

Jean Rhys: Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading

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So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country
and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all.

— Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be
taken out of it — and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another
colour must be imposed on it. (Educated hair. . . .)

— Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*

Why write this book? No one has asked me for it.

— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

A reading of Jean Rhys's work benefits from the recent attention of colonial discourse theorists to the complexity of the relationship between colonialists and indigenous peoples. Both Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak¹ resist the simple argument that there is a monolithic colonial discourse which is capable of creating what Benita Parry calls "the native as a fixed, unified object of colonialist knowledge." Parry coins the term "variously positioned native" (29) to refer to the heterogeneity of native experience. These critics seek to reveal the reductionism inherent in imperialist representations of the "Other." The over-simplification of these representations denies the interactive relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and the complexity of racial, cultural, and national identity. Whereas Bhabha and Spivak primarily raise questions about the ambivalence of the black or Indian native in colonial and neo-colonial society, Rhys explores the "variousness" of the Creole position: the white native who occupies a cultural space between the European and black Caribbean societies and

the native of mixed racial ancestry who also straddles cultural and political lines.

Although it is helpful to read Rhys's last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and her later Caribbean stories in the context of the post-World War II colonial debate carried on by Jean Paul Sartre, O. Dominique Mannoni, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon,² her earlier fiction of the 1920s presages many of the questions raised by these later writers and by current colonial discourse theorists. Like these writers, Rhys quite consciously complicates the dichotomy between "colonizer" and "colonized" and questions not only the politics but the psychology of colonialism. Yet, in her earlier fiction, as in the later *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys also explores the relationship between national and sexual politics, a relationship often left unexamined by later writers. Rhys's work demands an acknowledgment of the existence of the white Creole woman ignored by the strikingly male-centred theoretical debate following World War II. Mannoni's colonizer, for instance, is a Prospero, a Crusoe, a male conqueror searching for a "world without men" (105). In Fanon's writing about race and sexuality in *Black Skin, White Masks*, colonizers are white men; white women appear in the drama of colonial power and sexuality not as Caribbeans but as Europeans encountered "over there." And Memmi, too, mockingly imagines the colonizer as "a tall man, bronzed by the sun, wearing Wellington boots, proudly leaning on a shovel" scanning the distant horizon (3). But what of the white Creole woman? Is she a colonizer? Is she a colonized subject as well? Is she European or Caribbean? These are the questions and complications Rhys raises in her fiction. Her portrayal of racial relations and the place of the Creole woman is directly at odds with the belief in a fixed national/racial personality which Mannoni so clearly defines:

The colonial's personality is wholly unaffected by that of the native of the colony to which he goes; it does not adapt itself, but develops solely in accordance with its own inner structure. (108)

In sharp contrast to this view, Rhys examines in her fiction the influence each culture exerts on the other and the fluidity of racial and cultural roles and of the power relations inscribed in them. A

close reading of two of Rhys's early short stories, "Again the Antilles" and "Trio," allows us to see not only Rhys's conscious understanding of the complexity of colonial power structures but her own ambivalence as a member of the white settler class of Dominica.³

Jean Rhys was born on the Caribbean island of Dominica in 1890. Her mother's family had been there since the end of the eighteenth century and her father had come from Wales as a young man. Because her mother's grandfather had owned slaves before the Emancipation, her family, according to Rhys, was "never very popular. That's putting it mildly . . ." (*Smile* 33-34). In her autobiography, *Smile Please* (1979), Rhys writes about her lifelong feelings of alienation from both Dominican and Anglo/European societies. Although she identifies as a white colonial native in her autobiography, she questions the meaning of such family claims of "racial purity" in the Caribbean and wonders about the racial identity of her own slave-owner great-grandfather's dark wife who was supposedly Spanish (O'Connor 20). Rhys's own political and social position as a woman who is neither English nor black Caribbean allows her to explore the ambivalence of the white and "colored" colonial subject. That ambivalence is seen not only in her thematic concern with race and literary culture but also in what is left unsaid or unexamined in the text.

