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Perspectives

The Narrative Mood of Jean Rhys' *Quartet*

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Abstract: This article evaluates the application of dominant institutional discourses, such as psychoanalysis, in the interpretation of literary fiction. I take up the case of Jean Rhys and her 1929 novel *Quartet*. Both author and novel have been analyzed through the concept of masochism, as creating masochistic characters or a masochistic aesthetic. But what do we mean when we classify or "diagnose" authors of literature or fictional characters as in the case of Rhys' and *Quartet*'s protagonist? Against this mode of reading, I argue that Rhys' novel asks us, in various ways, to understand it on its own terms, suggesting a mode that I call *immanent reading*. It enjoins the reader to understand rather than to classify the famously problematic Rhys "heroine." Ultimately, *Quartet* foregrounds the instability of moral and social positions, implicitly arguing against what it calls the "mania for classification" employed by the novel's antagonists. *Quartet* cautions against diagnostic interpretations by dramatizing scenes of hypothetical focalization, emphasizing the modal nature of reality, and providing the novel with its characteristically shadowy mood. *Mood* is a term drawn from Gérard Genette, which describes how certain narrative choices and devices (or *mode*) compose a discursive narrative atmosphere (or *mood*). This project suggests the untapped potential of narratology for analyzing affect in fictional narrative.

Keywords: Jean Rhys, modernism, psychoanalytic criticism, affects, mood, narratology

Deleuze treats differences in literary techniques . . . as evidence for ostensible differences between "sadism" and "masoch-

> ism." But what are the "sadism" and "masochism" of which he speaks? Are they literary genres? Practices of living sadists and masochists? Floating formations of desire?
>
> Gayle Rubin, "Sexual Traffic" (93)

> It was astonishing how significant, coherent and understandable it all became after a glass of wine on an empty stomach. . . . The Place Blanche, Paris, Life itself. One realized all sorts of things. *The value of an illusion, for instance, and that the shadow can be more important than the substance*.
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> Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (23; emphasis added)

I. Introduction: The Trouble with Masochism

Jean Rhys' first novel *Quartet* (1929) is an infamous *roman à clef* about the affair between Rhys and Ford Madox Ford, which inevitably involved their respective partners, Jean Lenglet and Stella Bowen. Despite its real-life inspiration, however, *Quartet* has an aesthetic life of its own. Marya Zelli is the protagonist and center of consciousness of the novel. The other central characters are Hugh and Lois Heidler, a wealthy English art dealer and his wife, who is a painter; and Stephan Zelli, Marya's husband, who is also an art dealer of sorts. The Heidlers rule the British expatriate scene in 1920s Paris. Stephan is arrested soon after the story begins for trafficking in stolen artifacts. Stephan's imprisonment is the impetus for Marya's accepting the Heidlers' offer to move in with them (48). Soon after, Heidler announces his love for Madame Zelli. At first, Marya resists Heidler's overtures, but Lois—of all people—convinces her to stay and give in to him. Marya eventually becomes Heidler's mistress, while Stephan languishes in prison. A year later, before Stephan is released, Heidler tells Marya that she must leave her husband or the affair is over. Torn, Marya confesses to Stephan that she and Heidler are lovers. The novel ends when, in the words of Rhys' long time editor Francis Wyndham,"[n]umbed by misery, Marya mismanages the situation and loses both men" ("Introduction," 7). It is the nature of this "misery" that is in contention, then as now.

Some have read the misery of Rhys' heroines through the psychoanalytic lens of masochism. In a recent collection, *Rhys Matters* (2013),

Jennifer Mitchell builds on the plentiful readings of masochism in Rhys and *Quartet*. Mitchell's intervention draws on Gilles Deleuze and rehabilitates masochism by applying a feminist standpoint, seeing it as "empowering."[1] Rather than proposing another version of a Rhys heroine as "victim,"[2] Mitchell argues that Marya's affair with Heidler—and her tortured dynamic with his wife—constitute a scenario of masochism for all three participants.[3] "The impulse to *diagnose* Marya's masochism as self-destructive and, therefore, victimizing undercuts the ways in which Marya accesses autonomy and satisfaction," Mitchell writes (203–04; emphasis added). Mitchell explains that Marya "begins to relish the torturous position that she occupies" (204). Mitchell thus recuperates Marya's seeming weakness as a position of strength—albeit one vexed by the definition of masochism as self-induced suffering. The novel is rescued through the agency of psychoanalytic discourse—a systematic mode of knowing fortified by institutional power, premised on categorical classification. Yet, as I will demonstrate, it is this form of institutionalized knowledge that the novel itself challenges.

I cite this example because it engages in the psychoanalysis of literary characters, even the psychoanalysis of literary style.[4] And while there is much vibrant work on the intersection of modernism and masochism, especially on Rhys, this paper opens a space for methodological questions about the use of psychopathological categorization in the context of literary interpretation. My argument, however, is not against "clinical" interpretations of literature. Rather, I am more interested in the reading practice that I think Rhys' novel invites us to adopt, in its narrative technique, as well as in its content.

