frock consciousness' is particularly significant to Rhys and the meaning beneath her clothing, both for herself and her characters. Anxiety around appearance and dress saturated Rhys's life, particularly as an outsider to the social fabric of England. Her frock consciousness extended from her early writing career right through the rest of her life, as evident in a letter from the 1960s from Rhys to her daughter Maryvonne. Rhys wrote:

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[48] Diana Athill, 'Introduction', *The Collected Stories,* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 8.

[49] Lisa Cohen, '"Frock Consciousness": Virginia Woolf, the Open Secret, and the Language of Fashion', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture,* 3 (1999), 149-174, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.2752/136270499779155032?needAccess=true> [accessed 29 June 2021], (p. 150).

[50] Cohen, p. 150.

> My dream is to finish my book, get a face lift and a bright red wig. Also a lovely fur coat. Underneath I will wear a purple dress and ropes of pearls, or what to do you say to rags? Then, in all my glory, I will come and see you.[51]

Even at the age of seventy, dress and appearance still held the same importance that it had throughout her writing career and early life in England.[52] Like her characters, Rhys was forced into 'eking out a precarious living by working in a succession of ill-paid jobs as a mannequin, manicurist, shop assistant and chorus girl—jobs that all depended upon presentable appearance and clothing'.[53] Her anxiety around appearance and looking 'decent' was learnt through experiences of declining socioeconomic status and gender roles. Rhys wrote these fears into Marya, Anna, and Sasha in particular; their shared 'worries over beauty and hygiene indicate anxieties originating in a consumerist, melancholic, traumatized, and aging femininity, abiding in a world where attractiveness carries psychic and cash value'.[54]

While it is clear that Rhys was influenced by Brontë's writing, both in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and beyond, the culminative effect of these examples signals a link to Bertha, rather than Jane who is entirely uninterested in clothing and appearance. The Rhysian woman's fixation on appearances is directly linked to Bertha's obsession with the veil, and mirrors the frock consciousness that Rhys wrote into her revision of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Given

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[51] Joannou, ''From Black to Red': Jean Rhys's Use of Dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea'* p. 123.

[52] Joannou, 'From Black to Red': Jean Rhys's Use of Dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea'* p. 123.

[53] Maroula Joannou, ''All right, I'll do anything for good clothes': Jean Rhys and Fashion' *Women: A Cultural Review,* 23 (2012), 463-489 https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1080/09574042.2012.739849?needAccess=true [accessed 1 July 2021] (p. 465).

[54] Andrea Zemgulys, 'Farewell, Socialist Gwen: Poverty and the Politics of Injury in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction', *Women: A Cultural Review,* 31 (2020) 200-210 <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/full/10.1080/09574042.2020.1779443> [accessed 7 March 2022] (p. 204).

Rhys's interest in fashion and appearances, it makes sense that she would be far more interested in Bertha, as opposed to Jane who cares little for clothing. Jane completely contrasts the frock consciousness that Bertha and the Rhysian woman exhibit, as Brontë stresses how little she cares for the fine garments Rochester offers her: 'Mr Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses. I hated the business, I begged to leave to defer it: no – it should be gone through with now. […] I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk'.[55] While Jane despises the act of shopping and prefers simple 'sober' dresses, Rhys's characters more closely resemble Bertha in their fixation upon the 'right' garments. Given her own proclivity for clothing Rhys would have less interest in a Jane-like character, further establishing Rhys's women as textual extensions of Brontë's more frock conscious madwoman.

This clothing consciousness saturates *Wide Sargasso Sea*, with Rhys writing her own concern with appearances into her iteration of Bertha in a bridging of texts and reality. Antoinette of *Wide Sargasso Sea* exhibits a distinctly Rhysian frock consciousness, but one directly drawn from Brontë's depiction of her lunatic in *Jane Eyre.* Rhys 'redresses' the madwoman from *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, weaving biographic and textual influence into the fabric of Antoinette's red dress:

> Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. […] As soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers. […] I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember.[56]

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[55] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 351-352.
[56] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* pp. 151-153.

Since Bertha wears a ghostly white shroud in *Jane Eyre,* this red dress is Rhys's own creation. However, the colour of the dress is an intentional reference to Brontë's continued association of the colour red with Bertha and danger. From the red-room Jane is locked in at the beginning of the novel to flames of the fires Bertha sets to her 'roll of the red eyes', red is distinctly the colour of madness throughout *Jane Eyre.*[57] Rhys reclaimed this colour when she rewrote it into the red dress that Antoinette, her iteration of Bertha, wears. Instead of the menace that Brontë associated with red, red becomes symbolic of Antoinette/Bertha and Rhys's home in the West Indies and the freedom signalled by fire (the symbolism of both the West Indies and fire are further examined in chapter two).

Within this dress, Rhys embeds elements of her own experience as a Creole 'madwoman' trapped within England when the dress becomes weighted with Antoinette's anxiety around appearance. Rhys writes that Antoinette worries about how her beloved dress would look in the eyes of Rochester and wider society: 'I took the red dress down and put it against myself. "Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?" I said. That man told me so'.[58] Rhys illustrates Antoinette's devastating sense of frock consciousness with words taken directly from Brontë's description of Bertha, who wrote Rochester as the poor man 'bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste'.[59] While the links between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* hardly need stressing, I argue that this same sense of anxiety around appearance that Rhys wrote into Antoinette was drafted far sooner in her previous iterations of Bertha: Marya, Anna and Sasha. Rhys began to rewrite and 'redress' the maligned Bertha within her earlier novels, in which we can see this same overlapping biographical and textual frock consciousness that Rhys experienced as a Creole 'madwoman' in English society in which clothing signified status and worth.

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[57] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 372.
[58] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 152.
[59] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 403.

The fixation of Rhys's women with clothes mirrors Bertha's fascination and rage when she inspects Jane's veil. Bertha tries on the veil and inspects her appearance in the mirror before tearing the garment apart. This moment of frock consciousness is conveyed by Jane to Rochester, as Brontë writes:

> "A form emerged from the closet; it took the light, held it aloft, and surveyed the garments pendent from the portmanteau. […] It seemed a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell." "Did you see her face?" "Not at first. But presently she took my veil from its place: she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. […] It removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them."[60]

Bertha here appears as the mad ghost-bride of Rochester's past, and Brontë placed great emphasis on clothing in this scene by conveying the sense of Bertha as a vengeful ghost through her obsession with Jane's veil and gown. Bertha tries it on and looks at herself in the mirror before tearing the garment in two, symbolising both her awareness of appearance and rage towards her husband who transformed her into the 'poor ghost' Rhys would write into her Rhysian woman.[61] While Bertha was every bit Brontë's monstrous madwoman, she was still sufficiently invested in clothing to try the veil on before shredding it. Rhys transposed Bertha's sense of awareness, rage and melancholy into her own characters, drawn to the frock consciousness that the Creole madwoman exhibited that mirrored her own conflicted love and anxiety around clothing and appearances.

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[60] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 371-372.

[61] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 235.

Like Bertha trying the veil before tearing it, Sasha watches a woman exhibit her same sense of frenzied anxiety around appearance in *Good Morning, Midnight.* Sasha notes how the woman:

> Puts on a hat, makes a face at herself in the glass, and take it off very quickly. She tries another – then another. Her expression is terrible – hungry, despairing, hopeful, quite crazy. At any moment you expect her to start laughing the laugh of the mad. 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.[62]

Her madness of expression is closely linked to Bertha's depiction as a figure of horror: both women are made 'quite crazy' in their states of anxiety around appearance. The significance of appearance and clothing is embedded into *Good Morning, Midnight,* particularly when Sasha breaks down when reflecting upon 'how hard' she has to work to fit into wider society and signal that she is a good 'proper' lady through her clothing and make-up.[63] Frock consciousness controls her every movement and choice, resulting in harrowing isolation and indecision, as it takes Sasha:

> Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. 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.[64]

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[62] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 53-54.
[63] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 87.
[64] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 87.

In this moment Rhys moves from discussing appearance to its wider significance, as everything Sasha says, thinks, and does is judged, just like her clothing. From this sense of frock consciousness the reader is able to understand the maddening nature of her desperate attempts to fit in, as Sasha's inner monologue becomes more frantic, widening the scope of her anxiety from clothing to appearances to her entire life. Concerns around maintaining appearances dominates Sasha's entire existence, as she dresses up and down to fit in with different groups – allowing movement but also fragmenting her own personality and isolating her from a sense of self. As Maroula Joannou explains, Rhys uses the 'dressing up' of her characters as a 'textual metaphor for a shifting, fluid notion of identity and for the multiple selves that are the hallmark of the modernist consciousness'.[65]

The nature of living multiple identities through clothing further alienates her characters from themselves, as they become only what society approves of or fail entirely. This fragmented sense of character within their appearance is linked to their wider disjointed existence as being their own character whilst also remaining deeply connected to the other Rhysian women, as well as being textual extensions of Bertha, all while representing Rhys herself as 'madwoman' outsiders. This disparate, liminal identity within their own novels is signalled through 'dressing up', and relates to the wider sense of being spread across various identities beyond the pages of each individual novel.

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[65] Joannou, 'All right, I'll do anything for good clothes': Jean Rhys and Fashion', p. 465.

Body Language and ‘Postures’ of Bertha

Reading the body language and movements of Rhys’s characters shows further patterns of connection between the Rhysian woman and her prototextual madwoman. Applying Michel Foucault’s theories on bodies and discipline enables greater understanding of how Rhys wrote the non-“docile” body of Bertha into Marya, Anna and Sasha. In ‘Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power’, Sandra Lee Bartky examines how the production of properly embodied femininity is embedded into the female body through discipline and subordination: ‘The disciplinary techniques through which the “docile bodies” of women are constructed aim at a regulation which is perpetual and exhaustive – a regulation of the body’s size and contours, its appetite, posture, gesture, and general comportment in space and the appearance of each of its visible parts’.[66] Within these ‘postures and gestures’, Rhys’s characters emulate Bertha as “loose” unconstrained women. Within their behaviour we can read the same argument as that from ‘Frock Consciousness’: that while it is clear Rhys was inspired by Brontë, her characters are direct embodiment of Bertha rather than Jane. In contrast to Bertha stands Jane, a ‘docile’ body within her reserved nature. Jane makes herself as small as possible with her posture, attempting to become invisible by hiding in the quiet nooks and window seats at Gateshead and Thornfield. With her hands folded in her lap and head downturned, Brontë’s protagonist adheres to her dominated position within the Victorian patriarchal biopower by making herself ‘small and narrow, harmless’.[67]

In stark contrast to Jane’s ‘constricted posture and general style of movement’ stands Bertha, figurative and literal opposite to Brontë’s protagonist.[68] Despite being imprisoned by

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[66] Sandra Lee Bartky, ‘Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power’, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression,* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 63-83 (p. 80).

[67] Bartky, p. 68.

[68] Bartky, p. 67.

Rochester, Bertha's unrestrained movement around Thornfield Hall is a threatening force that haunts Jane long before Brontë reveals Bertha's identity. Brontë fully introduces the reader to her lunatic after Jane and Rochester's thwarted wedding, depicting Bertha as something between 'beast or human being' in her movements across the attic.[69] Finally appearing on the page beyond her haunting presence, yet still never able to speak for herself, Brontë describes her as 'a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was'.[70] Although he is nearly beaten by the wild, bestial Bertha in this moment, Rochester 'mastered' her through repeated physical restraint: binding her to a chair as a reinforcement of his control over the female body.[71] Embodying Bertha in her movements and manners, the Rhysian woman's 'looseness is manifest not only in her morals, but in her manner of speech, and quite literally in the free and easy way she moves'.[72] Bertha's wild, unconstrained movement is found in Anna, Marya and Sophia as they freely move across city spaces and stretch their legs across the bounds placed upon female bodies. Their 'looseness' of posture and morality stands in direct opposition to the 'proper' model of femininity established in Brontë's Jane.

While Jane endures and conforms to the expectations of docile female bodies, the Rhysian woman fights back against male control, desperately and often frantically, just as Bertha unrestrainedly fought Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys textually re-personifies Bertha through Anna when she demands that Vincent and Walter stop laughing at her, taking charge momentarily with force. Here Rhys describes Anna's anger as she burns Walter's hand with her cigarette: 'I jammed it down hard and held it there, and he snatched his hand away and said “Christ!” But they had stopped laughing’.[73] Anna’s use of her cigarette to burn Walter is particularly significant as this burning denotes a direct link to Bertha, who is associated with the motif of fire throughout *Jane Eyre*, which I discuss further in chapter two. Inasmuch as Bertha burns down Thornfield Hall and attempted to burn Rochester in his bed, Anna here burns Walter, an extension of Rochester and English patriarchy. Like Bertha’s defeat and physical restraint under Rochester, Anna is able, if only for a moment, to beat her embodiment of patriarchal power by burning his hand. But, much like Bertha’s fleeting triumph over Rochester when they wrestle, Anna’s actions here have little impact upon her wider position in the biopower, as Walter and Vincent continue to manipulate her body.

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[69] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 384.
[70] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 384-385.
[71] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 385.
[72] Bartky, pp. 67-68.

Significantly, *Quartet* was originally published as *Postures*. The original title was a reference to Marya’s unwillingness to conform and ‘fix the right smile, or assume the posture’.[74] This inability to conform is a major facet of Bertha’s presence within Rhys’s character. In a similar vein to Rochester’s attempts of controlling Bertha, Marya is told by Heidler that:

> “Your whole point of view and your whole attitude to life is impossible and wrong and you’ve got to change it for everybody’s sake.” He went on to explain that one had to keep up appearances. That everybody had to. Everybody had to 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.”[75]

Refusing to give in and ‘play the game’, Marya’s initial ‘posture’ is instead one of uninhibited fight, like Bertha’s unrepressed rage and refusal to give into Rochester’s confinement. Rhys disliked the title *Postures* for its small scope, as Marya's posture is only a small facet of the novel's themes of isolation and failed relationships. Instead, Rhys preferred *Quartet* as a title for its reference to the complicated relationship between the novel's four main characters.[76] While Heidler and Lois form defences against Marya upon their supposed respectability, to Marya this Quartet was not a love affair, but rather a 'ruthless, merciless, three-cornered fight. And from the first Marya, as was right and proper, had no chance of victory. For she fought wildly, with tears, with futile rages, with extravagant abandon – all bad weapons'.[77] Furthermore, while she fights initially, Marya's 'posture' throughout the novel is largely one of aimless uncertainty, as to 'prepare a pose is beyond Marya's scope. […] It is not in her nature to assume postures which would require decisiveness and direction'.[78] When Marya physically fights Heidler the echoes of Bertha grappling Rochester are clear:

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[73] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 74.

[74] Thomas F. Staley, ‘The Emergence of a Form: Style and Consciousness in Jean Rhys’s *Quartet*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 202-224 <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/pdf/441128.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad68470aa34ed729dafd1b1e7c079a5c8> [accessed 24 December 2021] (p. 207).

[75] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 88.

> 'Every vestige of coherence, of reason has fled from her brain. Besides, however reasonably or coherently she talked, they wouldn't understand, either of them. If she said: "You're torturing me, you're mocking me, you're driving me mad,' they wouldn't understand. […] She jumped forward and hit him as hard as she could.'[79]

Echoing Bertha in her 'mad' mental state, Marya fights Heidler in an attempt to escape from his isolation and control as he tries to confine her to an attic-like room in his home. Marya either fights wildly like Bertha, with rage but without precision or 'posturing', or her posture is arranged by Heidler or Stephan with little say for herself in the movement of her body.[80] Unlike Heidler and Lois, Marya is unable and entirely unwilling to assume the correct

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[76] Staley, p. 207.
[77] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 91.
[78] Staley, p. 207.
[79] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 80.
[80] Staley, p. 207.