As a British colonial subject, Rhys received an exclusively English and French literary education. Rhys was one of the earliest Caribbean writers to recognize the psychological and political effects of this enforced education.⁴ In an early story "Again the Antilles," published in *The Left Bank* (1927), Rhys explores the complex relationship between race and culture and the business of the constitution of selfhood in colonial society.⁵ In the space of three pages, Rhys reveals that the stakes involved in cultural, particularly literary, knowledge are those of colonial and racial domination. The story rehearses a bitter debate which took place, apparently some years before, in the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette* between its editor, Papa Dom, and an English colonialist, Hugh Musgrave. The social positions of these two men are striking. Papa Dom, a native to the island, carries himself as a proper "gentleman": "He wore gold-rimmed spectacles and

dark clothes always — not for him the frivolity of white linen even on the hottest days.” This is the solemn and proper exterior, however, of a “born rebel”:

He hated white people, not being quite white, and he despised the black ones, not being quite black. . . . “Coloured” we West Indians called the intermediate shades, and I used to think that being coloured embittered him.

He was against the Government, against the English, against the Island’s being a Crown Colony and the Town Board’s new system of drainage. (39)

Hugh Musgrave, on the other hand, is a white owner of a large estate and employs a great deal of labour for the production of sugar cane and limes. According to the narrator, Musgrave is harmless, in fact “a dear” though perhaps a bit “peppery” due to his “twenty years of the tropics and much indulgence in spices and cocktails” (40).

The debate between the two men begins when, under a pseudonym in letters to the paper, Papa Dom accuses Musgrave of “some specifically atrocious act of tyranny” that the narrator cannot remember, but she quotes the letter at length:

“It is a saddening and a dismal sight,” it ended, “to contemplate the degeneracy of a stock. How far is such a man removed from the ideas of true gentility, from the beautiful description of a contemporary, possibly, though not certainly, the Marquis of Montrose, left us by Shakespeare, the divine poet and genius.

“*He was a very gentle, perfect knight.*” (40)

From this point the debate revolves ferociously around whether this is the line of Shakespeare or Chaucer and which of the two writers to the *Dominica Herald* has the greater casual knowledge of English poetry and culture. This is not merely a college quiz repartee, but a struggle over the racial right to English culture and, by extension, the right to political power. Musgrave replies to the letter:

“The lines quoted were written, not by Shakespeare but by Chaucer, though you cannot of course be expected to know that, and run

He never yet no vilonye had sayde
In al his lyf, unto no manner wight —

He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght.
 "It is indeed a saddening and dismal thing that the names of great Englishmen should be thus taken in vain by the ignorant of another race and colour." (41)

And the narrator adds, "Mr. Musgrave had really written 'damn niggers.'"

Papa Dom's next reply goes on to remind the newspaper's readers of the doubts of authorship in literary scholarship and his own writing from memory as opposed to Musgrave's obvious use of reference materials. The debate here is obviously about the ability, indeed the *right*, of non-white readers to understand and use English culture. The complexity and irony of the story goes even further. Papa Dom, a coloured man, questions Mr. Musgrave's "Englishness" and alludes to the "degeneracy of the stock." Papa Dom does not question English culture itself; from his own ambiguous position as a "colored" man he not only adopts the English valuation of English culture but the English racial hierarchy as well. In this story Rhys explores both the anti-Black racism of the white English character and the internalized racism of a "colored" West Indian character.

Musgrave's sin, in Papa Dom's eyes, is his fall from "true gentility." Musgrave's reply, however, reveals the futility of Papa Dom's education and gentlemanly bearing, for no matter how scholarly or reserved Papa Dom may be in order to set himself off from the "easy morality of the negroes," he is nonetheless a "damn nigger" in English eyes, outrageously arrogant in his attempt to use English poetry. Rhys's analysis of this hostility of the colonialist for the "not quite white" native anticipates by fifty-seven years Bhabha's analysis of the "almost the same but not quite . . . [a]lmost the same but not white" figure of colonial society ("Of Mimicry" 130). Papa Dom is a good example of what Bhabha calls a "colonial mimic," a colonial subject who, while despising the English, has learned to play the role of the Englishman in many ways better than the Englishman himself. And yet, no matter how well he learns the rules, he will never entirely win, because culture, Rhys acknowledges, is politically tied to race. In other words, only the white English-born can be English and hold those

privileges associated with that status. Although Fanon argues that “the Negro in the West Indies becomes proportionately whiter — that is, he becomes closer to being a real human being — in direct ratio to his mastery of the language” (Fanon 18), Rhys seems to agree with Bhabha that this figure is nonetheless “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English” (“Of Mimicry” 128).