II. Resisting the "mania for classification"

The novel is narrated largely from the protagonist's point of view, which means that most of the narrative is internally focalized.[5] Given the predominance of Marya's focalization, it is important to note that in the first two chapters there are certain passages that depart from this pattern, where the narrator addresses the reader directly and sketches Marya's background: "Marya, *you must understand*, had not been suddenly and ruthlessly transplanted from solid comfort to the hazards of

Montmartre. Nothing like that. Truth to say, she was used to *a lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds*" (15; emphasis added). The direct address to the reader, in "you must understand," frames Marya Zelli as a deracinated figure before the affair even begins, foreshadowing her sense of feeling like a "ghost walking in a *vague, shadowy world*" (57; emphasis added).[6] What the reader "must understand" is that Marya was already "used to" living in the half lit world of the demimonde; she is a former chorus girl, and her husband Stephan sells art works of uncertain provenance (including what he claims was Napoleon's sword). This passage echoes one in the previous chapter, which also characterizes Marya as not only transient but undefined: "there were moments when she realized that her existence, though delightful, was haphazard. It lacked, as it were, solidity; it lacked the necessary fixed background" (8).

These two passages, linked by their common language, and their external view of the protagonist, serve as framing devices. What is more, the singularity of the direct address suggests something about the overall *mood* of the narrative. The mood of Rhys' novel is almost palpable as an atmosphere that sustains hazy perception, epistemological uncertainty, and emotional instability in the not-so-transparent minds of the characters and in the narrative discourse that envelops and instantiates them. *Quartet* is a storyworld made of various shadings of light and dark, a dynamic chiaroscuro of shadow and illusion. Another narrative frame that situates Marya in a world of "shadow" and "illusion" occurs at the end of Chapter 2: "It was astonishing how significant, coherent and understandable it all became after a glass of wine on an empty stomach. . . . The Place Blanche, Paris, Life itself. One realized all sorts of things. *The value of an illusion, for instance, and that the shadow can be more important than the substance"* (23; emphasis added).

In what follows, I argue that this preliminary framing of the protagonist can also help us understand the novel as a whole. In particular, I focus on a narrative technique—focalization—which, I argue, models for the reader how to understand the novel itself as a "vague, shadowy world." It is this world of shadow and illusion that the novel wants readers to value, to view the "shadow" as "more important than the substance." This direct address to the reader thus signals an important

moment, one that solicits the reader's understanding of Marya. Note, however, that the narrator does not ask us to diagnose—or classify—her.

As the reading of masochism in Rhys indicates, many critics use formal classification or psychoanalytic diagnosis to interpret the novel. Yet, in so doing, such critics mirror the Heidlers' way of "reading," their mode of knowing, what the novel calls the "mania for classification" (60, 118). This "mania for classification" is linked to institutional forms of knowledge: normative discourses, like psychoanalysis, that function as heavy instruments of power. Marya claims that Heidler "crushed her. He bore [her] down" (119), at one point noting how "He had everything on his side . . . Everything. Including Logic and Common Sense" (119). The Heidlers stand for this powerful way of knowing, a logical and commonsensical mode of putting people into categories, and, in so doing, exerting discursive control over social reality.

By contrast, the narrator's language of understanding introduces a mode of knowing based on *affective* connection with social experience, either first- or second-hand, by attending to subjective accounts of that experience. As Stephan, Marya's husband, notes, "You don't know what it is, *la misère*. Nobody knows what it is till it's got them" (172; emphasis in original). The only way to know his misery, Stephan claims, is to experience it. Barring first-hand experience of *la misère*, the narration proposes a secondary way of knowing—what the narrator calls "understanding." Another example of the "mania for classification" as an oppressive mode of knowing occurs when Marya critiques the Heidlers for "[i]magining they *know a thing* when they *know its name*" (130; emphasis added). She adds that "Lois and he [Hugh] pretended to be fair and were hard as hell underneath. . . . [T]hey couldn't feel anything and pretended that nobody else could" (130). Here, Marya challenges the Heidlers' propensity for labeling or classifying a thing ("knowing its name") by suggesting that it is a form of *mistaken* understanding. She adds that they share a rigid incapacity to "feel" and, by the same token, the Heidlers "pretend nobody else could" feel as well. The Heidlers are thus faulted for callousness ("hard as hell underneath") and for a lack of sympathy ("they couldn't feel anything"). Their lack of feeling is self-serving ("pretended nobody else could") and ensures a studied lack of

curiosity about others' feelings. Lacking empathy and sympathy, they project an objectifying, classifying gaze: knowing the "name" of something, they falsely "imagine" they know *the thing itself*.[7] This is what the narration calls the Heidlers' "mania for classification."

This "mania for classification" comes with the conviction of being correct in all matters, which makes others fall in line with the Heidlers' chauvinistic, self-authorizing point of view—one Marya describes as "strangely without pity" (64). Heidler rules the colony of English expatriates in Montparnasse, a veritable "autocrat," per his wife (65). These examples of the Heidlers' power to assert their own point of view is contrasted with Marya's powerlessness: her "longing to assert her point of view" (60) is repeatedly thwarted by the social authority of the Heidlers and their cronies. The tension in the narrative, then, consists in two ways of being in—and knowing—the world. One way of being in the world, in the words of the novel, is by following that which is demanded by the powerful and the elite, by the normative forces of society, as represented by the respectable Heidlers. They rule the British *Montparnos*, while the Zellis live a "haphazard" "existence" (8) in the "hazards of Montmartre" (15); they are disreputable "vagabonds" (60). As opposed to authoritative classification, which is the *modus operandi* of the Heidlers, understanding requires a capacity for feeling and respect for others' feelings—a suspension of prejudgment and a desire to connect through empathy.