‘posture’, and instead embodies Bertha’s wild, unsuccessful fight for freedom from her oppressor.

Rhys directly expanded upon the mind beneath the mad movements of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys describes Antoinette’s unrestrained nature through the eyes of an ashamed onlooking Rochester, who is ‘hardly able to believe she was the pale silent creature I had married, watching her in her blue chemise, blue with white spots, hitched far above her knees, she stopped laughing, called a warning and threw a large pebble. She threw like a boy’.[81] Defying both Rochester’s and wider societal expectations of gendered behaviour, Antoinette freely moves in the West Indies without the sense of English constraint and propriety expected of her. Antoinette’s free movements and wild temperament are based upon the unrestrained nature of Brontë’s madwoman, as *Wide Sargasso Sea* was certainly influenced by *Jane Eyre* and undeniably combined with Rhys’s memories of the West Indies. The unconstrained nature of Bertha is rewritten into Antoinette, but is evident much earlier within the “loose” Anna and Marya. The subversive behaviour of the Rhysian woman is evidence not only of Rhys’s long engagement with Brontë’s influence, but also shows a clear link between the Creole madwoman and Rhys’s own maddeningly depressed characters.

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[81] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 73.

‘Intemperate and Unchaste’: Sexualised Racialised Bodies

Speaking of her writing process in the aforementioned interview with Diana Vreeland, Rhys stated that ‘there’s very little invention in my books. What came first with most of them was the wish to get rid of this awful sadness that weighed me down. I found when I was a child that if I could put the hurt into words, it would go. […] If you “write out” a thing, it doesn’t trouble you so much’.[82] Rhys utilised this cathartic method of releasing emotions throughout her writing career, continually drawing upon her experiences and perspectives and weaving them into her fiction. Through this process, I argue Rhys began to “write out” the sadness and colonial history beneath Bertha long before she began drafting *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Here we can trace the pattern of influence that stems from Brontë’s prototextual depiction of the maddened, sexualised body of her Creole lunatic that permeates Rhys’s own sexualised outsider characters.

Constructed as the opposite to Jane’s English moral modesty, Bertha’s body is one rife with sexual and racial connotations. Adjectives such as ‘fierce’, ‘virile’, and ‘savage’ are used by Brontë to describe Bertha; even her desperate attempts to overpower and escape Rochester are said to be the ‘sole conjugal embrace’ he can expect from his wife.[83] The backstory of Brontë’s ‘intemperate and unchaste’ madwoman is narrated entirely by Rochester, who was supposedly seduced and captured by the power of her charm and allure before he became aware of her ‘pigmy intellect’ and degrading immoral vices.[84] Brontë’s descriptions of her Creole madwoman are animalistic and ‘inhuman’.[85] The ‘clothed hyena’ is frequently reduced to a mere ‘it’ through her bestial lunacy, and it is important to note that

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[82] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 224.
[83] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* pp. 384-385.
[84] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* pp. 402-403.
[85] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 384.

Brontë's descriptions do much more than reduce Bertha to an animal, as Nancy Armstrong explains:

> 'In pushing her back down the evolutionary tree, Brontë also gives Jane's antagonist the markings of what Darwin called the "lower" races and Mayhew considered typical of the "criminal classes." Brontë performs this transformation on Rochester's Creole wife, despite the fact she was of pure European descent and the daughter of a wealthy landowner'.[86]

Even though Bertha was likely a white woman, her heritage as a Creole marked her as an outsider, 'beneath' the English society of Jane and Rochester.

The overtly cruel depiction of the mad, imprisoned Creole resonated with Rhys long after her first reading of *Jane Eyre*. As Rhys stated plainly in an interview, which I quoted earlier in the introduction: 'when I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been'.[87] I argue she developed Bertha's story 'as it might really have been' over the decades of her writing before *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* contain distinct responses to Brontë as Rhys continually incorporated her criticism of the colonial perspective embodied by Brontë's Creole monster in an effort to rewrite how her own body was perceived within the patriarchal biopower. Discussing Rhys's singular point of view, Elaine Savory wrote that Rhys 'had an acute sense of being an outsider from the West Indies, poor and powerless in a world run by the rich and influential, and female in a male dominated world'.[88] As a Creole woman living in England and France, Rhys understood the 'complex interactions of the powerless, the powerful and place', and wrote her experiences of the white patriarchal biopower into each of her novels – rewriting the body of Bertha was an effort to rewrite the perception of her own body.[89] Like Bertha, even as a white woman Rhys was marked an 'other' by English society, particularly by men who both sexualised and scorned her status as an exotic Creole outsider. As Rochester scornfully describes his wife as 'intemperate and unchaste', likewise each of Rhys's women, 'whether identified as Caribbean or of uncertain origin', are seen as equally intemperate and unchaste by English society, but are moved from the margins to the centre of their own narratives.[90]

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[86] Nancy Armstrong, 'Gender and the Victorian Novel', *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel,* ed. by Deidre David, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97-124 (p. 112).

[87] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 235.

The body of Bertha was reincarnated in 1939 when Rhys wrote her directly into the narrative of *Good Morning, Midnight.* This occurs when Sasha is told the tragic story of a nameless girl from Martinique, with many aspects of her story identical to Brontë's Bertha and Rhys's later reimagining in *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

> She wasn't a white woman. She was half-negro – a mulatto. She had been crying so much that it was impossible to tell if she was pretty or ugly or young or old. She was drunk too, but that wasn't why she was crying. *She was crying because she was at the end of everything*. There was that sound in her sobbing which is quite unmistakable – like certain music… I put my arm round her, but it wasn't like putting your arm round a woman. She was like something that has turned into stone. She asked again for whisky. I gave it to her, and she started a long story, speaking sometimes in French, sometimes in English, when of course I couldn't understand her very well. She came from *Martinique*, she said, and she had met this monsieur in Paris, the *monsieur she*

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[88] Elaine Savory, 'Jean Rhys's Environmental Language: Oppositions, Dialogues and Silences', *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 85-106 (p. 85).

[89] Savory, 'Jean Rhys's Environmental Language: Oppositions, Dialogues and Silences', p. 85.

[90] Helen Carr, 'Intemperate and Unchaste', p. 92.

> *was with on the top floor.* Everybody in the house knew she wasn't married to him, but it was even worse that she wasn't white. She said that every time they looked at her she could see how they hated her, and the people in the streets looked at her in the same way. At first she didn't mind – she thought it comical. But now she had got so that she would do anything not to see people. *She told me she hadn't been out, except after dark,* for two years. When she said this I had an extraordinary sensation, as if I were *looking down into a pit*. It was the expression in her eyes. I said: "But this monsieur you are living with, what about him?" "Oh, he is *very Angliche, he says I imagine everything*." […] I said to her: "Don't let yourself get *hysterical, because if you do that it's the end*." But it was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because I had all the time this feeling that I was talking to something *that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive*.[91]

The direct influence of the Creole madwoman is evident in this girl from the Caribbean being likewise confined to the top floor of the house and trapped in a relationship to an Englishman. Also, in a similar sense to Brontë's version of the character, the woman in this story is only able to escape her confines after dark, much like Bertha could only roam the halls of Thornfield at night. The melancholic 'half-negro' from the Caribbean here is drawn directly from Bertha as the racialised, sexualised other, particularly in the finer details of the story: such as her being described as 'no longer quite human, no longer quite alive', which parallels Brontë's descriptions of Bertha as inhumanly savage, as well as her death at the novel's end. The concept of 'looking down into a pit' and at someone 'not quite alive' is also a reference to speaking to Bertha in its idea of a conversation that crosses the bounds of texts and decades. The societal shaming of the racialised, sexualised body is emphasised here also, as Rhys highlights how the household and people in the streets hated this woman because they

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[91] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 78-79. Italics mine.

‘knew she wasn’t married to him, but it was even worse that she wasn’t white. She said that every time they looked at her she could see how they hated her’.[92]

I read the woman of this story in *Good Morning, Midnight* as an early draft of Antoinette. Rhys here wrote another possible ‘other side’ of Brontë’s Bertha, one which emphasised the injustice of her situation while still utilising details that were later incorporated into *Wide Sargasso Sea* – such as the alcoholism and music that prominently feature in Antoinette’s narrative. The drinking and crying that are mentioned here, for instance, are characteristic of Antoinette. Likewise, the mention of this woman’s ‘hysteria’ and madness serving as the ‘end,’ as her slipping sanity serves as the ending to her narrative denotes a connection to Antoinette and the Creole lunatic.

Rhys continued to write the societal shaming of the sexualised, racialised woman into the body of Anna throughout *Voyage in the Dark,* as she continued to rewrite Bertha from her own experience as Brontë’s ‘Creole lunatic’. As a Creole woman trapped in England, Anna’s experiences of men and society reflect the body of Bertha, while the oppressive forces of Rochester are personified by Walter and Vincent. Rhys emphasises the patriarchal, colonial forces imposed on Anna’s, and by extension, Bertha’s, body when Walter inspects Anna’s teeth. Rhys writes: ‘He said “You’ve got the loveliest teeth. You’re sweet. […] And then he started kissing me’.[93] Walter’s inspection of Anna’s teeth mirrors the actions of customers at a slave auction, and also links to the slave listing from Constance Estate that Anna repeatedly recalls throughout the novel. Both of these events emphasise Anna’s position within the patriarchal biopower, ‘revealing Anna’s self-perception as Walter’s slave and tying his imperious sexual control over her with England’s imperial history’.[94]

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[92] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 78.

[93] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* pp. 19-20.

[94] Brown, p. 573.

Anna's sexual 'purity' is also linked to an advertisement for cocoa powder, when she reads on the back of a newspaper 'What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa'.[95] When she thinks about her relationship with Walter and worries if her stepmother will ask her how she was getting money, Anna repeats the advertisement in her mind, giving the sense of her being 'bought' by Englishmen. Given the skin-tone implications of the cocoa powder, Rhys writes Anna as a sexualised, racialised body through the value of her 'purity' and the colonial forces imposed repeatedly upon her body: '"What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa." […] For Thirty-five Thousand Years the Answer has been…'[96] The link between Anna as a colonial commodity, pure cocoa powder, brought from the West Indies for English male consumption emphasises her position as an echo of Bertha: a woman also brought from the West Indies but cast aside when Rochester no longer considered her 'pure'. Like her character in *Voyage in the Dark,* Rhys was subject to the labels of being a Creole woman, as Helen Carr explains: 'White Creoles were reputed to be "licentious", but if Creole men were regarded as dissolute and degenerate, Creole women's alleged sensuality was still more shocking. […] Such notions of white Creole degeneracy were still circulating vigorously in the first half of the twentieth century when Rhys arrived in England'.[97]As a Creole woman in England, Anna is the most honest and direct 'writing out' of Rhys's own experience as a 'Bertha'.

The labelling of Anna as a 'Hottentot' is, I argue, where Rhys's criticism of Brontë's depiction of the Creole madwoman reaches its fullest extent, not with *Wide Sargasso Sea* as widely believed. In the nineteenth century, the term 'Hottentot' was deeply connected with racialised, sexualised imagery, stemming from the tragic fetishization of Khoekhoe woman Sara Baartman as the 'Hottentot Venus'. Her body, deeply sexualised for its exoticism by the

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[95] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 50.
[96] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 51.
[97] Carr, 'Intemperate and Unchaste', p. 89.

English patriarchy, was on display for European consumption in freak shows in London from 1810 and Paris from 1814, before her death in 1815 at the age of 26 – likely dying of pneumonia, syphilis, or alcoholism.[98] In the Western biopower, Baartman's body was both:

> The icon of the Hottentot female and the icon of the prostitute. In the course of the nineteenth century, the female Hottentot comes to represent the black female in nuce, and the prostitute to represent the sexualized woman. Both of these categories represent the creation of classes which correspondingly represent very specific qualities. While the number of terms describing the various categories of the prostitute expanded substantially during the nineteenth century, all were used to label the sexualized woman.[99]

Rhys draws upon the sexualised symbolism behind the 'Hottentot' label, which rendered Anna's body a 'paradoxical freak of race and sexuality, both alluring and primitive, the very embodiment of desire and the importance of conquering instincts' within the English society. Like the 'Hottentot', Anna is sexualised for her outsider status and subsequently shamed for these labels of racialised sexuality: the same labels Brontë placed upon the body of Bertha as the Creole antagonist of *Jane Eyre.*[100]

By illustrating the body of Bertha under the English patriarchal powers that deemed her entirely 'alien', Rhys rewrote the narrative of her own outsider body.[101] Her existence as a Creole woman in England was one doubly isolated, her racial ambiguity marked her as, in her own words, a 'white cockroach' to black Dominicans and a 'white nigger' to the

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[98] Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus,* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009) pp. 1-3.

[99] Sander L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature', *Critical Inquiry,* 12 (1985), 204-242, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343468> [accessed 4 January 2022] (p. 206).

[100] Crais and Scully, p. 1.

[101] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 402.

Europeans.[102] Rhys depicted her own sense of liminality and immense isolation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* through the voice of her Bertha, when Antoinette states 'I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all'.[103] This lack of belonging that Rhys embedded into her iteration of Bertha permeates each of her earlier heroines, particularly Anna, whose liminal identity directly mirrors that of Brontë's Creole madwoman. Influenced by Brontë's representation, Rhys refigured Bertha with sympathy by showing how Anna as a Creole woman in England was condemned to 'self consciousness, homelessness, a sense of inescapable difference and even deformity in the two societies by whose judgements she always condemns herself'.[104] By writing women positioned as 'double outsiders' like Bertha and herself, we can see Brontë's influence upon Rhys, as she aimed to depict Brontë's villain with new depth and understanding.

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[102] Helen Tiffin, 'Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the novels of Jean Rhys', *World Literature,* 17 (1978), 328-341, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449857808588539> [accessed 3 January 2022] (p. 328).

Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 85.

[103] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 85.

[104] Tiffin, p. 328.

Chapter Two: Rhys's Gothic Echoes of Brontë's Madwoman

Brontë drew upon the gothic literary tradition continuously throughout her writing career. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are filled with gothic tropes: distant unknown lands and remote manors, mysterious and complicated families with dark secrets, and plenty of supernatural encounters. I argue that when writing her novels of unnerving isolation, Rhys drew upon Brontë's sense of gothic unease and suspense in creating her modernist Berthas. Her characters haunt the various hotel rooms and city spaces, navigating a world of eerie liminality as phantoms of Rhys's own life. Rhys draws a spectral split between past and the future and between places and people, with Sasha, Anna and Marya being haunted by past memories while never entirely existing in the present.[1]

In this chapter I use the lens of the gothic to examine the motifs and symbolism that extend from Brontë's novels into the pages of Rhys's works. Gothic literature is traditionally defined as 'a genre of fiction characterized by suspenseful, sensational plots involving supernatural or macabre elements'.[2] The culminative effect of these gothic themes and motifs present within both authors' works is evidence of Rhys's reinscription of Brontë's depictions of Bertha and the West Indies as sites of terror and madness.

As it provides an excellent point from which to examine the various threads of Rhys's criticism and rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, the gothic has long been studied within *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Sylvie Maurel has traced the gothic resonances within *Wide Sargasso Sea* in both 'The Other Stage: from *Jane Eyre* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*' and 'Across the *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Jean Rhys's Revision of Charlotte Brontë's Eurocentric Gothic'. Similarly, David McInnis has noted the postcolonial strategies that Rhys employs in *Wide Sargasso Sea* empowered by her use of the gothic in 'Re-orienting the Gothic Romance: Jean Rhys, Tayeb Salih, and strategies of representation in the Postcolonial Gothic'. April Monroe likewise studies Rhys's gothic modes to examine *Voyage in the Dark* as a postcolonial-gothic text in '"Haunted and Obeah": Gothic Spaces and Monstrous Landscapes in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*'. Primarily these analyses of Rhys's gothic modes consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* strictly in connection to *Jane Eyre,* or examine an earlier text like *Voyage in the Dark* for its gothic-postcolonial motifs without forming wider connections.