To push this short story one step further in complexity, I want to interrogate the place of the *narrator*, the first reader of this war of letters. The last line of the story, indeed, demands the question. Papa Dom’s final reply is followed by the enigmatic first-person conclusion, “I wonder if I shall ever again read the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette*” (41). This disruption of the narrative calls attention to the position of the narrator herself and ends on a question — why won’t she likely be reading this paper again? If, as is most likely the case, she might no longer have access to the paper, we can picture an island native now living far removed from Dominica remembering this debate. “Again the Antilles” then becomes a bit of nostalgia, an ironic little snippet of the ridiculous and bizarre situations that are the legacy of British colonialism in the tropical islands.

The story as I first interpreted it reveals a subtle understanding of the relationship between culture, race, and power, an understanding possible chiefly to a native of the island. But an unconscious intelligence is embedded in this story as well that is perhaps somewhat less “removed” than the first reading would have it. The last line of the story displaces the newspaper debate and all its passion to a somewhat remote moment, at once undercutting its immediacy and making it serve as a *representative* rather than a specific or *real* conflict. This is a story remembered from the past and the narrator’s interpretations of the events are mediated by all she has since learned about nationality, race, and power. The narrator plays no active role in the story but rather serves as a guiding consciousness throughout. One must almost “read against” the narrative to *see*, or rather *hear*, the narrator at all.

In the first paragraph, the narrator appears as the vehicle for seeing and describing Papa Dom:

The editor of the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette* lived in a tall, white house with green Venetian blinds which overlooked our garden. I used often to see him looking solemnly out of his windows and would gaze solemnly back, for I thought him a very awe-inspiring person. (39)

This narrator sets her younger self up as almost a mirror of Papa Dom's solemn image. That she once found him awe-inspiring, however, suggests that the narrator was either less well educated, less privileged racially, or quite a bit younger. The diction of the story and the appreciation of the literary debate place the narrator at a similar or higher educational level, and her description of Papa Dom's racial position is removed and condescending: "a stout little man of a beautiful shade of coffee-colour" and "I used to think that being coloured embittered him." She is clearly not English since she refers to "we West Indians" and her judgement of Mr. Musgrave as "a dear, but peppery" (39) places her as a younger woman. In light of Rhys's other Caribbean stories (and her autobiography, *Smile Please*) in which the main character is usually a young girl, it is not surprising that she is in this story as well. But the presence or consciousness of this specific narrator, a white West Indian woman remembering her island girlhood, adds a more complex political reading of the story. Although the narrator was clearly awe-inspired by Papa Dom when she was a child, she has since learned to devalue his achievements and political beliefs and to view them with humour.

As a "mirror" to Papa Dom, then, the girl becomes an ironic reflection to his stately solemnity. The well-educated, well-dressed, serious man stares from his windows deep in thought to be confronted with a mimicking image of a young white girl staring back. Rather than a subject deep in thought, he becomes an object of her gaze and later of her amused memory of island life. Her position as mimic underscores not only his own mimicking of the English Gentleman but the ways that both the "coloured" man and the white girl similarly mimic those figures they both revere and despise. Just as Papa Dom's admiration for English culture is undercut by his hatred of the English, the narrator's valuation of Papa Dom as "a very awe-inspiring person" is undercut by her

adult ironic consciousness in the narration and by the heart of the story she tells — Papa Dom's literary mistake.

Far from being the neutral narrator the text implies, she remains a specific, though anonymous, narrator residing in a specific political space. From this perspective, she determines that Papa Dom is "a born rebel," "a firebrand," an "embittered" coloured man. Similarly, Hugh Musgrave is "a dear, but peppery," and "certainly neither ferocious nor tyrannical." Papa Dom's political positions are rendered almost ridiculous by the way the narrator lists them.