We can profitably read *Quartet* by seeking to understand it as a cautionary tale against the "mania for classification" that dooms Marya at the hands of the Heidlers; the moral of this modernist novel, if there is one, is to resist this urge to classify, to try a different approach, one less beholden to existing norms and institutionally validated systems of knowing. To "understand," in my reading, means to read sympathetically and empathetically, by going along with the experiences of the protagonist, even as she descends into misery during her romantic obsession. To objectify these experiences, by classifying or even diagnosing them, violates the mood of the novel, its focus on subjective experience and empathetic understanding. Understanding that misery, rather than classifying it, is ultimately the point: this hermeneutic practice is rep-

resented not only by the experiences of the protagonist but also in the way those experiences are narrated in the discourse of the novel. In other words, we are meant to understand a "lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds" as the novel's aesthetic principle. The novel's style of presentation values shadow and illusion rather than schemes of classification.[8]

The formal paths of the novel turn on two ways of knowing—"classifying" or "understanding." Hence, the meaning of *Quartet* is partially about how to read it—or how to understand the stories that people tell about themselves and others, as well as their complex social situations. One can know the name of a thing without understanding it. Or one can understand the thing itself, but only by living through it, as Stephan warns, or by the capacity to feel and understand others' feelings—their affective reality. In sum, the narrative's injunction to understand functions as a counterpoint to the classifying moves made by two of the story's central characters, which are, in turn, mirrored in critical approaches to Rhys. The text responds to the false certainty of naming, classification, or even clinical diagnosis, with the ambiguities of subjective viewpoints and their limited purchase on social reality, including the reality of other viewpoints.

While classification is not synonymous with diagnosis, the two modes of knowing assert a normative purchase on reality, a systematic and categorical knowledge. Understanding in this novel is hazy, intuitive, affective, and unsystematic—as, one might say, befits the hazy, "shadowy" mood of *Quartet* and its heroine. Such shadowy form of knowing as understanding leads to over- or misinterpretation. The problem of knowing and perceiving through the haziness of understanding, as insight into others whose motivations are unknown to us, is the subject of the next section.

The narrative plainly elevates the problem of how to understand accurately without classifying or pathologizing the object of one's interest, the object of one's "nonce taxonomy," to quote Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (23, *passim*). In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick coins the phrase "nonce taxonomy" to indicate ways of knowing that ordinary people perform as they go about their ordinary lives, as opposed to modes of knowing that bend to the force field of institutional power.

Such systems of knowledge are what Foucault termed "power-knowledge," linked to modern discourses of sexology and psychiatry, such as masochism and hysteria. A similar ethical and aesthetic argument to Foucault's—that knowledge is a form of power and control, deployed as a mode of social domination—is played out at the level of *Quartet*'s formal concerns with focalization and thematic concerns with intersubjective conflict. Such conflicts are the "obsessions of love and hate" that beset *Quartet*'s central characters (97). The novel employs subtle techniques of focalization in the service of representing fraught dynamics, in contrast to what could be called the "sadism of epistemology" inherent in the Heidlers' "mania for classification."[9]

As narratologist Monika Fludernik claims, in many fictional narratives, "we come across a strategy of repeating keywords and word fields for structuring purposes. . . . In [certain] texts . . . certain key words keep recurring, like leitmotifs. Because of the associations which they conjure up in the context of characters and plot, they become symbols which suggest connections and arguments at a higher level" (76–77). "To the best of my knowledge," Fludernik adds, "there is no technical term for this" (77). Although I too lack a label for these repeating terms, I would suggest *immanent reading* for the reading process they inspire.

III. *Ménage à Trois*

At the end of the affair, underscoring the leitmotif of "backgrounds," Marya waits for Heidler at a café—cafés being "the unvarying background" of their romantic rendezvous (177). This phrasing of "unvarying background" echoes the "solid" or "fixed" backgrounds that we are told Marya lacks. In the passage about the pernicious impact of the "mania for classification," Marya's free-indirect thought views Heidler as

> forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hôtel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to. A *petite femme*. It was, of course, part of his *mania for classification*. But he did it with such conviction that she, miserable weakling that she was, found herself trying to live up to his idea of her. (118; second emphasis added)

Beware of such fixity, such solidity, the novel argues. Such reward comes at a steep price: it reduces Marya to whatever category the Heidlers impose upon her—here, a *petite femme*, "the little woman who lived in" dingy hotels "for the express purpose of being made love to." Heidler seeks to control her, often admonishing her not to get "hysterical" during their quarrels (103, 148, 149, 161).