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[1] Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran, 'Introduction: The Haunting of Jean Rhys' *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) 1-18 (p. 7).

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/80225?redirectedFrom=gothic&> [accessed 29 March 2022] s.v. gothic, adj. and n.

Similar to the patterns I traced across Rhys's earlier novels that refashioned Bertha in the first chapter of this thesis, I argue that within the authors' shared gothic modes and motifs we can trace further influence from Brontë upon Rhys's work beyond *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This chapter will primarily focus upon textual analysis, tracing the motifs of water, fire, mirrors, and nightmares to show how Rhys drew upon Brontë's gothic themes but utilised them to show her own perspective and continue to write 'the other side'.[3] Rhys replicated the same motifs and themes established in Brontë's work, we can see exactly where she sought to revise and extend the identity of the Creole madwoman and the West Indies within her own novels.

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[3] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 106.

Gothic Echoes: Brontë's Supernatural, Rhys's Reality

Rhys rewrote Brontë's figure of horror with her own 'poor ghosts' of Bertha, and continually drew upon Brontë's gothic tropes to invoke unease and isolation within her own fiction.[4] While Brontë used supernatural elements, like Jane's experience in the 'red-room' and Lucy's haunting Nun to convey her characters' isolation, Rhys instead transformed the gothic into the mundane. Scholars such as Molly Hite have noted how Rhys dealt with the palpable 'hard terror of psychological isolation'.[5] We can trace Brontë's influence in the ways Rhys merges the gothic and the real within her own fiction.

Brontë drew upon the gothic to create an air of unease and suspense within *Jane Eyre* when young Jane is locked in the red-room at Gateshead after she stands up against the cruel Master John. The red-room is described as 'chill, silent, and solemn' by young Jane, separated from the rest of the house and seldom used, despite its grandeur.[6] The room holds 'a sense of dreary consecration [which] had guarded it from frequent intrusion', and Jane is terrified of the tomb-like space in which her uncle 'breathed his last'.[7] It is in the red-room that Jane first explains how completely alone she is, as a 'discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, […] a strange child she could not love, an uncongenial alien permanently intruded on her own family'.[8] Jane's isolation in the red-room reflects her position in the world, as an orphan and a dependant. As she reflects upon her loneliness, Jane sees the ghost of her uncle. In the red-room, Brontë overlaps themes of isolation with the gothic, as the 'uncanny manifestations are primarily symptoms of inner conflicts threatening the self with dissolution'.[9]

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[4] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 235.

[5] Molly Hite, 'Writing in the Margins: Jean Rhys' *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narratives,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 19-54 (p. 20).

[6] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 20.

[7] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 21.

[8] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 22-24.

[9] Maurel, p. 157.

In a similar use of the gothic, Lucy is visited by the 'ghostly Nun' multiple times in *Villette*.[10] Lucy is arguably Brontë's most isolated heroine; as Gilbert and Gubar argue, she is 'from first to last a woman without – outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health – and her story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written'.[11] After seeing the spectral Nun, Lucy's isolation is heightened as she 'was left secretly and sadly to wonder in my own mind, whether that strange being was of this world or of a realm beyond the grave or whether it indeed was only the child of malady, and I of that malady the prey'.[12] Lucy's process of self-discovery is dramatized when she unveils the Nun that has haunted her throughout the novel, thus exorcising the ghost that represented her fragmented, isolated self.[13] While Lucy believes the Nun to be the ghost of a woman buried alive where she lives and works, the Nun is in fact a love interest of Ginevra's, disguised to gain access to the school.[14] The gothic elements of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* dramatize Jane and Lucy's anxieties and sense of alienation, through spectral and overtly supernatural imagery.

Brontë used hyperbolic imagery of the gothic to convey her themes of isolation, and Rhys later incorporated these same gothic tropes into her novels but inverted the sensationalised element of Brontë's fiction. While still drawing upon the same sense of fear and suspense evoked by Brontë's supernatural elements, Rhys instead rooted her gothic in the mundane, opting to write gothic themes within the realm of realism. Rhys's fiction shows the influence of Brontë when she uses gothic tropes to write the real horror of psychological isolation – less supernatural, but perhaps all the more terrifying in its realism. These psychological horrors also enact another mode of writing back to Brontë's depiction of the Creole lunatic. Rhys placed focus upon writing the horrors of psychological isolation, instead of writing with spectral nuns or deceased relatives; Rhys's women 'haunt' themselves and invoke the reality behind Bertha's madness. Sasha, Anna and Marya's sanity is slowly eroded through the course of each of their novels, as the fear and isolation they experience within their day-to-day lives drives them towards the insanity under constraint that Bertha embodied. Rhys uses gothic dread here to demonstrate possible social reasons behind Bertha's madness within her heroines, who are each similarly isolated and driven to maddening depression by Rochester-figures.

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[10] Brontë, *Villette,* pp. 156-157.

[11] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'The Spectral Selves of Charlotte Brontë: The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe, Villette', *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020) 399-440 (p. 400).

[12] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 298.

[13] Christina Crosby, 'Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 24 (1984), 701-715 <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/450487?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents> [accessed 16 January 2022] (p. 701).

[14] Crosby, p. 704.

For instance, Sasha of *Good Morning, Midnight* lives in a ghostly half-reality, with her identity fragmented across a series of haunting memories. When she looks into a mirror it talks back to her with an image of her past self: "Well, well," it says, "last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren't you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one – lightly, like an echo – when it looks into me again?"[15] Rhys's use of the gothic within her very real accounts of unease and mental anguish often breaks from traditional modes of gothic writing, but still draws upon distinctly gothic tropes. As April Munroe explains, Rhys's characters 'are not the heroines of traditional gothic tales, but often figures of the monstrous and the hybrid – of life-in-death – struggling to find coherence in their own narratives'.[16] Marya demonstrates this uneasy overlap of gothic terror and everyday life when she describes her constant state of fear:

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[15] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 140-141.

[16] April Munroe, '"Haunted and Obeah": Gothic Spaces and Monstrous Landscapes in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark', Studies in the Humanities,* 42 (2015), 108-134 < https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=1eb9360f-9357-4472-aff3-dd7821d2fb3d%40redis> [accessed 12 January 2022], (pp. 119-120).

> It seemed to her that if she moved quickly enough she would escape the fear that hunted her. It was a vague and shadowy fear of something cruel and stupid that had caught her and would never let go. She had always known that it was there – hidden under the more or less pleasant surface of things. Always. Ever since she was a child. You could argue about hunger or cold or loneliness, but with that fear you couldn't argue. It went too deep. You were too mysteriously sure of its terror.[17]

Linking gothic fear and terror with the everyday senses of hunger and cold and loneliness, Marya demonstrates Rhys's gothic-mundane with her constant, mysterious terror. Unlike Brontë's 'demons', ghosts and nuns, Rhys's gothic takes place just beneath the surface of everyday life. Undermining the 'pleasant surface of things', this shadowy sense of unease becomes all the more chilling for its close proximity to reality.[18]

Rhys describes the men of her novels through gothic tropes, embodying societal judgement and patriarchal power through emotions of fear and motifs of ghosts and haunting. Sasha is 'haunted' by the man who lives in the room next to her, as 'hanging around, he is like the ghost of the landing'.[19] She fears running into him, with his 'bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing', and is terrified of both what he plans to do to her and what he thinks of her.[20] Marya experiences a similar 'frenzy of senseless fright' of Heidler, fearing both him and his rejection of her.[21] A scene in which he visits her at night is saturated with horrific suspense:

> A board creaked outside. She watched the handle of the door turning very gently, very slowly. And during the few moments that passed from the time she heard the board

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[17] Rhys, *Quartet,* pp. 23-24.
[18] Rhys, *Quartet,* pp. 23-24.
[19] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 7.
[20] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 7.
[21] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 69.

> creak to the time she saw Heidler and said, ‘Oh it’s you then, it’s you’, she was in a frenzy of senseless fright. Fright of a child shut up in a dark room.[22]

When Marya says ‘it’s you’, the reader is unsure if she states this in relief or further fear, as her terror reaches its height at his appearance in her room. Rhys here gives Marya the terrors of *Jane Eyre*’s red-room, with real adult fears added to the child’s dread imaginings. Likewise, Anna reverts back to her own childhood ‘red-room’ state when Vincent breaks up with her. Brontë writes Jane’s overwhelming sense of terror at its height when she sees the ghost of her uncle in the room in which he died: ‘I thought Mr Reed’s spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister’s child, might quit its abode – whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed – and rise before me in this chamber’.[23] Rhys’s gothic mode connects directly to Brontë’s red-room again by incorporating the ‘ghost’ of an uncle within Anna’s spiralling internal monologue:

> Uncle Bo moved and sighed and long yellow tusks like fangs came out of his mouth and protruded down to his chin – you don’t scream when you are frightened because you can’t and you don’t move either because you can’t – after a long time he sighed and opened his eyes and clicked his teeth back into place.[24]

To convey her overwhelming sense of doom, Rhys uses imagery from an uncanny incident from Anna’s childhood in the West Indies. Her breakup is tinged with terror as Anna associates it with this feeling of dread from her childhood: ‘I thought, “What the hell’s the matter with me? I must be crazy. This letter has nothing to do with false teeth.” But I went on thinking about false teeth'.[25] Unable to move again from fear, Anna states that she had been frozen on the spot for two hours as childhood terrors and adult realities overlap in her mind.

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[22] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 69.
[23] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 24.
[24] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 79.

The fears of Rhys's women are grounded in reality where their 'monsters' use their bodies in uncomfortable and uncanny scenes of horror. Rhys's meshing of gothic and reality is particularly apparent when Sasha is assaulted at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight.* Once Sasha's assailant leaves, Rhys describes Sasha's grief and fear through an unnerving out-of-body experience:

> When he has gone I turn over on my side and huddle up, making myself as small as possible, my knees almost touching my chin. I cry in the way that hurts right down, that hurts your heart and your stomach. Who is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other – how do I know how the other is? She isn't me.[26]

Her very real pain is conveyed through a spectral, disembodied observer, who narrates her grief and tells Sasha "I hate to stop you crying. I know it's your favourite pastime, but I must remind you that the man next door has probably heard every damn thing that's happened and is now listening-in on the sequel."[27] Sasha's grieving is interrupted by a ghostly representation of her fear of societal shaming, and here Rhys conveys a very real sense of psychological terror that threatens Sasha's everyday life through this spectral voice.

Rhys continues to draw upon Brontë's sense of unease and displacement to emphasise the isolation of the Rhysian woman, transforming societal judgement into a thing of true horror. The houses and streets throughout *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are anthropomorphised by Rhys, as she creates monstrous figures out of them to embody social hostility. When visiting Walter's home for the first time, Anna notes how 'the taxis and the lights and the people passing looked swollen, as if I were drunk. We got to his house in Green Street and it was quiet and watching and not friendly to me'.[28] Here Anna foreshadows Walter's abandonment from the appearance of his street, discerning that his home, like England, will not be welcoming.[29]

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[25] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 81.
[26] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 153.
[27] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 154.

Anna is particularly sensitive to the 'gothic resonances of the street', as April Munroe explains, 'London's appearance is not quite right [for Anna], not quite definite: the cars, people, and lights take on a grotesque, oneiric quality'.[30] When Rhys describes the cityscape as 'swollen' and threatening, she links back to Brontë's description of Bertha as the swollen and grotesque figure of gothic horror: 'the long dishevelled hair, the *swelled* black face, the exaggerated stature, were figments of imagination; results of nightmare'.[31] Rhys continues to represent the streets as gothic figures in *Good Morning, Midnight* when Sasha describes walking at night 'with the dark houses over you, like monsters'.[32] Sasha only feels that the houses loom when she is without money or friends, as they embody wider societal shaming:

> If you have money and friends, houses are just houses with steps and a front-door – friendly houses where the door opens and somebody meets you, smiling. If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors, no lit windows, just frowning darkness. Frowning and leering and sneering, the

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[28] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 31.
[29] Munroe, p. 119.
[30] Munroe, p. 119.
[31] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 374. Italics mine.
[32] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 23.
Munroe, p. 119.

> houses, one after another. Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer. And they know who to frown at.[33]

Both Anna and Sasha are positioned as the 'poor devils' at whom the houses frown, leer and sneer, without money and friends. The houses are anthropomorphised into monsters with eyes to judge Rhys's destitute passing ghosts across both novels, as their 'experience of the city is not rooted in the individual; it is structured by the city's gothic topography'.[34]

As the Rhysian woman wanders Paris and London she is eternally plagued by memories of past lives. They live as ghosts of their former selves as Rhys 'personifies the negative and alienating effects of the city as ghosts and nightmare figures, releasing them into London's streets to amble alongside her characters'.[35] As Anna, Sasha and Marya move around the city, they float from place to place as 'haunting' renditions of Rhys's own life, rather than fully inhabiting the dreary series of rooms they each occupy.[36] In *Quartet*, for instance, Rhys embeds Marya's feelings of uneasy loneliness with her own experiences of alienation from the fallout of her affair with Ford. Through Marya, Rhys reflects upon her isolation, describing her memories as 'vague and pale, like ghosts'. Marya's ghost-like state here extends the haunting presence of Bertha as she's likewise driven mad by a Rochester-figure before her death: feeling 'horribly unhappy, […] simply going mad'.[37] Each of Rhys's women describes themselves as feeling 'more ghostly than real', evoking Rhys's wish in her interview with Diana Vreeland to write the 'poor ghost' of Bertha a life.[38] This life that Rhys writes for Brontë's ghost is based upon her own.

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[33] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 23.
[34] Munroe, p. 117.
[35] Munroe, p. 119.
[36] Johnson and Moran, p. 4.
[37] Rhys, *Quartet*, pp. 122-123.
[38] Johnson and Moran, 'The Haunting of Jean Rhys', p. 7.

Location Location Location

Setting Rochester's bed alight, stabbing and biting Mason, tearing Jane's wedding veil and frequently emitting hysterical, witch-like cackles, Bertha is relegated to haunt the margins of *Jane Eyre.* Through the terrified eyes of Jane Brontë describes Bertha's features as 'fearful and ghastly'.[39] Her gothic is distinctly racialised when she describes her 'demon' having 'a discoloured face – it was a savage face' with swollen lips and dark skin.[40] The depiction of Bertha reveals Brontë's underlying anxieties and prejudices. As Hogle and Smith explain, reading the gothic dissolves the boundaries that impede knowledge of an author's 'fears and uncertainties about numerous cultural issues: race and enslavement, colonialism and post-colonial conditions, the crossings among and confrontations between classes and sexualities'.[41] Rhys expresses her disgust with Brontë's portrayal of the Creole lunatic in a letter, here cited by Sylvie Maurel from the Rhys Collection. She writes that:

> The Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure — repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry — off stage. For me (and for you I hope) she must be right on stage.[42]

Of course, Rhys moved her centre stage in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* As Sylvie Maurel notes, Rhys intensified the 'gothic mode of her predecessor, supplying a conjure woman [witch], descriptions of obeah, ghosts, omens, zombi-lore, and poisonous potions. She uses the Gothic to rethink otherness, and to disentangle the other woman, the alien and mad Creole of *Jane*

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[39] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 327.

[40] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 327.

[41] Jerrold E. Hogle and Andrew Smith, 'Revisiting the Gothic and Theory: An Introduction', *Gothic Studies*, 11 (2009), 1-9, <https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.7227/GS.11.1.2> [accessed 10 February 2022] (pp. 4-5).

[42] Maurel, p. 155.

Eyre, from its stereotyped construction'.[43] While the 'writing back' within *Wide Sargasso Sea* remains undoubtedly important, Rhys began moving Brontë's ghost 'on stage' far sooner.