He was against the Government, against the English, against the Island's being a Crown Colony and the Town Board's new system of drainage. He was also against the Mob, against the gay and easy morality of the negroes and "the hordes of priests and nuns that overrun our unhappy Island," against the existence of the Anglican bishop and the Catholic bishop's new palace. (39)

Each of Papa Dom's objections is given the same weight and his political positions become mere personal characteristics, part of his crankiness. He is a "born rebel"; that is, his dissatisfactions are a product of his personality, not of specific political problems.

If Papa Dom exercises any control over the debate by his role as the paper's editor, the narrator, as "editor" of this text, takes that power back. If Papa Dom edits out Musgrave's insult of "damn niggers," the narrator puts it back into the text: "Mr. Musgrave had really written 'damn niggers.'" Presumably, since Papa Dom would like to silence this obscene racism, the narrator must have heard the original insult in the Musgrave camp where she also heard that Musgrave is a fair employer against accusations to the contrary.

Whereas Papa Dom's political and cultural identification is the thematic centre of the story, a submerged tension in the text is the narrator's "social grounding," her choice of community and identity. As a woman, she occupies a similar position to Papa Dom in relation to literary culture. Both the woman and the "colored" man are excluded from the cultural world of Shakespeare and Chaucer so carefully guarded by white Englishmen like Musgrave. The narrator's identification with Papa Dom, however, is obstructed by the promise of social power she gains by siding with the white English (male) colonialists. The story allows us to see Rhys

simultaneously asking challenging questions about cultural identification and race, of the sort that Frantz Fanon asks later in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and disclosing through the unconscious of the text itself the racial and political ambivalence of the "settler discourse" and particularly of native white women.

The narrator of "Again the Antilles" stands between the European and Caribbean cultures. Like Papa Dom, she is a product of the two cultures and, like him, she is a native West Indian writer who will never entirely be accepted by the guardians of English literature and political power. As a woman writer, Rhys creates a "colored" West Indian writer to represent her own exclusion, but as a member of the settler class she nonetheless evaluates his literary endeavours with scorn. From her unique position as a white West Indian woman writer, Rhys portrays the tensions and ambivalences of Creole culture that go unexamined in English texts of imperialism.

It is, nevertheless, the power of these English texts and of Anglo-centric education, not to mention economic necessity, that sends colonial-born writers to England to pursue their literary aspirations. The creation of the colonial subject, therefore, takes place not only in the colony but in the "Mother Country" as well. The white or coloured Caribbean characters of Rhys's novels, like Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* or Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and in her short stories, like Selina Davis in "Let Them Call It Jazz" or the narrator in "Trio," "return" to the "Mother Country" of their parents or grandparents. But instead of feeling themselves nurtured in the "Home" they have been so persuasively educated to expect, they find themselves once again in exile, this time not on the frontier, but in the heart of the metropolis.⁶ At the centre of Rhys's writing is her extremely powerful deconstruction of this "family" — the "mother" country, England or France, and her "children," the colonies.

The metaphor of "family" for political relations is not haphazard, but highlights the exploitation that Rhys sees at the heart of both the political and social family systems. Rhys connects this political and sexual exploitation in much of her fiction. Her characters' "homesickness" is the result of the unhealthy relationships permitted by the myths surrounding "family," both political

and familial. The relationship between family and political place can be seen in Rhys's short story "Trio," an early story about West Indians in Paris, and in the few critical readings of the story.

The two-page story is the description by a third-person narrator of three West Indians, a man, a woman, and a girl, eating in a Parisian restaurant. Like "Again the Antilles," also published in Rhys's first volume of stories, "Trio" is the study of racial location in which the three variously "colored" patrons and the narrator, who from her valuations of the others' pigmentation is presumably white, occupy different racial categories. Nevertheless, from the narrator's point of view, as West Indian compatriots and foreigners, these four characters occupy the same political space. The narrator describes the three dinner companions as follows:

The man was very black — coal black, with a thick silver ring on a finger of one hand. He wore a smart grey lounge suit, cut in at the waist, and his woolly hair was carefully brushed back and brilliantined. The woman was coffee-coloured and fat. She had on the native Martinique turban, making no pretension to fashion. Her bodice and skirt gaped apart and through the opening a coarse white cotton chemise peeped innocently forth. . . . From the Antilles. . . .