A more expansive example of the Heidlers' "mania for classification" occurs soon after Marya moves in. Lois begins to paint Marya's portrait, Lois' "chest well out, her round, brown eyes travelling rapidly from the sitter to the canvas and back again" (59). The reference to Marya as "the sitter" precludes Marya as the focal point. For Marya would not perceive herself as "the sitter," or the object captured by the painter's gaze. Such an alienated perspective properly belongs to the painter or the narrator, or both. Indeed, if there is a focalizing subject, it turns out to be Lois herself:

> The movement of her [Lois'] head was oddly like that of a bird picking up crumbs. She talked volubly. She would often stop painting to talk, and it was evident that she took Montparnasse very seriously indeed. She thought of it as a possible stepping-stone to higher things and she liked explaining, classifying, fitting the inhabitants (that is to say, of course, the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants) into their proper places in the scheme of things. The Beautiful Young Men, the Dazzlers, the Middle Westerners, the Down-and-Outs, the Freaks who never would do anything, the Freaks who just possibly might. (60)

Focalization in this passage is marked by the shift to free-indirect discourse, which does not simply report Lois' perspective but also uses her idiom, as in her use of social labels such as "Freaks". Lois' free-indirect speech, however, is ironically parroted by the simile of her head's movement "oddly" resembling "that of a bird." In addition to what Brian McHale calls the "lyric fusion" (275) between narrator and character that occurs in free-indirect discourse, there is also an ironic fusion effected through the free-indirect style, anticipated by the deflating description of Lois speaking "volubly" and the "bird" simile. Even as Lois' beliefs

and expressions are faithfully represented as tonally imperious, she is meant to seem ridiculous—as when admitting she "took Montparnasse very seriously indeed," but only as a project to advance the Heidlers' social ambition. But the key signal of the narrator's ironic portrayal of Lois in this passage is the sardonic parenthetical phrase, "of course, the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants." The free-indirect narration doubles down on Lois' penchant to "explain . . . classify . . . and fit" their Anglo-Saxon brethren as if exercising god-like powers, putting them in their "proper places . . . in the scheme of things." The Heidlers' ironically pathetic arrogance and naked social ambition is exposed from the inside-out, as the contents of Lois' mind—discursive and ideological—are laid bare in brazenly categorical, opportunistic terms that echo the "stepping-stone" notion that ends the free-indirect report: "the Freaks who never would do anything, the Freaks who just possibly might".

Lois' classifying of their social milieu is a means to world domination—of the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants' world, of course. Ironically, the narrator's ventriloquism of her point of view performs the same classifying operation it deprecates. By parroting Lois' penchant for classifying, the narrator is "explaining," "classifying," and "fitting" Lois into *her* "proper place in the scheme of things." What is more, the syntax of the free-indirect report mirrors the taxonomical impulse—a "mania for classification"—that is the subject of the passage. After the paratactic parallel series of "explaining, classifying, fitting" the inhabitants into their "proper place," the next sentence presents another parallel series, that of the "Anglo-Saxon inhabitants" living in Montparnasse—the parallelism is mirrored in the lack of a final conjunction, "the Freaks who never would do anything, the Freaks who just possibly might." Hence, the double parallel series frames Lois with taxonomical precision, "fitting" Lois herself into her "proper place," and then in turn enumerates the social types that her taxonomy fits into their proper places.

By contrast, the narrator describes Marya in the next sentence as "longing to assert her point of view" (60). Lois' ironic detachment is contrasted with the warmth of Marya's longing. Mrs. Heidler exerts a powerful benefactor's control, manifested through a classifying gaze. As opposed to Lois, Marya has trouble "asserting" her own point of view

while caught in the harsh light of the Heidlers' social gaze. While Marya struggles to describe her life with Stephan, Lois characterizes it coolly and crisply, in contrast to the sentimental effusions that characterize Marya's speech.

> Sometimes she [Lois] would ask questions, and Marya, longing to assert her point of view, would try to describe the charm of her life with Stephan. The vagabond nights, the fresh mornings, the long sleepy afternoons spent behind drawn curtains.
>
> "Stephan's a—vivid sort of person, you see. What a stupid word! I mean natural. Natural as an animal. He made me come alive; he taught me everything. I was happy. Sometimes just the way the light fell would make me unutterably happy."
>
> "Yes, of course," Lois would say intelligently. "I can quite see how he got hold of you. Quite." (60)

The contrast in worldviews could not be more evident, nor the rhetorical precision that characterizes Lois' curt reply from Marya's rambling, vague, and emotional speech. On the one hand, Marya struggles to explain the "charm of her life with Stephan," using abstract diction such as "vivid" to describe him, a word that she realizes is too vague to describe a person: "What a stupid word!" In contrast, Lois is presented, again, as a shrewd, calculating observer, a social climber who sees life in Montparnasse only as a "stepping stone to higher things." In a related passage, Marya grants that Lois is "extremely intelligent," insofar as she banks on conventional opinion to legitimize her viewpoint: "She expressed well-read opinions about every subject under the sun . . . and was so perfectly sure of all she said that it would have been a waste of time to contradict her" (60).