While Brontë's gothic literature represented colonial ideals, Rhys conversely refigured the European gothic into her own postcolonial 'writing back'. Here, we can examine the inversion of *Jane Eyre*'s and *Villette*'s gothic tropes in *Voyage in the Dark* and, later, *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Reading postcolonial literature like *Wide Sargasso Sea* with attention to the gothic provides important insight into the criticism underlying the words on the page. William Hughes and Andrew Smith explain in 'Defining the Relationships Between Gothic and the Postcolonial' that the gothic has 'historically maintained an intimacy with colonial issues, and in consequence with the potential for disruption and redefinition vested in the relationships between Self and Other, controlling and repressed, subaltern milieu and dominant outsider culture'.[44] Given the tropes of outsider figures and the unknown, there is the sense that gothic literature has always been postcolonial, 'where, in the Gothic text, disruption accelerates into change, where the colonial encounter – or the encounter which may be read or interpreted through the colonial filter – proves a catalyst to corrupt, to confuse or to redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership.'[45] The same can be said of Rhys's earlier modernist works in which the gothic is still undeniably present, but not at the forefront quite as much as her directly gothic-postcolonial rewriting of *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

Gothic texts were 'semi-ethnographic texts in their representation of Catholic, Continental Europe or the Far East as fundamentally un-English, the site of depravity', which Brontë represented in her account of Villette and the West Indies as dangerous, exotic

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[43] Maurel, p. 159.

[44] William Hughes and Andrew Smith, 'Introduction: Defining the Relationships Between Gothic and the Postcolonial', *Gothic Studies,* 5 (2003), 1-6 <https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.7227/GS.5.2.1> [accessed 10 February 2022] (p. 1).

[45] Hughes and Smith, p. 1.

‘others’ to Englishness.[46] In her own ‘voyage in the dark’, Lucy leaves the comfort of England for the strange foreign shores of Villette. Here she knows very few people and remains isolated from their customs by seas of difference. Lucy’s voyage is one infused with English gothic tropes, as Lucy represents the colonial traveller adrift in a far-off land, where ‘the natives are intensely stupid and vulgar; but there are some nice English families’.[47] Rhys inverts these gothic notions of identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and her earlier works. Essentially ‘flipping the script’, this capsizal of the gothic presents England as the isolating, foreign land while the ‘exotic’ West Indies becomes the familiar home from which her protagonists are separated.

The West Indies appears within both Brontë and Rhys’s fiction, but is represented in drastically different ways. Much like Bertha’s haunting presence epitomises the ‘spoken for’ and ‘cast aside’, the West Indies of *Jane Eyre* are a textual side-note. Rhys’s home never appears on the page as a fully-formed space of Brontë’s novels, instead fulfilling the gothic notion of the scary unknown.[48] Likewise, in *Villette* the West Indies appears when a distant and dangerous destination is needed for M. Paul. His demise within the novel’s closing pages refers to the perilous weather of the region in another enactment of gothic pathetic fallacy: ‘The skies hang full and dark – a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms – arches and broad radiations’.[49] Even though it appears recurringly as the place of trouble and uncertainty, the West Indies only appears on the margins of Brontë’s books; a place of exotic danger that characters visit off-screen, often to never return.

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[46] Cannon Schmitt, ‘Introduction: Gothic Fictions and English Nationality’ *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1-20 (p. 2).

[47] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 61.

[48] Sylvie Maurel, ‘Across the ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’: Jean Rhys’s Revision of Charlotte Brontë’s Eurocentric Gothic’ *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 24 (2002), 107-119, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/762692451/fulltextPDF/2E306674A30F4916PQ/1?accountid=17287> [accessed 12 January 2022] (p. 108).

[49] Brontë, *Villette,* pp. 585-586.

Rhys sought to rewrite Brontë's depictions, in the same mode of 'writing back' from the other side that she used to rewrite Bertha throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea* and her earlier novels. In the interview with Vreeland that I have previously quoted, Rhys's reaction to Brontë's representation of the West Indies mirrors her dislike of her Creole 'lunatic'. She states: 'Charlotte Brontë must have had strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books, like *Villette'*.[50] The 'strong feelings' of Brontë's that Rhys refers to here were clearly negative ones, as Brontë used the West Indies repeatedly as a location of wild, exotic danger and the unknown, which Rhys subsequently rewrites in her works.

The figure of Bertha is closely linked to the West Indies in *Jane Eyre*. The 'madwoman' is underpinned by Victorian notions of otherness, with her 'madness characteristically appearing as a consequence of excess and excess being conveniently associated with the heat of Bertha's distant birthplace'.[51] Brontë's West Indies was deeply associated with madness and menace: she describes Bertha, the 'Creole lunatic', as the 'boast of Spanish Town' and daughter of West Indian planter and merchant with a 'pigmy intellect'.[52] As Rhys noted in the aforementioned interview, the West Indies appeared in *Villette* too, in which it is associated with dread and uncertainty as the place where Lucy's love interest is sent to, tasked with overseeing a plantation and doomed to never return.

On the other hand, while the West Indies are associated with danger in Brontë's works, it is also linked to wealth. Jane's inheritance is from her uncle in Madeira, and Rochester goes there to secure his fortune through his marriage to Bertha. The wealth gained from the West Indies seems a positive connotation on the surface, as it is this wealth that makes Jane 'an independent woman, free to go her own way and follow her own will' as Gilbert and Gubar point out.[53] But underlying both fortunes is the darker colonial implications of how they were gained: slavery and exploitation. Given the fact that Jane's uncle was a wine merchant, some scholars have linked his business and its land with the dangers of alcohol, as Alexandra Valint argues: 'Madeira specifically embodies the dangers of excessive consumption, dangers that Jane must avoid by rejecting the full inheritance and curbing her drunken-like moments of rebellion'.[54] Despite the happiness her wealth affords, Jane's fortune remains rooted in the oppression and danger Brontë associated with the West Indies.

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[50] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 235.
[51] Maurel, 'The Other Stage: from *Jane Eyre* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*', p. 155.
[52] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 401-403.

Born in Dominica in 1890, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the West Indies served as home for Rhys as it did for her characters Antoinette and Anna. Given her attachment to her childhood home, Rhys responds to Brontë's gothic depiction of it and the West Indian lunatic with a very personal sense of sympathy and belonging. The postcolonial act of reclaiming the West Indies that scholars observe in *Wide Sargasso Sea* occurred within Rhys's earlier novels, which we can trace here through her reclamation of the gothic.[55] This rewriting of the West Indies is particularly prominent within the story of Anna, who longs for the comfort and warmth of the West Indies whilst trapped in England. Rhys dots *Voyage in the Dark* with lush imagery of her home, describing the beauty to her reader with great depth – breaking up the monotony of Anna's cold life in England with interludes of her memories of the West Indies, where ‘you could see the curve of a hill like the curve of a green shoulder. And there were pink roses on the table in a curly blue vase with gold rings’.[56] Rhys writes the colonial perception of the West Indies within her use of imagery when she writes of Anna’s admiration, followed by Hester’s English sense of unease:

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[53] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination,* 2nd ed., 'The Spectral Selves of Charlotte Brontë, A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Jane Eyre', (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 336-371, (p. 360).

[54] Alexandra Valint, 'Madeira and Jane Eyre's Colonial Inheritance', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 45 (2017), 321-339, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/354127A88E5951CD75CC1B2D0E3BBCA3/S1060150316000632a.pdf/madeira-and-jane-eyres-colonial-inheritance.pdf> [accessed 24 January 2022] (p. 321).

[55] For examples of the research done on the gothic links between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* I recommend Sylvie Maurel's 'The Other Stage: from Jane Eyre to Wide Sargasso Sea', particularly the 'Gothic Delirium' section, as well as Maurel's 'Across the 'Wide Sargasso Sea': Jean Rhys's Revision of Charlotte Brontë's Eurocentric Gothic'.

> Before I came to England I used to try to imagine a night that was quite still. I used to try and imagine it with the crac-cracs going. The verandah long and ghostly – the hammock and three chairs and a table with the telescope on it – and the crac-cracs going all the time. The moon and the darkness and the sound of the trees, and not far away the forest where nobody had ever been – virgin forest. We used to sit on the verandah with the night coming in, huge. And the way it smelt of all flowers. (“This place gives me the creeps at night,” Hester would say.)[57]

Here the beauty and peace of Rhys’s home is described in lush imagery and flowery scents, yet underlined with ‘ghostly’ notes. Brontë’s dislike of the West Indies in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* is textually embodied by Hester, Anna’s English aunt, who gets ‘the creeps’ from the evening’s sounds. Anna’s constant longing for her home echoes the position of Antoinette and Bertha: Creole women isolated by the society of England and craving the sense of self felt in the West Indies, certainly a stark contrast to Brontë’s depiction of the West Indies as a place of lust, danger and madness.

While Brontë’s gothic modes were distinctly European, Rhys’s gothic is infused with elements of her upbringing in the West Indies. For instance, Rhys describes Anna in a moment of terror:

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[56] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 61.
[57] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 71.

> Lying in the dark frightened of the dark frightened of soucriants that fly in through the window and suck your blood – they fan you to sleep with their wings and then they suck your blood – you know them in the day-time – they look like people but their eyes are red and staring and they're soucriants at night – looking in the glass and thinking sometimes my eyes look like a soucriant's eyes…[58]

Meshing modernist stream of consciousness with gothic imagery here, Rhys used her own version of gothic tropes to invert the European expectations of horror but still instil the same feelings of unease within her fiction. The soucriants that Anna fears are disguised as regular people but are actually bloodsucking and venomous. Here Rhys draws upon the gothic figure of the vampire to emphasise Anna's fear of social exclusion and the betrayal of Walter and Vincent, who act kindly towards her before sucking her dry. Anna's vision of soucriants here is a writing back to *Jane Eyre*, when Jane is reminded of 'the foul German spectre – the vampire' after seeing the nightmarish face of Bertha.[59] While Brontë uses a distinctly European gothic figure, the German vampire, to emphasise the horror of Bertha's Creole appearance, Rhys's gothic modes are instead distinctly rooted in her own culture, using a distinctly West Indian gothic image to emphasise Anna's fears and isolation within her encounters with English men.

Anna's unease in England is conveyed through metaphors of Caribbean gothic 'obeah', as Rhys inverted Brontë's European gothic to reflect her own experiences of isolation and unease. When she realises she's pregnant, for instance, Anna's stream of consciousness mixes her fear and uncertainty of possibly having a child with memories of 'obeah women who dig up dead people and cut their fingers off and go to gaol for it'.[60]

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[58] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 140.
[59] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 372.
[60] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 139.

Anna's fear of the obeah women links closely with Christophine of *Wide Sargasso Sea,* an 'obeah woman' who assists Antoinette.[61] Here in *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys uses the same modes of postcolonial gothic that she used when writing back to Brontë in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, only much sooner.

Sinking into Depression Beyond the Wide Sargasso Sea

Water is used by both Brontë and Rhys in connection to the mental states of their characters, with strong emphasis on feelings of dread, uncertainty and terror. The use of water in relation to emotions was deeply embedded in the contextual understanding of water for Brontë:

> In nineteenth-century Britain, for instance, the agential nature of water became a matter of grave concern in the context of sanitary reform, since theories of disease aetiology held that dampness was productive of miasma and generated disease. The anxiety which this vision engendered found expression in diverse special discourses, among them literature, where it was creatively rendered in images of aquatic agency and scenes of contact and intra-action between human characters and water. As this suggests, literature is able to give narrative form to the manifold material entanglements between humans and water, entanglements whose degrees of intensity occasionally challenge the very notion of "the environment," or of "nature" as a category separate from humanity.[62]

Through its association with dampness and disease, water became associated with strong negative emotions. A gloomy dark sky or a violent storm is a key characteristic of gothic literature, and authors like Mary Shelley used pathetic fallacy to reflect character's moods and foreshadow disaster. For instance, in *Frankenstein* when the titular protagonist arrives home after the death of his brother, the storm mirrors his grief and anger:

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[61] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 103.

[62] U.M. Kluwick, 'Aquatic Matter: Water in Victorian Fiction' *Cultural Studies*, 3 (2019), 245-255 <https://boris.unibe.ch/133305/1/%5BOpen%20Cultural%20Studies%5D%20Aquatic%20Matter%20Water%20in%20Victorian%20Fiction.pdf> [accessed 7 March 2022], (pp. 246-247).

> The thunder ceased; but the rain still continued, and the scene was enveloped in an impenetrable darkness. […] No one can conceive the anguish I suffered during the remainder of the night, which I spent, cold and wet, in the open air. But I did not feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in scenes of evil and despair.[63]

Similarly, Brontë uses pathetic fallacy to portray the anguish at the lowest point of *Jane Eyre.* She describes Jane's sadness at the loss of her love and her looming death entirely through the repeated symbol of water. As the rain pours she drowns in emotional turmoil:

> It was near: and as I had lifted no petition to Heaven to avert it – as I had neither joined my hands, nor bent my knees, nor moved my lips – it came: in full heavy swing the *torrent* poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope *quenched*, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, *the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me*.[64]

While the water motif is repeated throughout the novel, it is particularly prominent in this section as Brontë employs distinctly gothic metaphors and images of water to convey the sense of Jane's 'torrents' of sadness. Much like Jane 'sinking' into a state of despair, Rhys describes her own women as 'drowning' in societal judgements. Each of Rhys's characters are plagued with anxieties around appearances and exist in a near-constant state of melancholy, as Rhys echoes Brontë's symbolism of water to describe their immense sadness and isolation. In *Good Morning, Midnight,* Sasha asks her reader in a direct address:

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[63] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein,* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), p. 78.

[64] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 388. Italics mine.

> What more do I want? … I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely – dry, cold and sane. Now I have forgotten about dark streets, dark rivers, the pain, the struggle and the drowning… Mind you, I'm not talking about the struggle when you are strong and a good swimmer and there are willing and eager friends on the bank waiting to pull you out at the first sign of distress. I mean the real thing. You jump in with no willing and eager friends around, and when you sink you sink to the accompaniment of loud laughter.[65]

Using the same language of water that Brontë established as a method of demonstrating her own character's emotional distress, Rhys extends the symbolism by linking Jane's sense of drowning in sadness to a drowning in loneliness and judgement. While Jane is pulled from the water by friends, Sasha's isolation is emphasised in her sinking whilst being ridiculed by those around her. While the metaphor of sinking is used for a different purpose here, illustrating Sasha's societal isolation as opposed to Jane's love-sick depression, Rhys still employs gothic images and metaphors of water to describe the emotional state of her character.

When we consider the deeper metaphors of oceans within *Jane Eyre,* we can trace Brontë's influence when Rhys extends this symbolism of division in her continued effort to show the 'other side'. Storms, shipwrecks and traumatic journeys over the ocean are another gothic trope. As Emily Alder explains, this motif had been 'shaped and inspired by the natural power of the sea and its weather, and by the reports and experiences of those who braved the dangers of ocean travel and witnessed its sublime marvels, or stood watching on the shore'.[66] While literal journeys also featured in Brontë's work, the ocean primarily served as a metaphor, used to keep Rochester and Jane seas apart:

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[65] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 4.