Between them was a girl, apparently about fifteen, but probably much younger. She sat very close to the man and every now and then would lay her head on his shoulder for a second. . . . There was evidently much white blood in her veins: the face was charming.

She had exactly the movements of a very graceful kitten, and he, appreciative, would stop eating to kiss her . . . long, lingering kisses, and, after each one she would look round the room as if to gather up a tribute of glances of admiration and envy — a lovely, vicious little thing. . . . From the Antilles, too. You cannot think what homesickness descended over me. . . . (*Collected* 34)

In an article on the use of physical place in Rhys's work, Kevin Magarey describes this story as "a loving description of a Martinique family in a Paris restaurant" (Magarey 55). At first I dismissed this reading because it differed so radically from my own interpretation of the relationship between the members of this "trio." How could Magarey interpret the "long, lingering kisses" and the "huge delight" the girl provides the man by jumping up from the table and singing and dancing with feverish excitement

as a loving description of family relations? While I do disagree with Magarey's reading of the story, it is provocative to consider what in the story *itself* could lead to such an interpretation. In other words, the gender and age configurations of the trio *can* be seen to constitute an ironic almost-family. It is significant that Rhys presents as a tableau a relationship between a young girl and her dubious guardians, an older man and woman. The relationship for all its apparent gaiety is not a happy one. Feverishly the girl sings a patois song "*F'en ai marre*," roughly translated "I'm fed up with it," while the older woman, trying to keep her quiet, proudly attests to the girl's charm and teasing allure: "*Mais . . . ce qu'elle est cocasse, quand même!*" (35).

Far from reading this story as a loving description, I read it as a frightening and unsettling mystery, a story in which the subject (that is, both the issue and the consciousness in the story) is missing. While the story is primarily description, it is not a story of disclosure but of secrecy. The most obvious and unanswered question of the story is what the relationship among the three characters actually is. Is the older woman the girl's nurse? ("Doudou," she calls her, the comforting name Christophine gives Antoinette.) Is she in a position to protect this girl, and if so why is she not doing so? What is the economic relationship between the man with the "thick silver ring" and the frumpy woman, and are the girl's sexual favours to the man part of the "family" economics? What looks like a family is likely the bartering of the daughter; at the heart of the gaiety is weariness and a plea for help.

When "Trio" is set next to the family economics of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the exploitation of the young girl is obvious. It is the myth and appearance of family that permits Mason (with the help of his son Richard) to barter his step-daughter to "Rochester." In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys reveals that family relationships are at root the legal terms, the excuse, that allow father, brother, and husband to define and use the daughter as exchange value between themselves and to transfer the wealth of the colonies once and for all to English banks. When Christophine (who herself became a commodity on the occasion of the Cosway wedding) advises Antoinette to take her money, "pick up your skirt and walk out,"

Antoinette must explain that English law denies her, now that she is "Rochester's" wife, her money and freedom:

"... I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him."

"What you tell me there?" she said sharply.

"That is English law."

"Law! That Mason boy fix it, that boy worse than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights."⁷ (110)

The much noted repetition in Rhys's fiction of the relationship between a younger passive woman and an older seemingly "care-taking" man underscores what Rhys saw as the exploitation inherent in sexual and colonial relations when they are legitimized by the ideology of family-like relations. In their studies of the Black Exercise Books Rhys kept, Teresa O'Connor and Mary Lou Emery point to the importance of Rhys's "psycho-sexual involvement" as a young girl in Dominica with the elderly British Mr. Howard who took her for rides in his carriage and told her "serial stories" involving the two of them in violent and sadomasochistic sex, always concluding with "her own sexual submission and humiliation" (O'Connor 4, 25-26).⁸ Mary Lou Emery sees in this relationship and in Rhys's autobiographical story of it, "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose," not only an analysis of an individual psychological experience, but of a more general sociological and political relationship as well (Diss. 16-19). In addition to the critique of colonial relations, Emery recognizes in Rhys's stories a connection between this particular kind of exploitation and the myth of "the Family." The lovers who look something like fathers — Captain Cardew in "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose," Walter Jeffries in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Hugh Heidler in *Quartet* (1929), or the "coal black" man in "Trio" — all legitimate their sexual exploitation by their roles as advisers and financial caretakers. But the mother figures, like the woman in "Trio" or Hester in *Voyage in the Dark*, provide as little protection for the young women as did Rhys's own mother in the Mr. Howard episode. The parentless, particularly fatherless, young women in these stories long for the security of "belonging" which is promised but ultimately denied them by the social and political family. They are neither daughters nor wives in their relationships; they are prostitutes or