In fact, to describe Stephan as "[n]atural as an animal" is telling. Stephan is the antithesis—in Marya's mind—of what the Heidlers stand for. He represents a "natural," "vagabond" life, seemingly free from bourgeois hierarchies of social value. This is why Marya can think only of intrinsic, experiential, inarticulate attributes to describe Stephan and their life together: he is "vivid," he "made [Marya] come alive," "taught [her] everything," he made Marya "unutterably happy." No wonder she strug-

gles to explain the charm of their former life! Their charming existence was, precisely, "unutterable," thus incalculable by any measure of social hierarchy or material value. (Not least because such charm led only to Stephan's imprisonment and Marya's dependency on the Heidlers.) The Heidlers' point of view dominates this scene, which takes place just after Marya has moved in. Lois coolly responds to Marya's rhapsodic account of her former life: "'Yes, of course,' Lois would say intelligently. "I can quite see how he got hold of you. Quite'" (60). Lois' repeated "quite" is as cutting as it sounds, as she coldly translates Marya's vague, shadowy web of emotion into a rational social calculus, with winners and losers. Lois implies that Stephan's charm was nothing but a ruse to "get hold of" Marya, a conquest and trap that Marya fell for. Lois coldly deflates Marya's description of true happiness with her husband into the transaction of a predator marking his prey—to view Marya's animal metaphor from Lois' perspective. What Lois sees is not exactly what Marya says, but how she says it—how she struggles to say it, and then how her words are vague and abstract, vainly trying to convey the sense of being "unutterably happy." Such ineffable qualities as "unutterable," "happy," and "vivid" prevent Lois' taking Marya's point of view seriously; they speak different languages of social value, of what counts as a valuable existence.

The two cannot communicate across this ideological divide, which is presented as a tension between incommensurable points of view, each with its own language and rhetorical style. It is thus impossible for Marya to persuade Lois of the value or even the truth of Marya's experience, for such truth cannot be expressed except as ineffable, fleeting ("vagabond"), and already lost. Lois does not understand feeling and the unutterable, but rationality and the calculable: the classifiable. It is no wonder that after this scene, Lois thinks of Marya as "excitable," an emotional creature naïve enough to fall for whatever pretty story Stephan told her. Even Stephan has a "mania for order," indicating how Marya stands apart as overly emotional, which the Heidlers view as a weakness (77, 87, 178). Marya is even dismissively diagnosed by a minor character as a "neurasthenic," while admonished by Heidler's calling her "hysterical." By contrast, the Heidlers have a "sense of proportion" (77).[10]

Finally, note that Marya's rhapsody about her former life with Stephan returns us to the motifs of light, shadow, and illusion associated with the point of view that finds such conditions salutary, rather than alarming: "the long sleepy afternoons spent behind drawn curtains"; "the way the light fell would make me unutterably happy." Marya's rhapsody echoes the narrator's explanation of "the value of an illusion," that "the shadow can be more important than the substance." My point is not just that this example aligns the narrator's sensibility with Marya's; this passage represents a moment when the narrative discourse dramatizes the deep desire ("longing") to present this point of view to an impassive interlocutor. Lois, in turn, can only see what—or, rather, how—she wants to see: "I see how he [Stephan] got hold of you. Quite," thereby nullifying the value of the life being described, transforming it into a vision of Stephan as a manipulator taking advantage of Marya's naïveté to take possession of her. Such possession over others begins by the act of classifying them according to one's own "scheme of things." That scheme defines the Heidlers' worldview as one focused on scheming, and classifying others to advance those schemes.

IV. The Narrative Mood of *Quartet*

One aspect of my main argument is that the narrative design of the novel anticipates the difficulties of interpretation, the reading of other people and social gestures. The novel's key terms highlight why it might be better to understand, rather than to classify or diagnose.

In Gérard Genette's oft-cited *Narrative Discourse* (1980), he claims a distinction between narrative *voice* ("who speaks") and *mode* (originally translated as *mood),* or the "regulation of narrative information" (162), the ways the narrator influences how we interpret that information. "Indeed," Genette writes, "one can tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells, and can tell it *according to one point of view or another*; and this capacity, and the modalities of its use, are . . . what our category of *narrative mood* aims at" (162; emphasis in original). Chief among these modalities is point of view—what Genette coins as "focalization" (168; *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 46).[11] By "regulating [narrative] information" by filtering it through focalizing characters, the figural narrative—restricted

by characters' limited perspectives—offers the illusion of maximum closeness and maximum partiality. This filtering is subjective, and subject to the distortions of individual perspectives. (A famous case in point is the unnamed governess in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* [1898], whose accounts of supernatural phenomena can be construed as mere hallucination.)

Situating narration in subjectivity through focalization, and thus creating a narrative with a characteristically shadowy mood, is the point of departure for my reading of *Quartet*. This novel is a triumph of mood, chiefly through Rhys' experiments in focalization, related by a third-person narrator "who is not one of the characters but who adopts" their point of view (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 168). Genette indicates that narrative mood is a function of perspective and ideology, while the structural hermeneutic distinction between understanding and classification in *Quartet* is mapped by Rhys' handling of the narrative mood, which adopts extensive focalization in ways that are hard to describe within existing narrative theory.[12]

Indeed, in his theory of mood, Genette seems to be hypostasizing the narrative discourse itself as having a certain texture, an overall quality that perhaps cannot be reduced to discrete technical categories that help to constitute it.[13] Marya's love affair with Heidler is similarly encoded with a palpable mood. The novel is as much about *how* it relates the story as about the events that compose the story itself. The narration's overall effect, or what Genette calls its mood, is achieved through its close contact with the "transparent minds" of its central characters, chiefly Marya.[14] But focalized narration is only the beginning of how Rhys achieves the shadowy mood of *Quartet*—a mood that the narrator seems to describe, in relation to Marya's backstory, as "a lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds."