> The sea is a barrier […] colder the thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master at whose side I now walked; and coldest the remembrance of the wider ocean – wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved.[67]

In contrast to this emotionally symbolic sea, Rhys writes of the literal ocean that separates Antoinette from her home: the titular wide Sargasso Sea that traps her in England. Writing into the void of Brontë's Bertha once again, Rhys describes Antoinette's terrible confusion during her journey to England across the ocean. Continually employing imagery of water to reflect emotional turmoil, Rhys writes: 'I smashed the glasses and plates against the porthole. I hoped it would break and the sea would come in. […] When I woke it was a different sea. Colder'.[68] The sense of Antoinette's overwhelming sadness is conveyed to the reader when she wishes the sea would burst into the ship and drown them, and Rhys writes this same motif into the narrative of Anna in *Voyage in the Dark.* Following the same path as Antoinette, only written much sooner, Anna makes her titular voyage in the dark from the West Indies to England. In this narrative, Rhys writes a possible aftermath to Antoinette and Bertha's journeys, documenting the same experience of being seas apart from their home and trapped in an uncanny unknown land. Using Brontë's motifs of water again, Rhys describes Anna's 'sinking' mental state after being stranded in England: 'It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask, and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under the water. And how do you know what it's like to try speak from under water when you're drowned?'[69]

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[66] Emily Alder, 'Dracula's Gothic Ship' *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies,* 15 (2016), 4-19 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1842820588/fulltextPDF/5F06214EA8944463PQ/1?accountid=17287> [accessed 7 March 2022] (p. 4).

[67] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 330.

[68] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 148.

In *Good Morning, Midnight* the central sense of dread and isolation is immensely similar to that of *Voyage in the Dark,* as Sasha's feelings are captured in a watery metaphor: 'I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad. It doesn't matter, there I am, like one of those straws which floats around the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm'.[70] Rhys writes her own feelings of being without place, 'no name, no face, no country', extending the symbolism of water from Brontë's work to her own while reworking it to encapsulate her own experiences of depression and loneliness in England. Rhys extended Brontë's motif of water and oceans with a distinctly postcolonial overtone when she links Anna's despair and the colonial history of the Caribbean Sea:

> "And drift, drift. Legions away from despair." It can't be "legions". "Oceans", perhaps. "Oceans away from despair." But it's the sea, I thought. The Caribbean Sea. "The Caribs indigenous to this island were a warlike tribe and their resistance to white domination, though spasmodic, was fierce. […] But they are now practically exterminated. "Oceans away from despair…"[71]

Within her twisting internal monologue, Rhys writes of Anna's memories of a song with lyrics that linked to her own despair. The "oceans" of despair within the song turn her mind to the colonial history of West Indies, as she positions herself as likewise conquered by the English before 'drifting away' on her own waves of anguish caused by Walter and Vincent.

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[69] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 84.
[70] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* p. 33.
[71] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* pp. 90-91.

Within this sea of despair here, Rhys prefigures the ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’ that kept her from her Dominican home.

Warm West Indies, Cold England

Throughout *Jane Eyre,* fire is harnessed by Brontë as a symbol of the destructive force of her ‘fiery West Indian’ madwoman.[72] Fire is used at moments of heightened terror throughout the novel, particularly in connection to the madwoman who sets Rochester’s bed on fire while he sleeps: ‘Tongues of flame darted round the bed; the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and vapour, Mr Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep’.[73] His safety from the Creole madwoman’s flames is due to English Jane extinguishing the threat, but Bertha eventually sets Thornfield ablaze later in the novel. Bertha blinds Rochester with the flames she set, and transforms the English manor to ‘a blackened ruin’ before throwing herself off roof of the building as Brontë kills her figure of racialised madness.[74]

Rhys reclaims fire within her own fiction by transforming it from a gothic warning of the madwoman to the symbol of her freedom. The fire that destroys Antoinette’s home in the West Indies symbolically echoes the burning of Thornfield Hall, but in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys writes a different instigator. Against Brontë’s deliberate depiction of the mad Creole as the destroyer, Rhys writes the complicated racial tensions that lay beneath Brontë’s antagonist-arsonist. Those who view Antoinette as nothing more than a ‘white cockroach’ burn her home, which symbolised plantocratic status and slavery of the past era – using the same fire but here illustrating the far more complicated ‘other side’ of Brontë’s flames.[75]

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[72] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 404.
[73] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 195.
[74] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 556.
[75] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 85.

Rhys again inverts the symbol of fire with Antoinette's fiery-red dress. In a reversal of Brontë's use of fire and the colour red throughout *Jane Eyre* to symbolise madness, danger and hate, Rhys writes Antoinette's red dress as a new link between fire and her freedom. When her dress falls to the floor it reminds Antoinette of spreading flames, and Rhys writes how it inspired her Bertha to set Thornfield alight: 'I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire'.[76] Rhys connects Antoinette's dress to fire and freedom, as she writes:

> As soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers. "If you are buried under a flamboyant tree," I said, "your soul is lifted up when it flowers. Everyone wants that." […] The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain.[77]

Antoinette's dress serves as a reminder of her identity within the confines of Rochester's attic. The dress is inseparably linked to fire through its colour and the actions it inspires, as well as the West Indies in its beautiful smell and bright colour. Antoinette tells Grace that "If I had been wearing my red dress Richard would have known me." "Your red dress," she said, and laughed. But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now'.[78] In *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Gilbert and Gubar identify that Bertha symbolically represents and physically acts as Jane's double throughout *Jane Eyre.* Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha's actions in setting fire to

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[76] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 152.
[77] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 151.
[78] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 153.

Thornfield were in fact Jane's impulses, as her 'profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha, who burns down the house and destroys herself in the process as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own'.[79] In *Wide Sargasso Sea* however, the fire symbolises a rebellion and freedom entirely belonging to Antoinette. She sets her oppressor's house ablaze in an act of rebellion, rather than madness.

The fires in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are an important site for examining Rhys's reversal of gothic tropes. However, the gothic connections between these two particular novels have already been well documented by scholars, and reveal little about the wider influence of Brontë upon Rhys. Nevertheless, it is important to understand Rhys's motifs and symbolism here, as I argue her rewriting of Brontë's fires began far sooner than *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Flipping Brontë's gothic symbolism of the fire set by the dangerous Creole madwoman, the heatless fires throughout *Voyage in the Dark* signal England's emotional lack of warmth for Anna. When Anna has sex with Walter for the first time fire becomes icy: 'there was a fire but the room was cold. […] The fire was like a painted fire; no warmth came from it. When I put my hand against my face it was very cold'.[80] Without the heat that reminds her of home, Anna is completely isolated, trapped in an uncaring foreign country and surrounded by cold strangers.

In *Jane Eyre,* Brontë describes how Mr Mason huddles near the fire when he comes to England from the West Indies:

> He occupied an arm-chair drawn close to the fire, and kept shrinking nearer, as if he were cold. […] He was but just arrived in England, and that he came from some hot

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[79] Gilbert and Gubar, 'The Spectral Selves of Charlotte Brontë, A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Jane Eyre', (p. 360).

[80] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* pp. 20-21.

> country: which was the reason, doubtless, his face was so sallow, and that he sat so near the hearth, and wore a surtout in the house. Presently the words Jamaica, Kingston, Spanish Town, indicated the West Indies as his residence; and it was with no little surprise I gathered, ere long, that he had there first seen and become acquainted with Mr Rochester. He spoke of his friend's dislike of the burning heats, the hurricanes, and rainy seasons of that region.[81]

Brontë uses the warmth of the fire to signal English comfort after the 'burning heats' of the West Indies, and the fireside reoccurs across both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* as a natural place of warmth, comfort and conversation. Lucy of *Villette* notes: 'I remember the black stoves pleased me little when I first came [to Villette]; but now I began to associate with them a sense of comfort, and liked them, as in England we like a fireside'.[82]

Rhys contrasts Brontë's English firesides with her own perspective of the inhospitable cold of England. In the novel's opening pages, Rhys writes of Anna's discomfort in England, describing her own feeling of isolation and displacement through imagery of heat and fires: 'I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold. Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or the bed-clothes drawn up round me, was sun-heat'.[83] Much like Mason after his arrival from the West Indies in *Jane Eyre*, Anna is constantly cold. Her fellow chorus girl Maudie explains "She's always cold," Maudie said. "She can't help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere," and Anna's constant shivering serves as a reminder of how out of place she is within both the society and climate of England.[84] Unlike the gothic fires that rage and destroy in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide*

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[81] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 250-252.
[82] Brontë, *Villette*, pp. 273-274.
[83] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 7.
[84] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 12.

Sargasso Sea, Rhys writes of the small fireplaces that Anna often seeks warmth from, a reminder of her home within the cold hostility of England.

These descriptions of Anna seeking warmth are taken directly from Rhys's own experiences of England. *Voyage in the Dark* is Rhys's most directly autobiographical work and Anna's experiences of fire is deeply connected to Rhys's own, as she discussed in her interview with Vreeland: 'I hated the cold. England was terribly cold when I first came there. There was no central heating. There were fires, but they were always blocked by people trying to get warm. And I'd never get into the sacred circle. I was always outside, shivering'.[85] Being on the 'outside, shivering' not only refers to the cold of being apart from the fire, but the coldness of social exclusion and being an outsider to the warmth of friends and family. Reading Rhys's symbolic fires, we can see the pattern of influence that stemmed from her own experience of England's coldness towards her. These experiences of being pushed outside of 'the sacred circle' inspired both a conscious (in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) and unconscious rewriting of Brontë's fires and gothic symbolism to highlight the contrast between warmth of the West Indies and the cold English hostility.

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[85] Vreeland, Rhys, p. 221.

Dreaming and Reality

Brontë depicts Bertha as a presence that haunts Jane's nightmares before her reality is known by the reader. In a moment of heightened suspense and gothic terror, Brontë writes of Bertha as a nightmare, which I previously discussed in the Frock Consciousness section of chapter one. While Rochester misdirects Jane into thinking the haunting presence within her 'dream' was only 'half-reality' and attributes the tearing of Jane's veil to Grace Poole, Bertha remains a presence depicted through nightmares as a ghost on the margins of Jane's consciousness:

> It was *half-dream, half-reality*. A woman did, I doubt not, enter your room: and that woman was – must have been – Grace Poole. […] In a state between *sleeping and waking*, you noticed her entrance and her actions; but feverish, almost *delirious* as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance different from her own: the long dishevelled hair, the swelled black face, the exaggerated stature, were figments of imagination; results of *nightmare*.[86]

Bertha's haunting presence as a figure of horror on the fringe of Jane's mind is brought centre-stage when Rhys rewrites the madwoman's nightmare state to reflect the reality of her characters. Within her revision of the symbolic nightmares, Rhys continued to write back to Brontë's depiction of Bertha's marginalisation in a further act of postcolonial-gothic writing. As we will see, the racialised 'swelled black face' of Bertha's nightmarish appearance is rewritten within the nightmares of Anna and Sasha, as their nightmares are transformed to reflect stifling Englishness as the thing of horror.

Also discussed in the previous chapter in connection with Bertha and the Rhysian woman, both Rhys's original and published endings to *Voyage in the Dark* contain a plethora of gothic nightmare and dream imagery. Here, Anna's dreams are tied into her reality, overlapping gothic horror and modernist stream of consciousness to convey the sense of her isolation and fear as a colonial subject and her subsequent death. Within her dream-state Anna embodies Bertha in her own nightmarish descent into madness, but this madness is caused by stifling Englishness instead of the racialised connotations of Brontë's prototextual madwoman. Inverting the Creole 'demon' that haunts English Jane, Rhys embeds Anna's dreams with the West Indies as a comfort from the terrors and isolation she experiences in England. When rewriting her 'Mad Part Three' to suit her the wishes of her publisher, Rhys kept the imagery of the Dominican Masquerade within her near-death. Here the warmth, dancing and music is emphasised in contrast to her pain and despair, as Anna dreams that she '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'.[87] As Catherine Rovera explains, and as I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Anna's dreams here serve as an escape from her nightmarish reality in England, with 'her bearings in space and time, and madness and dreaming being at close quarters'.[88]

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[86] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 374. Italics mine.

Rhys's gothic mode of postcolonial writing back is continued throughout *Voyage in the Dark*, as dreams of the West Indies provide comfort from the nightmarish reality of England. Voicing her waking-dream state, Anna says that 'Sometimes it was as if I were back there [West Indies] 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'.[89] Rhys directly wrote Anna's experience here into Antoinette's alienation and confusion in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who asks ‘Is it true that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said that this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up’.[90] England becomes a dream from which neither Anna or Antoinette can wake, embodying Bertha’s ‘half-dream, half-reality’ within their nightmarish liminality and isolation.[91]

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[87] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 157.

[88] Catherine Rovera, 'The "Seeds of Madness" in Wide Sargasso Sea: The Novel and its Avatars' *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 32 (2009), 110-120 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/759082089?parentSessionId=UoJRLUghKiFvO8wWd3gFTI%2FG0xj8D2gN%2FXUubvhqz7c%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=17287> [accessed 8 March 2022] (p. 115).

[89] Rhys. *Voyage in the Dark*, pp. 7-8.

The gothic motif of nightmares is not restricted to *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* however. Rhys’s wider engagement with Brontë’s ghoulish madwoman is clear within the various nightmares of the Rhysian woman, each made mad by their frightening lives of isolation within England. In *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys writes how Sasha adapts ‘the habit of walking with my head down… I was walking along in a dream, a haze’, as Rhys conveys the shame and dejection that Sasha feels.[92] The dreams, nightmarish reality, and memories within *Good Morning, Midnight* are not distinct or separated, as Rhys informs her reader of Sasha’s isolation through both her current life, flashes of her terrible jobs and the pain of losing her child. These daydreams, nightmares and current situation overlap to give narrative shape and reason to Sasha’s declining mental health, as she embodies Bertha as a maddeningly depressed outsider. She often narrates her dreams to the reader as if they are her reality, for instance, in her mad dream that blurs her lived experiences with fiction:

> I take some more luminal, put the light out and sleep at once. I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. […] 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

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[90] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 67.
[91] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 374
[92] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 70-71.

> from other people." The steel finger points along a long stone passage. This Way – This Way – This Way to the Exhibition… Now a little man, bearded, with a snub nose, dressed in a long white night-shirt, is talking earnestly to me. "I am your father," he says. "Remember that I am your father." But blood is streaming from a wound in his forehead. "Murder," he shouts, "murder, murder." Helplessly I watch the blood streaming.[93]

Even when Rhys describes the strange events of Sasha's dream, her immense isolation is made clear as she walks with her head bent, even in dreams, just as she does in reality. The gothic nightmare-reality state of Sasha is evidence of Rhys's continued engagement with Brontë's madwoman. As she uses her dreams to further illustrate the maddening stiffness of English society, I argue we can read Anna and Sasha as iterations of Bertha. Their declining mental state mirrors the Creole lunatic and is reflected through their nightmare experiences of England that invert Brontë's West Indian nightmare-figure and English sanity.

In 'The Haunting of Jean Rhys', the introduction to *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First Century Approaches,* Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran argue that Rhys's gothic modes transcend the page, reading Rhys herself into a kind of strange 'ghost' that escapes traditional literary definitions:

> Rhys still hovers on the edges of these fields in part because of her ambiguous colonial biography, with her Dominican childhood and European adulthood; we would also argue that her ghostliness in various fields of study reflects the content of her work and the way in which it draws readers in and bothers, disturbs or even

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[93] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 6-7.

> frightens them on a personal level that rarely finds voice in any established academic discourse.[94]

This sense of spectrality and haunting resonances became key themes of both Rhys's fiction and personal life. She became a 'ghost' herself later in life through the same experiences of isolation as her characters. In her dwindled popularity after the Second World War, Rhys lived a reclusive life in England as a spectre of her former self. Johnson and Moran cite letters from Rhys that show her isolation and unease:

> "My bitter enemy next door is now telling everybody very loud and clear that I'm an imposter "impersonating a dead writer called Jean Rhys," Rhys wrote Kirkaldy. "It's a weird feeling being told you are impersonating yourself. Rather nightmarish. You think: perhaps I am!" In fact, Rhys depicted this rediscovery as a resurrection from death: Selma Vaz Diaz's interest "meant a lot to me [. . .] I began to wake up and make plans and come alive again," she wrote. In another letter she explained her disappearance from the public thus: "I don't know why everybody thinks I am dead – but I was feeling a bit that way myself at the end! – I did not mean to disappear, but besides hearing once or twice that I was a ghost – there were such rum stories tacked on by people I've never met in my life that I felt it was damaging me".[95]

These letters illustrate how feeling unreal, both to herself and to the wider public, had always been key to Rhys's life of writing. Her abjectly outcast women form an eerie precursor to the life Rhys would later live, as she was left a 'ghost' of her former self for the decades prior to her literary resurrection with *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Both on the page and beyond it, Rhys lived the gothic, uneasy reality that permeated her fiction. Rhys's long life as a ghost on the margins of English society motivated a writing back to the ‘poor ghost’ of Brontë’s fiction, refashioning the Victorian gothic to represent her own experiences of unnerving isolation.[96]

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[94] Johnson and Moran, 'The Haunting of Jean Rhys,' pp. 6-7.
[95] Johnson and Moran, 'The Haunting of Jean Rhys,' pp. 6-7.