"kept" mistresses. The mistress, whom Emery argues (*Rhys* 98) operates as a third term between wife and prostitute ("good" and "bad" woman),⁹ occupies a similar position to that of Papa Dom the "colored" man, neither black nor white, whose existence threatens the colonial dichotomies of racial difference. The "almost the same but not quite" status of these figures underscores both the seeming precariousness and the ultimate intransigence of these racial and sexual hierarchies.

Although the ambiguity of Rhys's social place as a white Creole woman allows her to observe the instabilities inherent in such colonial binarisms, the ambivalence of her position can also be seen in "Trio." The two centres, or rather gaps, in the story provide an intriguing connection and antithesis. The first, we have seen, is the unknown position of the young girl in the triangle of the almost-family. The second is the unknown identity and relation of the white Creole "watcher," the narrator. What we know by the last line is that the narrator feels related to the trio, and that this relationship would probably be unrecognized (for racial reasons) by the rest of the patrons in the restaurant: "It was because these were my compatriots that in that Montparnasse restaurant I remembered the Antilles." These two crucial gaps in the story connect the narrator's political relationship with the trio with the "familial" relationship of the three diners. While we are never sure how the three belong together, we are told that the narrator belongs with them as a "compatriot" in a way she does not with other Parisians. By claiming this more intimate relationship with these three strangers, the white Creole narrator creates another almost-family. While it allows her a place of "belonging" in her European alienation, it also underemphasizes the important racial differences between the trio and herself, and thereby masks the economic exploitation embedded in *their* relationship. In fact, the narrator's "home-sickness" depends on a memory of island culture that undoubtedly privileged her economically at the expense of black West Indians like the ones she watches in the restaurant. The narrator's claim of egalitarian fraternity evoked by her use of "compatriot" is one-sided; whether or not any of the trio would experience this bond with the narrator as anything more than a romantic myth is questionable.

At the same time that Rhys reveals an ugliness at the heart of an accepted structure of power, the family, she recreates a mythic family of Caribbeans. As a white Creole she can see the exploitative use of the ideology of the family by British men such as "Rochester," Mr. Sawyer in "The Day They Burned the Books," or Captain Cardew in "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose." But her very longing for a fulfilment of the empty myth of the British Family leads her to adopt a romantic national family which, not unlike the British version, claims loyalty and safety where none exists.

In this way, we can read "Trio" with the same strategy we used when reading "Again the Antilles." On one level, we can appreciate the subtle connections Rhys makes regarding the racial, cultural, and sexual relationship she perceives. On another level, we can ask where these perceptions are coming from and what additional story is being told. By naming what goes unnamed in the text, in this case the racial and political location of the narrator, we can recognize a possible strain or discomfort that determines the shape and scope of the story. In other words, the story that is told can be seen as a defensive gesture masking the "real" story the author has to tell. In this case, the story of the man's and woman's use of the young girl is told instead of the story of the narrator's (or Rhys's) use of black Caribbeans. Just as Rhys focussed her attention on Charlotte Brontë's off-stage Bertha and discovered a story that had not yet been told, so we can find rich and important stories embedded in Rhys's own texts. If the story Rhys tells critiques the metaphors that sustain colonialist politics (metaphors linking race to culture or family to Empire), the story embedded within it reveals the collusion and participation in this politics of even such an astute critic. The nostalgia of the narrators in both "Again the Antilles" and "Trio" becomes the point of entry into the not-told story. That nostalgia, and the contradictions it reveals, is the mark of the white Creole woman writer, who occupies a position of both privilege and estrangement. Reading for the silence of the stories tells us much about the seductive power of colonialist metaphors and myths even for those who, like Rhys, recognize their disastrous effects.