In a sense, I am equivocating on the definition of narrative mood as *mode*—as technique—and mood as *affect*, a quality or intensity of feeling that pervades, much as climate does, a narrative space. A moody painting or musical composition might be tonally colored in varying shades of blue. Rhys, I am arguing, creates a moody book, mood-as-affect, by way of manipulating the narrative discourse in various ways (mood-as-

mode). Ultimately, mood-as-affect and mood-as-mode are one and the same (call it mood-effect). This means that the study of affect in aesthetic forms like literature could benefit from Genette's notion of narrative mood. His theory of mood helps us describe how fiction formulates affect, how fiction generates and regulates affect, through devices and choices in narrative form.

Quartet's characteristic mood is created primarily through the mode of focalization. The third-person narrator filters most of the information through the consciousness of Marya. In this regard, Rhys is doing nothing new. But the mood of the narrative permeates the story world, rendering a world of "shadow" and "illusion." Additionaly, the story of the actual affair itself is not as original—indeed, Ford, Bowen, and Lenglet each wrote their own versions.[15] But what is innovative is the way the novel produces a narrative climate of uncertainty and instability. Rhys does this by various means; focalization is only the beginning of how *Quartet* achieves a shadowy mood. For the remainder of this essay, I focus on how the novel regularly registers a distinctive form of focalization: one that reflects hypothetical points of view.

The narration adopts focalization and various modes of presenting figural consciousness—including extensive use of free-indirect discourse, psycho-narration, and dialogue.[16] But the most peculiar technique is what David Herman calls hypothetical focalization. Briefly, hypothetical focalization (HF), which I define more fully below, is Herman's term for narrative information presented "as if": as in, if there were someone to observe event *x*, this is what she would see. But there is actually no one there—only the invocation of that possibility by the narrator. HF also describes the possibility of an actual observer who perceives event *x* but is not quite sure the event happened as it seemed to. Hypothetical focalization thus creates a story world of uncertainty and instability, a shadowy register of social space peopled with illusions and with illusions about people.

This technique helps imbue the narrative with its characteristic mood and represents the hermeneutics of understanding versus classification that the novel champions.[17] My reading of Rhys' novel as employing

the technique of hypothetical focalization depends on extending this concept from Herman's original description to encompass the way it helps to define the novel's mood. The hypothetical quality of numerous focalized passages also underscores the narrator's gesture toward subjective understanding as opposed to objective classification. Hypothetical focalization at the character level, which is how it most often appears in *Quartet*, entails that individual figures become narrators of other characters' inner lives. Or, they project themselves as such, as in the railcar scene described below.

Before approaching *Quartet*'s employment of hypothetical focalization, I should explain how my account extends Herman's definition. Herman defines hypothetical focalization as the "use of hypotheses . . . about what might be or [might] have been seen or perceived" (231). Herman defines focalization per se as a "perceptual and conceptual frame . . . more or less inclusive or restricted, through which situations and events are presented in a narrative" (231). For Herman,

> Ways of focalizing a story can thus be redescribed as the narrative representation of propositional attitudes, i.e., modes of focalization encode into narrative form various kinds of epistemic stances that can be adopted towards what is being represented in the narrative. . . . [W]hat I am calling HF is the formal marker of a peculiar epistemic modality, in which . . . the *expressed world* counterfactualizes or virtualizes the *reference world* of the text. (231; emphasis in original)

What Herman calls the "expressed world" exists only in the mind of the narrator, that is, its reality is "propositional"; it differs from the actual reality of the story world (or "reference world") as it exists in the narrative. This means that hypothetical focalization is legible in narrative statements invoking a probabilistic perspective, grammatically marked by the conditional or subjunctive mood. If we tie his discussion to Genette's notion of mood, we can see that Herman doubles down on the grammatical metaphor of Genette's narratology, where narrative discourse is structured like a language into tense, voice, and mood. Now we can include in our account of focalization hypothetical statements that

invoke a subjective or conditional perspective that "counterfactualizes or virtualizes" the world of the story.

Yet Herman qualifies his definition of hypothetical focalization: HF involves statements of "what might be or have been perceived—if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue" (231). Herman's examples involve instances that invoke non-existent or "counterfactual" focalizing agents—such as the narrator's interpolation of a hypothetical witness to Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher": "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which . . . made its way down the wall" (qtd. in Herman 237). Herman notes two grammatical signs that "encode . . . hypotheticality": the adverbial operator "perhaps" and the subjunctive mood expressed in the modal auxiliary "might," which, Herman claims, "implies a lack of commitment to the truth of the expressed world relative to the reference world of the story" (237). There is no actual "scrutinizing observer," in other words—only a hypothetical one who, also hypothetically, "might have discovered" the famous crack in the House of Usher. Herman also adduces other forms of HF, instances where, unlike Poe's virtual observer, the focalizor does exist, but only their function as focalizor is hypothetical. In other words, rather than positing an imaginary character who might witness the crack in the House of Usher, a narrative might impute a real character who possibly might function as focalizor, but only provisionally.[18]

Indeed, characters who function as hypothetical focalizors abound in *Quartet*. Thus, when Herman defines HF as "what might be or have been perceived—if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective," he underestimates instances where hypothetical focalization occurs *between characters*—what so-and-so "might be or have been perceiv[ing]" (231), not according to the narrator, but according to another character. As such, I extend Herman's notion of hypothetical focalization to include instances of narrative encoding of hypotheticality that involve *character-based* suppositions about what another character is thinking or perceiving, which also destabilize the reference world by projecting an expressed world that "counterfactualizes or virtualizes" it.