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[96] Vreeland, p. 235.

Chapter Three: The ‘Other Side’ of Céline and Ginevra

This chapter aims to trace the underlying influences and echoes of Brontë within Rhys’s earlier works through Céline Varens of *Jane Eyre* and Ginevra Fanshawe of *Villette*. Because I am examining two side-characters here, there is less textual evidence to draw upon and the connections are subsequently more subtle compared to the previous chapters of this thesis. To fill the gaps in our knowledge, I study the overlaps of text and context. Unlike the wealth of research into the connections between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* there is significantly less scholarship upon the links between Rhys’s modernist women and Brontë’s other characters beyond the more obviously connected Jane and Bertha/Antoinette.[1] Perhaps seemingly speculative in places, my examination of literary resonances here is rooted in both textual evidence and strong biographical study, and my argument is thusly formed from cumulative examples.[2] Since Rhys frequently and overtly overlapped fiction and reality within her writing, reading her texts within the context of her life provides deeper insight into her modes of writing back.

I will trace the connections between Céline’s sexualised and side-lined position as a prefiguring of Rhys’s own abject chorus girls and prostitutes, Marya and Anna. I read Céline as a sort of prototype of the Rhysian woman: a demi-monde dancer in Paris, engaging in affairs and used by the men around her as they exchange money and gifts for her body. Likewise, Ginevra of *Villette* is extended from Brontë’s narrative of a selfish coquette into Rhys’s own complicated ‘kept women’. Through this reworking, Rhys rewrites Ginevra’s selfish use of her love interests as well as her anxiety around appearance. Rhys focused her attention on more of Brontë's scornful representation of women like herself by refashioning Céline and Ginevra through the same method of feminist, post-colonial writing back she used to transform Bertha. This continuous writing back was inspired by Rhys's experiences as the marginalised women of Brontë's novels, as she both consciously and subconsciously reacted to Brontë's mistresses, demi-mondes and Creole madwoman throughout her fiction.

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[1] For an excellent example of this kind of study of connections and ‘writing back’ of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I can recommend *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* by Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger.

[2] Having read several other accounts of Rhys’s life, I personally have found Elaine Savory’s biography of Rhys to be the most insightful and useful in its balanced examination of her life and works: *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Céline and the Rhysian Mistress

On the margins of Jane and Rochester's romance stands Céline Varens, a demi-monde dancer belonging to Rochester's past. French courtesan and adulterous 'opera-mistress', Céline is one of Rochester's previous lovers and the mother of Jane's student, Adele.[3] Like the lunatic in Rochester's attic, Céline is another abject and sexualised figure. Given the fact that Rhys was driven to rewrite Brontë's 'paper tiger lunatic' throughout her early novels, it is not hard to imagine Rhys being inspired to write 'the other side' of Céline.[4] Both Céline and Bertha were resigned to the margins of the wider narrative, and wider society, and Rhys would be able to see herself within their roles as abjectly sexualised women. Not liking Brontë's depiction of Céline, I argue she wrote her own, with the same lens of sympathy and experience that she used when writing back to Bertha.

In a similar vein to Bertha, Céline is also unable to speak for herself, as she is described to the reader entirely through the voice of an ashamed and scornful Rochester. Listing his mistresses, he states that his first 'was Céline Varens – another of those steps which make a man spurn himself when he recalls them. […] To live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Céline, Giacinta, and Clara'.[5] When describing their relationship, Rochester emphasises Céline's brazenly sexual nature with scathing descriptions of her loose morality and dishonesty, all of which are in stark contrast to Jane's strict morals throughout the novel. Through her assertation that 'I will not be your English Céline Varens', Brontë demonstrates Jane's virtuous refusal to give into the perceived sexual depravity of a relationship with Rochester outside of marriage.[6] The comparison between the two women works to distance Jane from the degraded, immoral position of a 'mistress' that Céline embodies.

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[3] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 188.
[4] The phrase 'paper tiger lunatic' is quote from Rhys's own description of Brontë's Bertha, here cited from: Sylvie Maurel, 'Across the 'Wide Sargasso Sea': Jean Rhys's Revision of Charlotte Brontë's Eurocentric Gothic', p. 108.

As a figure of loose morals and a mistress to an older embodiment of English patriarchy, Céline bears many similarities to the Rhysian woman. Like Bertha, Céline is a character closely connected to Rhys's life of reading and experience: a demi-monde dancer that engages in affairs with Rochester-like men. Like the lunatic Creole, Brontë's scornful characterisation of another character so close to Rhys could have easily lingered in the mind of the author long after reading. However, unlike *Jane Eyre*'s monstrous madwoman, it is safe to assume Rhys would not have felt as closely connected to the character of Céline until a later reading, once she had become a mistress.

This is why my argument for the influence of Céline takes the form of interconnected, cumulative connections here, as opposed to the clear 'writing back' of Bertha in chapter one. Born and raised in Dominica, Rhys would have embodied the negative depictions that Brontë wrote into her Creole madwoman from her earliest reading of *Jane Eyre*. However, she only lived as a 'Céline' from around age 17 onwards, when she joined a chorus and then lived as a demimondaine in England from 1909.[7] Her first affair began a year later, when Rhys was involved with Lancelot Hugh Smith until 1912, when he broke their relationship but continued to support her financially for some time afterwards.[8] As Rhys lived the life of Céline, her representation of this demimonde existence within her novels has echoes of Brontë's own dancer-mistress.

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[5] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 409.
[6] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 354.

I am not the first to make a connection between the character of Céline and Rhys's writing. Shady Cosgrove recognised the Rhysian elements of Céline within *Jane Eyre* and highlighted them by rewriting the character in *The Golden Courtesan* in 2003. The story brought Céline's narrative from *Jane Eyre* centre-stage by using the same mode of 'writing back' that Rhys implemented in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *The Golden Courtesan* hoped to give a possible backstory to Céline 'in a Rhysian tradition by exploring the life of Edward Rochester's mistress'.[9] When altering the character from Brontë's, Cosgrove depicted Céline as an immensely Rhysian figure. She drinks, smokes, engages in illicit and ill-fated love affairs, and even considers having an illegal abortion when she becomes pregnant.[10]

Rhys's experiences as a 'Céline' formed the basis for the events of her novels *Voyage in the Dark* and *Quartet.* After her arrival and education in England, Rhys lived as a 'kept woman' from 1910 onwards, first with Lancelot Hugh Smith. The details of Rhys's relationship with a man twenty years older than her and who gave her an 'allowance' for some time after their affair ended were later woven into *Voyage in the Dark* in 1934.[11] Following several similar affairs, Rhys married Jean Lenglet in 1919, but had an extramarital affair with Ford (who was also married) after Lenglet was imprisoned – these events, of course, formed the basis for *Quartet.* There has been speculation by various biographers that Rhys worked as a prostitute as well, such as Lilian Pizzichini in *The Blue Hour: A Portrait of Jean Rhys*.[12] This claim, while supported by Rhys's works that often wove reality into fiction, is not widely supported by Rhys's major biographers.[13]

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[7] Elaine Savory, 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write,' *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 1-35 (p. 11).

[8] Helen Carr, 'Biographical Outline', *Jean Rhys,* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd: 2012) viii-x (viii).

[9] Shady Cosgrove, 'From *The Golden Courtesan', Hecate,* 29 (2003), 335-346 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/210914525/fulltextPDF/7C3BEE9DE5C24C24PQ/1?accountid=17287> [accessed 21 December 2021] (p. 335).

[10] Shady Cosgrove, 'From *The Golden Courtesan*', *Antipodes,* 17 (2003), 134-138 <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=waikato&id=GALE|A114593590&v=2.1&it=r> [accessed 16 March 2022] (p. 137).
As well as the Rhysian elements, Cosgrove also incorporates the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea* into her version of Rochester's past. Cosgrove's mention of Bertha is marked with distinctive elements of Rhys's own iteration of the character, relaying the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea* when she writes: 'When he first laid eyes on her [Bertha] he was reminded of doves and peaches. The West Indies had hypnotised him, but he thought it was her: the way she stayed in bed all morning; her white dressing robes; the rum and the food. He believed she had affected his vision, suddenly all the colours were fierce and strong.' Given the prevalence of Rhys within Cosgrove's Céline, she makes the case for reading further connections to Brontë's prototextual 'opera-mistress' within Rhys's works.

Rhys's experiences of love affairs and the demi-monde gave her a nuanced, singular perspective, and she wrote her remarkable insight into the relationships across her novels. In her autobiography, *Smile Please*, Rhys writes on her perspective as a 'kept woman' and demimondaine. She states:

> It seems to me now that the whole business of money and sex is mixed up with something very primitive and deep. When you take money directly from someone you love it becomes not money but a symbol. The bond is now there. The bond has been established. I am sure the woman's deep-down feeling is "I belong to this man, I want to belong to him completely". It is at once humiliating and exciting. (The only time I have seen this described was in an Italian novel by a man writing as a woman.)[14]

While Céline's lavish lifestyle is funded by Rochester in a simple exchange of money and sex, Rhys here indicates that she felt there was far more depth to these kinds of affairs, which she experienced for herself as a similarly ‘kept woman’. Through the likes of Marya and Anna as mistresses to ‘Rochesters’ Heidler and Vincent, Rhys’s writing explores the bond within ‘belonging’ and the subsequent societal shaming of mistresses. In the passage above, Rhys interestingly states the only time she had seen this complicated perspective on relationships and affairs like her own is in a novel by another author. This is noteworthy since it was a perspective Rhys wove into every one of her novels, detailing her understandings of lust, power and melancholy. Because she states that the ‘only time’ she saw this conflicting experience of love, humiliation and shame depicted to her liking is in a novel by an Italian man, it stands to reason that Rhys thought Brontë failed to capture the nuances of these relationships in her negative depictions of Céline.

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[11] Carr, 'Biographical Outline', *Jean Rhys,* p. viii.

[12] Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Portrait of Jean Rhys,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

[13] See Helen Carr's *Jean Rhys* (2012) and Carole Angier's *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (1985), two widely accoladed Rhys biographies that I found particularly helpful for my research.

[14] Rhys, *Smile Please,* p. 106.

In a similar vein, we can read criticism from Rhys of these kinds of depictions in *Voyage in the Dark* when Anna reads Zola’s *Nana.* Anna’s friend and fellow chorus girl, Maudie, says she finds the book ‘disgusting’.[15] Maudie thinks that ‘a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way or another. Besides, all books are like that – just someone stuffing you up’.[16] While Rhys criticises Zola’s depiction of a mistress through the voice of Maudie, she also clearly thought that women, specifically Brontë, stuffed it up too. Not only do Anna and Nana sound immensely similar, the wider connection between the two characters’ professions is also noteworthy. Zola’s text forms a ‘kind of rehearsal for the relation between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*’, as Elaine Savory argues.[17] Rhys intertwines elements of gender, sexuality, social standing and racial identities within Anna’s position as a mistress and prostitute, responding to those very elements at work in *Nana* and ‘exposing the immorality of the men and women who prey on Anna and so reversing the image of Nana as a predatory force of nature'.[18] In Zola's narrative, Nana is placed in the same helpless societal position as Anna: no finances or education, completely alone. Unlike Rhys's sympathetic and nuanced representation of Anna, Nana is a prostitute 'predator', preying upon the men who hire her.[19] Described as 'greedy and utterly evil', Nana's youth and beauty is positioned as a danger to men around her, a hateful narrative born of mistrust and misogyny.[20]

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[15] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 9.

[16] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 9.

[17] Elaine Savory, ‘Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean: *Voyage in the Dark* and the Politics of Colour,’ *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 83-109 (p. 93).

Maudie recognises *Nana* by its distinctive cover, which features 'a coloured picture of a stout, dark woman brandishing a wine-glass. She was sitting on the knee of a bald-headed man in evening dress'.[21] With a glance at this image, Maudie labels Nana a 'tart' and thinks her story is 'disgusting' without having read it for herself.[22] Maudie's quick judgement reflects the wider societal condemning of women like Anna and Nana, and this type of bias without insight is exactly what Brontë reflected in her depiction of Céline in *Jane Eyre*. In writing the complicated reality that she experienced as a Nana or Céline, Rhys strives to provide the lives beneath this kind of superficial preconception.

Brontë depicted Céline's betrayal of Rochester entirely through his point of view. Céline is utterly voiceless within the account of her own treachery, demonstrated when Rochester tells Jane how he 'installed her in a hotel; gave her a complete establishment of servants, a carriage, cashmeres, diamonds, dentelles, etc.'[23] He describes being jealous and angered at his mistress' betrayal after ambushing her and a vicomte: 'a brainless and vicious youth whom I had sometimes met in society, and had never thought of hating because I despised him so absolutely'.[24] Discovering Céline in the company of another man, Rochester discards her entirely, stating that he ‘disregarded screams, hysterics, prayers, protestations, convulsions; made an appointment with the vicomte for a meeting at the Bois de Boulogne; left a bullet in one of his poor etiolated arms’.[25] Leaving Céline utterly ‘destitute’ and with his child, as well as grievously wounding her suspected lover, this love triangle only emphasises Rochester’s temper and Céline’s adulterous nature.[26]

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[18] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean', p. 93.
[19] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean', p. 92.
[20] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean', p. 92.
[21] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 9.
[22] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 9.
[23] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 185.
[24] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 189.

While Brontë is one-sided in Céline’s illustration of ‘her treachery’, Rhys wrote back from ‘the other side’ with her own experience of being the ‘despised mistress’.[27] Much like Cosgrove’s perception and representation of Céline’s “side” in *The Golden Courtesan,* Rhys depicted Brontë’s narrative with far more nuance and sympathy in *Quartet.* Against the background of mistresses and kept-women like herself being scorned and societally-shamed, Rhys wrote Marya and her extramarital affair with Heidler. Unlike Brontë’s narrative of Rochester being wholly blameless in his courting and affair with Céline, Rhys writes the complicated love triangle of *Quartet* to better represent the seduction and manipulation that she experienced with Ford. Utterly trapped as Heidler’s mistress, the same position Céline experienced with Rochester, Marya describes how ‘her heart felt as if it were being pinched between somebody’s fingers’ when torn between her husband and Heidler’s control.[28] As I stated in chapter one, I read Heidler as an embodiment of Rochester, and argue that Rhys used Rochester as a textual model of colonial patriarchal power when writing out her feelings about Ford from the perspective of Bertha. Likewise here, Rochester appears within the character of Heidler in his use and scorn of Céline.

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[25] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.

[26] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.
While I argue Rhys wrote into the space of this relationship with her own perspective, the violence of this affair has been the source of interesting scholarly work upon Rochester’s abusive patterns. Jessica Cox’s study of domestic abuse in ‘“I’ll Try Violence”: Patterns of Domestic Abuse in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*’ and Patrick Morris’s ‘The Depiction of Trauma and its Effect on Character Development in the Brontë Fiction’ are two great examples of this kind of work.

[27] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 191.