NOTES

- ¹ Spivak says: "... I am critical of the binary opposition Coloniser/Colonised. I try to examine the heterogeneity of 'Colonial Power,' and to disclose the complicity of the two poles of that opposition as it constitutes the disciplinary enclave of the critique of imperialism" (qtd. in McRobbie 13).
- ² In *Anti-Semite and the Jew*, Jean Paul Sartre introduced the term "manichaeism" that Fanon and Abdul JanMohamed use in reference to Colonialist ideology. These theorists strongly critique Mannoni's claim that the colonial drama takes place between two already constituted personalities — the independent personality of the European and the dependent personality of the Malagasy. According to Mannoni, not all peoples can be colonized — only those who experience the psychological need for dependence. Fanon, a black psychoanalyst, and Memmi, a Jewish Tunisian, both counter this portrayal of static cultural psychologies by insisting on the *interactional* relationship between colonizers and colonized natives. As Fanon puts it, what "Mannoni has forgotten is that the Malagasy alone no longer exists; he has forgotten that the Malagasy exists *with the European*" (96-97). In 1927, in the two short stories I analyze here, Rhys begins to explore these questions of the ambivalence of colonial relationships.
- ³ Parry argues that Rhys's unique representation of Creole culture "is dependent on both [the English colonialist and the black Jamaican] yet singular, [and is an] . . . enunciation of a specific settler discourse, distinct from the texts of imperialism" (37). Discussing the debate about Rhys's place as a West Indian writer, Kenneth Ramchand disagrees with Edward Brathwaite's rejection of white Creole writing. As Brathwaite puts it: "White Creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf, and have contributed too little culturally as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea." (qtd. in Ramchand 99)
- ⁴ Edward Brathwaite explores the effect of this alien education on Caribbean writers:
- [O]ur educational system . . . insisted that not only would English be spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean, but that the educational system would carry the contours of an English heritage. Hence . . . Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen — British literature and literary forms, the models that were intimate to Europe, that were intimate to Great Britain, that had very little to do, really, with the environment and reality of the Caribbean — were dominant in the Caribbean educational system. (18)

The Caribbean, in Brathwaite's term, is a "cultural disaster area" where writers know how to write about falling snow, but not about the hurricanes that are their own lived experience. As an example of the ambivalent perceptual position of Caribbean writers and of their literary adaptations, Brathwaite cites Caribbean children's school essays:

Now the Creole adaptation to [the English educational system] is the little child who, instead of writing in an essay, "The snow was falling on the fields of Shropshire" (which is what our children literally were writing until a few years ago . . .), wrote "The snow was falling on the cane fields." The child had not yet reached the obvious statement that it wasn't snow at all, but rain that was probably falling on the cane fields. She was trying to have both cultures at the same time. (19)

And that, Brathwaite argues, is creolization.

- ⁵ See also her later short story "The Day They Burned The Books" (1968) in which she pursues the questions of cultural colonialism and the ambivalent position of whites and those of mixed background born in the Caribbean and educated as British subjects.
- ⁶ Kenneth Ramchand, in his analysis of Rhys's fiction and her place as a West Indian (as opposed to English) writer, compares her novel *Voyage in the Dark* with fiction written by black West Indian writers in England (George Lamming and Samuel Selvon are obvious examples): "its critique of English life against the background of a West Indian existence full of warmth, colour and spontaneity brings it very close in temper to the literature of negritude" (100).
- ⁷ Christophine's prophesy is doubly ironic when one recalls Rhys's connection between England and Hell in both "Temps Perdi" and Antoinette's dream: "It would be a very humorous idea if England was designated as the land of the dead . . . as hell. In such a form, in truth, England has appeared to many a stranger" (Collected 257).
- ⁸ Teresa O'Connor quotes extensively from the Black Exercise Books Rhys kept and which are now housed in the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa.
- ⁹ For Emery's excellent discussion of the meanings of prostitution and of the roles for women who are not quite prostitutes but are mistresses or "tarts," see Chapter 5 of her book on Rhys. Emery also suggests that the prostitute is imagined in racial as well as sexual terms, and that in *Voyage in the Dark*, Hester's version of the lady/whore dichotomy actually reveals itself as a lady/"nigger" dichotomy (75).

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