V. Hypothetical Focalization in *Quartet*

There are at least fifteen significant instances of hypothetical focalization in the novel. Ten of these adopt Marya's point of view, presenting Marya's insight into another character. Normally, the adoption of a character's point of view is an instance of what Mieke Bal calls double focalization, "in which [the external narrator] 'looks over the shoulder'" of a character whose point of view is adopted (159). Thus, for Bal, double focalization usually entails the overlay of narrator and focalizor. In *Quartet*, however, double focalization—one actual, the other virtual—often occurs under the nose of the narrator, as it were. In these instances, the point of view is Marya's, while she, in turn, adopts the point of view of another character.[19] These instances depict Marya's free-indirect thought, in which she presumes to understand another's perspective. Often this double perspective is marked as a supposition that can be proven right or wrong.[20]

A key passage occurs in the opening chapter, when Marya meets the Heidlers for the first time. At dinner, Marya observes Lois' eyes, finding them to be

> beautiful, clearly brown, the long lashes curving upwards, but there was a suspicious, almost deadened look in them. "I'm a well-behaved young woman," they said, "and you're not going to catch me out, so don't think it." Or perhaps, thought Marya, she's just thoroughly enjoying her pilaff. (11)

Here, the free-indirect report presents Marya's perception of Mrs. Heidler. At first, Marya thinks that Lois' eyes are physically "beautiful"; however, in the same sentence, they also seem to have a "suspicious, almost deadened look in them." Next comes Marya's hypothetical focalization of Lois, presented as imaginary discourse: "'I'm a well-behaved young woman,' they said, 'and you're not going to catch me out, so don't think it.'" But the following sentence returns to simple focalization, with the narrator's bird's-eye view clearly demarcated: "Or perhaps, thought Marya, she's just thoroughly enjoying" her dinner. Thus, the passage includes different kinds of discourse and different kinds and levels of focalization.

More importantly, the passage encodes conjectures about Mrs. Heidler's personality, based on Marya's perception of the look in Lois' eyes. These conjectures are formulated as a hypothetical statement representing Lois' point of view, imagined as direct discourse. But Marya's hypothetical focalization is immediately qualified, if not cancelled, by her next thought—also presented as conjectural, with the word "perhaps" "indicating possibility and doubt," as Herman understands the "alethic and epistemic functions" of hypothetical focalization (Herman 237, 249n17). Thus, there is an ironic double valence in presenting a hypothetical perspective through direct discourse. To speak what "Lois' eyes . . . said" mimes the indicative mood ("they said"), which is contradicted by the conjecture entailed in one character's knowing what another is thinking. Even if "eyes" were able to "speak," Marya's perception is indicative only of her own vision of Lois, her own "expressed world," even if it is presented, grammatically, in the indicative mood. The mere probability of this "expressed world" is emphasized by the sentence beginning with "perhaps," which casts doubt on this first impression.

Marya's hypothetical focalization of Lois is thus immediately placed under erasure, proven to be fallible, perhaps even mistaken. But the indicative and conditional moods are not so much cancelling as balancing each other: just as the first impression of Lois' eyes are that they are "beautiful but . . ." so is the point of view of Lois as "suspicious" balanced by a much more mundane explanation. This oscillation between darker and lighter impressions of Lois' perspective is mirrored by other instances and, in fact, are structurally indicative of the narrative theme, that of the hermeneutic uncertainty of understanding others' points of view. Marya catches herself getting carried away with Lois' first impression, and, although she sets the conjecture aside for a less suspicious explanation, it nonetheless foreshadows Lois' personality.

Quartet contains several more instances of character-level hypothetical focalization. They involve characters imagining other characters' inner lives. Such cases of hypothetical focalization employ grammatical signals that a character is imagining what another character *would* say or *would be* thinking.[21] These signals indicate an epistemic shift from the

reference world of the story to a counterfactual expressed world of the character.

A related instance bears mentioning, because it shows how a similar technique is employed to depict character-level focalization that is not at all hypothetical; the moment involves Heidler focalizing Marya. Given the surrounding narrative context, double focalization would be the most apt description, narrated as Heidler's free-indirect thought:

> "I'm still fond of her," he told himself. "If only she'd leave it at that."
>
> But no. She took her hands away from her face and started to talk again. What a bore! Now, of course, she was quite incoherent.
>
> "The most utter nonsense," thought Heidler. Utter nonsense about (of all things) the visiting cards stuck into the looking-glass over Lois' damned mantelpiece, about Lois' damned smug pictures and Lois' damned smug voice. (129–30)

Here, Heidler mentally processes what Marya is saying: her trivial complaints about Lois. His interior monologue is quoted directly ("'The most utter nonsense,' thought Heidler"), or narrated as free-indirect discourse ("What a bore!"). But Heidler silently begins to narrate Marya's speech, which he views as little more than nonsense: "she was quite incoherent." There is a reinforcement of this reading, since Marya ends by complaining about "Lois' smug voice," summing up the novel's obsession with voice, with the way characters express their points of view. The free-indirect report ventriloquizes Marya, but is focalized through Heidler. It is a feat of narratorial engineering and stands in contrast to most of the novel's doubly focalized passages, which reveal an expressive, rather than referential, status. Thus, most of the novel's character-level focalizations are not factual; they destabilize the "reference world" of the story by marking the distortions of subjectivity, achieved by attempts at intersubjectivity.