[28] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 76.

By drawing upon her own experience, Rhys is able to highlight the hypocrisy of Rochester's supposedly blameless position in his relationship with Céline. Despite his adamant declaration that he despises mistresses and thinks them entirely 'inferior', Rochester intends on making Jane his mistress once it is revealed that he is already married. Rochester condemns the women of his past relationships for their sexualised position, despite the fact that he was a part of these affairs with Céline, Clara and Giacinta.[29] The mistress's body is perceived as the sexualised and shameful one, not the man who used her sexually before discarding her. Rhys incorporates this hypocrisy into her depiction of Heidler in *Quartet*, emphasised when he adamantly tells Marya "I've never shared a woman in my life, not knowingly anyhow, and I'm not going to start now."[30] While Céline is voiceless within her narrative as the adulterous mistress, Marya responds to the type of hypocrisy Rochester enacts when she directly addresses Heidler's lies: "You forced me to share you," said Marya, "for months. Openly and ridiculously. You used your wife to torture me with."[31]

Rhys continued her criticism of Brontë's limited perspective into *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Here, she writes out Rochester's relationship with Bertha, but emphasises the same hypocrisy that occurs within his affair with Céline when she depicts Rochester as seeking out Antoinette's sexuality and then punishing it. He seduces her, but once Antoinette becomes 'as eager for what's called loving as I was', Rochester is offended by the sexual body of his wife, despite the fact that he formed it.[32]

Rhys reflected upon the double-standard in views of Céline's (and her own) body throughout her life and writing, particularly in *Voyage in the Dark* in which she explores the position of Anna the 'demimonde' in great depth. Like her connection to Zola's Nana,

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[29] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 409.
[30] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 116.
[31] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 116.
[32] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 77.

Anna’s narrative is one closely connected to Céline’s, both characters are abjectly sexualised and have few other people to rely upon due to the stigma of being ‘kept women’. Walter reflects Rochester’s use of Céline in his use of Anna before casting her aside when she is no longer ‘a virgin’.[33] Walter’s reaction to Anna once she has been ‘used’ echoes Rochester’s disgust at Céline’s ‘loose-principled’ behaviour and the ‘debauchery’ she engaged in. Like Rochester, Heidler and Walter fail to recognise the fact that they’re the ones who ‘kept’ the women they grow to despise and subsequently abandon.[34]

Similarly, Anna is shunned once she becomes pregnant, an aspect of her narrative that overlaps Céline’s and connects with Rhys’s own experience of motherhood. Speaking of Adele, Céline’s shallow young daughter, Rochester states that ‘unluckily the Varens, six months before [the end of their relationship], had given me this fillette Adele, who, she affirmed, was my daughter; and perhaps she may be, though I see no proof’.[35] The scornful depiction of Céline’s illegitimate child is an aspect of Brontë’s narrative that would resonate with Rhys. In 1912 Rhys became pregnant as the result of an affair and had to have an illegal abortion.[36] Rhys, of course, wrote these events into her depiction of Anna’s difficult demimonde existence at the end of *Voyage in the Dark,* which illustrated the ‘other side’ to Brontë’s overly simplistic and contemptuous depiction of Céline as a mother and her ‘illegitimate offspring’.[37]

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[33] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 31.

[34] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 409.

[35] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.

[36] Lesley McDowell, ‘Jean Rhys: Prostitution, Alcoholism and the Mad Woman in the Attic’, *Independent,* 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/jean-rhys-prostitution-alcoholism-and-the-mad-woman-in-the-attic-1676252.html> [accessed 17 March 2022].

Floriane Reviron-Piégay, ‘Writing Jean Rhys a Life: The Circumvolutions of Transmission Lines in the Memoirs and Biographies of Jean Rhys’, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 31 (2020), 173-186, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/full/10.1080/09574042.2020.1779442> [accessed 16 March 2022], (p. 175).

[37] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.

The Mistress as 'The Other'

Brontë's partial picture continues to be extended with Rhys's own outsider characters, representing the 'other side' of Rochester's other distinctly un-English mistresses. Rochester's past lovers, while each only mentioned briefly, are all made notably foreign by Brontë. When telling Jane how he sought his 'ideal' mistress, Rochester lists his past lovers with their nationalities before their names: 'an Italian, Giacinta, and a German, Clara; both considered singularly handsome'.[38] Likewise, Céline is marked by her nature as a foreigner by Brontë, who connects the abject sexuality of the mistress with her race with a similar sexualised, racialised depiction placed upon the Creole madwoman. 'French opera-girl' Céline is equated with 'the slime and mud of Paris' as her non-Englishness is emphasised whenever she is mentioned in the novel.[39]

Even her daughter, Adele, is marked by her mother's indolent 'French defects'.[40] Rochester states that when he took Adele in, he 'transplanted' her from the scum of Paris 'to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden'.[41] Her superficial nature, linked to 'her mother's faults', is mostly communicated in French. For example, when given a new dress Adele exclaims "je crois que je vais danser!" [I think I'm going to dance!][42] As she dances across the room she says 'C'est commee cela que maman faisait, n'est-ce pas' [That's how mama used to do, isn't it], Brontë attributes her shallow excitement and 'coquettish' dancing to her mother.[43] Adele's excitement over the dress prompts Rochester to connect her superficiality back to her mother again: ‘coquetry runs in her blood, blends with her brains, and seasons the marrow of her bones’.[44]

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[38] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p, 409.
[39] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.
[40] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 589.
Alexandra Valint, 'Accepting Adèle in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 47 (2016), 201-222, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/dickstudannu.47.2016.0201> [accessed 27 December 2021] (p. 201).
[41] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 190.
[42] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 184.
[43] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 184.

Elaine Showalter connects the use of French in *Jane Eyre* with ‘the illicit, self-indulgent, and dangerous’.[45] Emily Eells points out that French is ‘used consistently and successfully as an objective counterpart to Jane’s sexual response to Rochester’.[46] As Céline’s debauched sexuality is continually emphasised through her non-Englishness, Rhys writes into the ‘other side’ of Brontë’s depiction of the French mistress with her own outsider and foreigner characters. While the Creole madwoman remains the main motivator of Rhys’s ‘writing back’, Céline’s position outside of English society and standards is also a recognisable and important aspect of Rhysian women. Céline wholly embodies the outsider position that Rhys sought to bring centre stage with her own figures of abject nationality and status. For the Rhysian woman, and Rhys herself, England is a place of stifling conformity and strict standards of behaviour, ‘where human emotions, especially those associated with sexuality, are outlawed or repressed’.[47] Rhys would have been subject to the same scorn and societal judgement that Brontë wrote into her depiction of Céline’s distinctly ‘un-English’ displays of debauched and ‘loose principled’ sexuality.[48]

Extending Brontë’s emphasis of Céline’s ‘otherness’ against Jane’s properly constrained ‘Englishness’, the Englishmen Walter and Vincent sexualise Anna’s otherness. Anna is dubbed the ‘Hottentot’, as discussed in chapter one with its association to Bertha. The fetishized ‘exotic’ image of the Hottentot reinforces Anna’s inability to blend into the

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[44] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 183.

[45] Elaine Showalter, as quoted from:
Emily Eells, ‘The French Aire in *Jane Eyre*’, *Cahiers Victoriens & Édouardiens* 78, (2013), 2-13 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1629952435/fulltextPDF/428BD7EC114347AFPQ/1?accountid=17287> [accessed 16 March 2022], (p. 2).

[46] Eells, p. 2.

[47] Savory, ‘Living on Both Sides, Living to Write’, p. 28.

[48] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 409.

English society around her.[49] As Céline's nationality is repeatedly associated with her debauched sexuality, Anna's status as the Hottentot is likewise seen as negative by those who label her: "The girls call her the Hottentot? Isn't it a shame? […] I hope you call them something worse back".[50] The idea that it is a 'shame' and the suggestion that Anna ought to call the girls something even 'worse' in retort reinforces the notion of the racialised mistress's 'intense sexuality conjured by the social fictions of racist imperialism'.[51] The Hottentot term was one distinctly associated with sex work, and marks Anna as a sexualised body 'colonised' by Englishmen like Walter as extensions of Rochester's patriarchal control over the 'othered' Céline and Bertha.[52]

Anna's 'otherness' is maintained by connections between her sex work and the slavery associated with her nationality. Rochester tells Jane that 'hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading'.[53] In these lines he likens his mistresses to slaves. Rhys echoes this depiction of mistresses by placing Anna in the same 'slavery' Rochester describes.[54] After losing her virginity to Walter, Anna is reminded of the slave list she saw at Constance Estate, her old home in the West Indies: 'Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. […] All those names written down', I said. 'It's funny, I've never forgotten it'.[55] Anna repeatedly recalls the slave girl's name and age (the same age as Anna, reinforcing the connection between the two) when she is with Walter. Her rambling interior monologue repeats the register list when they are in bed together as Anna likens herself to the girl through her role as Walter's mistress: 'Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged

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[49] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 12.
[50] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 12.
[51] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing the Caribbean', p. 94.
[52] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing the Caribbean', p. 94.
[53] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 409.
[54] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 409.
[55] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 46.

18'.[56] Today, we could see this likening to a slave as problematic given the fact that Rhys was a white Creole, however, Rhys used the connection to denote the sense of servitude and power imbalance within Anna's role as a mistress to an Englishman.

Extending the Opera Dancer into Chorus Girls

In the same vein of seeing Céline's 'debauched' position as Rochester's mistress inspiring Rhys to write 'the other side' of Brontë's depiction, Céline's working role as a dancer could have also incited further writing back. Céline's profession as an 'Opera-mistress' is mentioned scornfully multiple times throughout the novel, but never fleshed out beyond a vague connection between her dancing and coquettish behaviour.[57] Like Brontë's limited illustration of mistresses, her depiction of Céline's profession was a space that Rhys wrote into with her own insight and experience as a 'chorus girl and call girl'.[58] Rhys lived the life of her characters, and so had personal experience on which to draw, but her literary representation of that life has distinct echoes of Brontë. Here, the strands of biography and textual influence overlap to form Rhys's chorus girls and sex worker characters Anna and Marya. When reading these patterns of influence, it is important to not disregard Rhys's own experiences influencing her work in favour of merely reading the textual traces of Brontë. The biographic, contextual elements of Rhys's life were the reason why Brontë's depictions resonated so deeply with Rhys, and why she wrote back within her own novels, both consciously and unconsciously.

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[56] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 48.
[57] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 183.
[58] Savory, 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write', p. 28.

Rochester views Céline as expendable and debauched due to her status as a demimonde 'kept woman' and dancer, mirroring Brontë's and wider society's view. Rita Felski explains the liminal position of the sex worker, stating that she was positioned as:

> Both seller and commodity, the prostitute was the ultimate symbol of the commodification of eros, a disturbing example of the ambiguous boundaries separating economics and sexuality, the rational and irrational, the instrumental and the aesthetic, […] representing the dark abyss of a dangerous female sexuality linked to contamination, disease, and the breakdown of social hierarchies in the modern city.[59]

Rhys's women experience this disturbing liminality that Felski describes. Marya is told by men who pursue her that 'honourable intentions were unnecessary when dealing with chorus girls' like herself, who view her as a body for consumption and subsequent scorn.[60] Against Brontë's limited depictions of a woman so close to herself, Rhys's novels showed the reality of women deemed expendable. Marya of *Quartet* and Anna of *Voyage in the Dark* are both chorus girls and mistresses who slide into prostitution due to their declining financial and social status.[61]

Echoing Brontë's view of Céline, Marya and Anna are likewise viewed as debauched by the landladies who refuse to 'let to professionals'.[62] The term 'professionals' here refers to chorus girls 'whose reputation was chancy at best' as Savory explains, but also contained a wider, negative association with sex work.[63] The perception of the chorus girl was closely connected to the sexualised view of the 'kept woman' and prostitute: sexually-appealing and designed for male consumption, but subsequently condemned for its classification and 'use' by men. Both of Rhys's chorus girls and Brontë's dancer follow similar patterns of construction, use, and subsequent societal shaming. In *Bodies That Matter,* Judith Butler specifies how the useful female body 'becomes a normative and normalising ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated, and invested; it is an historically specific imaginary ideal under which the body is effectively materialised'.[64] Brontë demonstrates this construction with her portrayal of Céline as a distinctly sexualised figure for her role on the stage. 19th century opera dancers were frequently sexually exploited, particularly in Paris where Céline performed, as the '*foyer de la danse* was a backstage room that essentially served as a brothel'.[65] Given the fact that Céline relied upon Rochester for money and lodgings it is safe to assume she, like the majority of opera dancers in this era, was close to financial destitution.[66] Céline's role as a dancer was one widely associated with prostitution, especially for women like herself with no other means of income, who were exploited and consumed in the same sense as the chorus girl.[67]

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[59] Rita Felski, 'Modernity and Feminism', *The Gender of Modernity,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 19.
[60] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 12.
[61] Savory, 'Living on Both Sides, Living to Write', p. 28.
[62] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 8.
[63] Savory, 'Writing Colour, Writing the Caribbean', p. 94.

Rhys illustrated the 'miseries, oppressions and cruelties women are subject to in a patriarchal society' through her own chorus girls and prostitutes, and Marya's role on and off the stage reflects the precarity behind Brontë's depiction of Céline as an opera dancer.[68] Marya's director, Mr Albert Prance, terrifies Marya: 'her knees shook whenever he came anywhere near her'.[69] Rhys illustrates the kind of exploitation that dancers like Céline were subject to when Marya needs a role: ‘the agent, a stout and weary gentleman, had run his eyes upwards and downwards’ before deciding if she is pretty enough for a part.[70] Further echoing Céline, both Marya and Anna are only able to leave the stage by becoming kept women. Even beyond their life as chorus girls, Marya and Anna are both wholly reliant on men for money and therefore subject to further exploitation. Rhys demonstrates this difficult reality with Marya’s descent into madness at the hands of Heidler, and Anna’s near-death at the end of *Voyage in the Dark*.

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[64] Judith Butler, 'Bodies That Matter', *Bodies That Matter,* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 3-27 (p. 9).

[65] Sebrena Williamson, 'Exploitation in Ballet History: Prostitution at the Paris Opera Ballet', *The Collector,* 2022 <https://www.thecollector.com/history-ballet-paris-opera/> [accessed 17 March 2022].
Sally Banes, 'The Romantic Ballet: La Sylphide, Giselle, Coppélia', *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage,* (London: Routledge, 1998) 12-42 (p. 39).

[66] Barnes, p. 39.

[67] Barnes, p. 39.

[68] Imogen Free, ''Outside the Machine': Stasis and Conflict in the work of Jean Rhys', *Women: A Cultural Review,* 31 (2020), 211-233 <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1080/09574042.2020.1759546?needAccess=true> [accessed 1 August 2021] (p. 211).

[69] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 10.

Much like Céline’s complete lack of identity in Brontë’s narrative beyond the few descriptions of the shallow dancer, Marya and Anna are likewise denied a sense of identity as chorus girls. While each belong to separate novels, Rhys frequently overlaps descriptions of Marya and Anna’s lives on the stage to emphasise the limited sense of self she experienced: being made ‘to talk like a chorus girl, to dress like a chorus girl and to think like a chorus girl’.[71] In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna describes how ‘the towns we went to always looked so exactly alike’, and Marya experiences the same monotony when touring of ‘a vague procession of towns all exactly alike’.[72] With their shared lives of repetition Rhys’s chorus girls are reproductions of each other and Rhys herself, and of Brontë’s dancer, as well as becoming reproductions of the other women in the chorus, all repeating the same steps with mechanical accuracy. Felski explains in ‘Modernity and Feminism’ how ‘women were now seen to be constructed’ through the industrialised and commodified age as well as its impact upon the female body.[73] The mechanical production and reproduction of Marya and Anna’s roles worked as a mode of ‘conditioning’ and constructing through ‘social, discursive, and institutional regimes' that turned their bodies into performative machines.[74] It is not surprising that Rhys repeated elements of Brontë and her dancer since reproduction and imitation were at the heart of the chorus. Like Céline's lack of identity in *Jane Eyre,* the chorus girl had no identity on stage as a mass-produced body. Merely designed to be desirable to men as 'susceptible, masked surfaces', they replicated and performed femininity for male consumption.[75] Through the difficult, constrained existence of her chorus girls, we can see how Rhys extends the marginalised body of Céline, fleshing it out with a backstory drawn from experience. Just as she wrote back to the depictions of the Creole madwoman, Rhys rewrites the 'treacherous' demi-monde dancer with sympathy for her powerlessness, having herself lived as a 'Céline'.[76]

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[70] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 10.
[71] Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 10.
[72] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 8
Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 10.
[73] Felski, p. 20.

Revising the 'Coquette' of *Villette*

Brontë illustrates Ginevra Fanshawe of *Villette* with the same disdain displayed towards Céline. Using her looks to her advantage, Ginevra's singular goal throughout the novel is to enjoy her youth, using her good-looks to profit from her multiple affairs.[77] Every bit Brontë's moral heroine, Lucy criticises Ginevra for profiting from 'the good nature and the purse of a man to whom you feel absolute indifference'.[78] While Lucy is willing to 'turn my hand to any useful thing, provided it was not wrong or degrading', Ginevra is completely her 'ignorant' and 'coquettish' opposite. [79] As she counters Lucy's grim morality, Ginevra is effectively pushed to the side of the narrative in a similar way to the madwoman in the attic. The same patterns of connection, extension and revision that I traced between Céline and the Rhysian woman can be read within the character of Ginevra. I believe Rhys saw more value in Ginevra than her own author did, and rewrote the character from her own perspective, using Brontë's depiction as a model to write against much like Céline and Bertha. While the madwoman of *Jane Eyre* remains at the core of the Rhysian woman, Ginevra is rewritten in a similar way. With her own characters, Rhys offered another angle for Ginevra's selfish use of men for financial gain, revising Brontë's illustration of the 'kept woman' based upon her experiences of the demi-monde.

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[74] Kara Watts, 'Designing Women: Modernist Mass Culture and the Formation of the Female Body,' *Feminist Modernist Studies,* 2 (2019), 44-61 <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/doi/full/10.1080/24692921.2019.1575045> [accessed 23 August 2021] (p. 50).

[75] Watts, p. 50.

[76] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* p. 191.

[77] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 106.

[78] Brontë, *Villette,* pp. 104-105.

[79] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 74, p. 105.

Completely 'content with my being a pretty girl', Ginevra uses men for financial gain through manipulation and selfish exploitation: another 'kept woman' depicted by Brontë as vain and cruel.[80] Brontë shows Ginevra's 'unsparing selfishness' through her unashamed use of men like John Graham to finance a lavish lifestyle beyond her means.[81] Lacking the independence that Lucy values, Ginevra 'called out lustily for sympathy and aid' whenever in need of money or attention, with 'no notion of meeting any distress single-handed'.[82] Brontë stresses Ginevra's faults constantly throughout *Villette,* overstating her self-absorbed nature against Lucy's selflessness: for instance, she writes 'her liking and disliking, her love and hate, were mere cobweb and gossamer; but she had one thing about her that seemed strong and durable enough, and that was — her selfishness'.[83] Through her multiple affairs, Ginevra elevates her status and eventually becomes Count Alfred de Hamal's wife, writing to Lucy at the end of the novel to boast 'I am a countess now. Papa, mamma, and the girls at home, will be delighted to hear that. "My daughter the Countess!" "My sister the Countess!" Bravo! Sounds rather better than Mrs. John Bretton, hein?'[84]

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[80] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 106.
[81] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 63.
[82] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 566.
[83] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 98.
[84] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 564.

Ginevra’s relationships with John Graham and the Count are echoed by Marya, Anna and Sasha, who likewise use men to fund lifestyles of evenings out and fashionable clothing. On the surface, the Ginevra could be read as an early prototype for the Rhysian woman, given their shared use of men for financial gain. However, Rhys writes Brontë’s ‘coquette’ into her own novels to better depict the difficulty, pain, degradation of Ginevra as a victim of male control. Unlike Brontë’s illustrations of Ginevra’s selfishness of ‘profiting by the good nature and the purse of a man to whom you feel absolute indifference’, the Rhysian woman is almost completely dependent upon men.[85]

While Ginevra is ‘content’ in her role as a kept woman, the Rhysian woman often has little other means of survival. As Ginevra exploits John Graham for her selfish benefit, Anna is exploited by Walter and Vincent for her financial precarity and used by the men around her before being forced to literally exchange her bodily autonomy for money. Ginevra leaves John Graham in desperate despair, but in *Voyage in the Dark* it is instead Anna left feeling that ‘if I never see you again I’ll die’.[86] Vincent strings Anna along, making her believe they’re in love before casting her aside, seen when Walter informs her that “Vincent’s hardly ever spoken about you. Except that he said once he thought you were very young and didn’t quite know your way about”.[87] Rhys inverts the power structure that Brontë sets up in *Villette*: where Ginevra was the manipulator, Rhys’s women are the manipulated. Within this inversion, Rhys is able to criticise the way in which Ginevra is depicted, not Ginevra herself.

This pattern of criticism is continued in *Quartet*, as Marya represents a reversal of the power that Ginevra demonstrates in her affairs to illustrate the precarious reality Rhys lived as a kind of ‘Ginevra’. Marya becomes involved with Heidler out of need, not greed, as she is led to believe he will find her a self-reliant source of income. Here Rhys adds an element of sympathy to Marya as she ‘uses’ Heidler out of necessity, rather than for selfish fun as Brontë depicted in Ginevra’s relationship with John Graham. Inasmuch as Ginevra led John Graham to believe that she returned his affections, Marya is told by Heidler “I love you, my dear, I love you. And I wish I were dead. For God’s sake, be a little kind to me”.[88] He seduces Marya until she returns his feelings, pleading “I love you. Oh, please be nice to me. Oh, please say something nice to me”, which he dismisses as “utter nonsense” after growing bored with her.[89] This echoes the power Ginevra holds over John Graham, as Lucy states: ‘It stands to reason that by accepting his presents you give him to understand he will one day receive an equivalent’ affection and eventually her hand in marriage.[90] Rhys shows the inversion of vulnerably through Heidler and Marya here, using the same desperate wish of being ‘kind’ and ‘nice’ but flipping who wishes it once Heidler has gained what he wanted from her.

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[85] Brontë, *Villette*, pp. 104-105.
[86] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 83.
[87] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 85.

When reading *Villette* I found Ginevra to be incredibly annoying, due to Brontë’s representation of the ‘silly’ coquette. Rhys reverses this portrayal with sympathy and experience in her own novels; while I felt annoyed by Ginevra, I instead felt sorry for Anna and Marya, despite the fact that they are all similarly positioned as powerless ‘pretty girls’. Much like her criticism of how Brontë illustrated Céline as adulterous and greedy, Rhys illustrates the ‘other side’ to Ginevra that Brontë failed to represent. That is, even though Ginevra ‘enjoys’ her youth and good-looks being exploited in being a kept woman, she is still trapped within the patriarchal power structure that sees her only value as being ‘a pretty girl’.[91]

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[88] Rhys, *Quartet,* p. 58.

[89] Rhys, *Quartet,* pp. 101-103.

[90] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 105.

[91] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 106.

Dressing Up(wards)

Highlighting Ginevra’s self-absorbed nature as ‘coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish’, Brontë frequently stresses her vain obsession with clothing and appearance.[92] Ginevra’s immense ‘frock consciousness’ deeply resonates through the Rhysian woman, as discussed in chapter one. We can see this obsession at work when Ginevra is in need of an appropriate dress for an upcoming party: ‘all of her [Ginevra’s] thoughts turned on this difficulty; her whole soul was occupied with expedients for effecting its solution, […] spurred by a sense of necessity, and the wish to shine’.[93] Ginevra’s use of clothing closely resembles the woman of Rhys, fixating upon her appearance and understanding clothing as both a marker of social standing and a method of elevation. Using Brontë’s descriptions of selfish obsession, Rhys illustrates the ‘other side’ of anxiety around appearance with her own frock-conscious protagonists.

Ginevra’s overwhelming anxiety around appearance drives her to hysteria at times, demonstrated when ‘she cried in a somewhat sobbing voice, half hysterical. “What in the world is the matter?” I [Lucy] drily said. “How do I look – how do I look to-night?” she demanded.”’[94] Much like Bertha and Céline being positioned as the ‘spoken for’ in *Jane Eyre,* the reader is not provided insight into Ginevra’s thoughts throughout *Villette* and we know little of the concerns beneath her hysterical sobbing. Both the Rhysian woman and Ginevra enjoy clothing, but they also understand that their appearance is all they are valued for. If Ginevra fails to look appropriately beautiful, her means of income are at risk, and given her hysteria, it would seem Ginevra is aware of the stakes here. While Ginevra’s ‘hysteria’ towards clothing is shown in relation to vanity and her desire to move up the social ladder of Villette, Rhys's women demonstrate the reason beneath this hysteria. Also only valued as 'a pretty girl', Anna is told the 'price' of women like herself when a man asks if she realised 'that a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them?'[95] He tells her that:

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[92] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 105.
[93] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 101.
[94] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 168.

> 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. […] People are much cheaper than things.[96]

Anna's clothing is directly linked to her ability of maintaining appearances, and subsequently maintaining her means of survival. Showcasing the extreme fragility of Ginevra's situation, failing to maintain appearances for Marya, Sasha and Anna could lead to further financial destitution and, in the case of Marya, even death.

Ginevra's consciousness towards clothing is successful in *Villette,* as she is able to rise through society with her appearances and eventually work her way from Madame Beck's school to become a Countess. Rhys demonstrates the other side of this upward mobility with her fallen women. Unlike Ginevra, Anna, Sasha and Marya are not able to move up the social ladder, despite their attentions to their appearance, and remain anxiously dressed demi-mondes. Throughout *Voyage in the Dark,* Anna expresses the depressive effect of being, quite literally, 'poorly' dressed. Rhys is able to demonstrate the intense pervasiveness of frock consciousness beneath Ginevra's hysteria and obsession, as Anna's internalised societal judgements on clothing and appearance pushes her sense of self-loathing. This is exemplified when she laments:

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[95] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 39.
[96] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* pp. 39-40.

> When I thought about my clothes I was too sad to cry. About clothes, it’s awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. As if it isn’t enough that you want to be beautiful, that you want to have pretty clothes, that you want it like hell. As if that isn’t enough. But no, 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. You look at your hideous underclothes and you think, “All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything – anything for clothes.”[97]

Rhys’s use of ‘you’ here demonstrates how this mode of thinking is ingrained in Anna, as she judges herself and her clothing as markers of her socioeconomic status. Her fixation on appearance, as explained by Andrea Zemgulys, is driven by her ‘wish to be beautiful and attractive, one that fits logically with her awareness of cruel women’s judgement and her dependency on men’s attraction, but that is also articulated as distinctly self-generated and self-referential, not a desire to please others but to please herself’, which accurately describes not only the Rhysian woman, but Ginevra’s obsession also.[98] However, their clothing also works as a barrier against society: a boundary that ‘frames the body and separates it from the rest of the social world, thus functioning as a kind of container or wrapper. […] As margin, on the other hand, dress connects the individual to other bodies, it links the biological entity to the social ensemble and the private to the public’.[99]

This extension of Ginevra’s vanity is drawn from Rhys’s own life, as she, like her protagonists, used clothing to assimilate into a society hostile to outsiders. Rhys writes that ‘The clothes of most 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, then of course I'd be quite different"'.[100] This immense sense of frock consciousness drives desire for fashionable dresses as it 'not only figures a wish for renewal, changed luck, protective covering and camouflage (as Rhys readers know well), but also signifies a more direct wish not to be clad in "cheap," ill maintained, or old clothing'.[101] In *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys describes Sasha's desperation for the 'right' clothing after appearing foolish in the eyes of her boss. She thinks despondently about the dress she should have been wearing, one much more fashionable and expensive than what she was wearing at the time: 'if I had been wearing it I should have never stammered or been stupid. […] I start thinking about the black dress, longing for it, madly, furiously. If I could get it everything would be different'.[102] The 'everything' she speaks of here is referring to Sasha's entire life – believing that her failed marriage and jobs, terrible lodgings, and continual lack of money could be made better simply if her appearance was improved through the transformative power of clothing.[103] The powerful black dress that signifies agency and confidence to Sasha reflects the same symbolism that Rhys wrote into the red dress of Antoinette, with the same sense of frock consciousness and anxiety around appearance that stemmed from Brontë's prototext also apparent here.

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[97] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 22.
[98] Zemgulys, pp. 204-205.
[99] Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body,* (Oxford: Berg, 1998) p. xvii.

In the same way she set out to amend Brontë's madwoman, a figure so close to herself as a Creole outsider, Rhys rewrites Brontë's coquettish kept-women with her own experiences. Brontë condemns Céline and Ginevra's selfish 'use' of Rochester and John for financial gain, and as a woman of the demi-monde writing in Paris and England, Rhys had to similarly 'use' men to begin her literary career. As Shelia Kineke explains, 'unlike materially better-off writers such as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein who had direct access to publishing venues, Rhys had much to gain from an alliance with a well-connected modernist', and Rhys's writing career was afforded through her affair with Ford.[104]

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[100] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark,* p. 111.
[101] Zemgulys, p. 205.
[102] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight,* pp. 20-23.
[103] Joannou, p. 468.

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[104] Shelia Kineke, "Like a Hook Fits an Eye": Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, and the Imperial Operations of Modernist Mentoring' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* 16 (1997), 281-301 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/464363?seq=1> [accessed 31 March 2022], (p. 281).

Conclusion

In his introduction to Rhys's first published work, *The Left Bank and Other Stories,* Ford praised Rhys's 'terrifying insight and a terrific an almost lurid! – passion for stating the case of the underdog'.[1] The 'underdog', as Ford termed it, was directed at the reoccurring figures of Rhys's fiction: the abject woman living on the margins of respectable society, isolated by her outsider or minority status. To be able to state the case of the underdog, Rhys spent a lifetime living as one herself. Rhys continued to state the case for disempowered and disaffected women like herself throughout her writing career.

Whether we read Rhys's work as a constant writing back to Brontë, or as a continued series of drafts prefiguring what would eventually become *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Rhys's earlier novels show an engagement with Brontë's work that certainly predates the connections between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre.* With the 'passion' for the underdog that Ford and Rhys's readers alike have identified in her fiction, Rhys sought to rewrite the underdogs within Brontë's novels, in order to better represent herself and her home.

With her continual rewriting of Brontë's representation of marginalised women and the West Indies, Rhys has widened the scope of the intertextuality that has long been studied within the confined connections of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This refiguring of Bertha, as well as Céline and Ginevra, into each of her signature Rhysian women crosses the bounds of texts, eras and genres. This mode of criticism also blurs the lines between fiction and fact since Rhys wove her own life into the backstory she provided Bertha within Marya, Anna and Sasha.

Considering this longstanding connection and critical engagement with Brontë's works offers remarkable insight into the mind of one of modernism's key literary figures.

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[1] Kineke, p. 287.

Rhys's criticism of the colonial powers that Brontë reinforced have been examined chiefly within *Wide Sargasso Sea,* and so the longstanding feminist and postcolonial critiques of Brontë within her earlier works have been hugely overlooked. As I hope I have proven with this thesis, Brontë's influence upon *Quartet, Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* is undeniable and deserves acknowledging for its illumination of Rhys's longstanding efforts to write back from 'the other side, always'.[2]

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[2] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* p. 106.

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