Perhaps the most interesting moment of character-based hypothetical focalization occurs at roughly the midpoint of the book, at the beginning of Chapter 14. The Heidlers and Marya are riding the train to

Brunoy, a fictional town in the South of France, the Heidlers' weekend getaway. For the first time, Marya goes with them. As a consequence, and also for the first time, Marya skips visiting her husband in prison. She chooses Heidler.[22]

> They sat facing her in the railway carriage and she looked at them with calmness, clear-sightedly, freed for one moment from her obsessions of love and hatred. They were so obviously husband and wife, so suited to each other, they were even in some strange way alike. . . .
>
> Lois sat sturdily, with her knees, as usual, a little apart: her ungloved hands were folded over a huge leather handbag; *on her dark face was the expression of the woman who is wondering how she is going to manage about the extra person to dinner. She probably was wondering just that.* (97; emphasis added)

"[F]reed for one moment from her obsessions of love and hatred," Marya, we are told, sees the Heidlers "clear-sightedly," as if objectively. The shift from psycho-narration to free-indirect thought tracks the deepening of perception, from external to internal; from describing how Lois sat, Marya then contemplates what Lois thought. But the final sentence underlines that her image of Lois' consciousness was not necessarily accurate: "She *probably* was wondering just that" signals Marya's personal point of view and colloquial idiom, while underscoring its hypothetical quality, as an observation that may or may not be true. However, it most likely is true, for the narrator observes that Marya is seeing "clear-sightedly." When they reach Brunoy, Marya's supposition is confirmed, as is the source of the double focalization: "Lois said, exactly as Marya had known she would say: 'I must stop on the way because there's not much to eat in the house'" (98).

In this instance, Marya's hypothetical focalization is proven correct. But its suspension as merely subjective is the important point; the reader does not know, yet, whether Marya is right. The narrator confirms that it was Marya's point of view all along and that this point of view is proven right ("exactly as Marya had known she would say"). She was the source of the narrative insight into Lois' interior thoughts. In this case,

Marya does so with a satirical, dismissive bent: the passage focalizing what Lois was "probably" thinking ends with the dismissal of Lois as "[o]bviously of the species wife" (97).

But perhaps the most interesting dimension of the scene is how Marya's hypothetical focalization continues and becomes more affectively charged. Lois becomes weaponized in Marya's eyes:

> There she [Lois] was: formidable, an instrument made, exactly shaped and sharpened for one purpose. She didn't analyse; she didn't react violently; she didn't go in for absurd generosities or pities. Her motto was: "I don't think women ought to make nuisances of themselves. I don't make a nuisance of myself; I grin and bear it, and I think that other women ought to grin and bear it too." (97)

Transforming Lois into a "sharpened" "instrument" is Marya's doing, through her focalization of Lois' motto no less than her idea about what Lois was probably thinking. In this case, the description conveys intense emotion: note the series that renders Lois, in implicit opposition to Marya, as a cool, rational, self-controlled, and powerful—and powerfully masculinized—figure. The vehicle of the metaphor connotes a phallic object—a knife, or, better yet, a scalpel; the word "instrument" invokes a vision of the Heidlers as scientifically classifying, and then penetrating, the object of their interest ("sharpened for one purpose"). Rather than wounding, as Marya does, with "tears . . . futile rages . . . [and] extravagant abandon," Lois cuts clinically with discursive aplomb (117). The clear aggression in the metaphor, however, marks it as less clear-sighted than Marya's previous insight. But both descriptions are presented as of a piece, as Lois appears to Marya. Whether this instance of character-level focalization is objective or simply a fabrication on her rival's part is partially answered by the narrator's corroboration about what "Lois said," which was "exactly as Marya had known she would say."

The meaning of the passage rests on the "probably" more than on the "exactly"—the "shadow" not the substance. After Lois, Marya turns to Heidler, who appears

> like the same chord repeated in a lower key, sitting with his hands clasped in exactly the same posture as hers. Only his eyes were different. He could dream, that one. But his dreams *would not be* many-coloured, or dark shot with flame like Marya's. No, *they'd be cold*, *she thought,* or gross at moments. *Almost certainly gross* with those pale blue, secretive eyes. *It seemed to her* that, staring at the couple, *she had hypnotized herself into thinking, as they did, that her mind was part of their minds* and that she understood why they both so often said in exactly the same tone of puzzled bewilderment: "I don't see what you're making such a fuss about." Of course! And then they wanted to be excessively modern, and *then they'd think*: "After all, we're in Paris." (98; emphasis added)

The italicized portions indicate the partiality or conditionality of Marya's perception of the wealthy married couple. Again, the lens of double focalization projects onto the Heidlers while never leaving Marya's side in their "three-cornered fight" (117). Formally, this moment of hypothetical focalization recapitulates the content of the scene. The form of the narration corroborates the idea that Marya's mind *is* a part of the Heidlers'—or, at least, she thinks so, since she can peer into them. She has "hypnotized herself into thinking" just "as they did"; they seem to share one mind too. But do they *really* believe they are of one mind with Marya? Marya's focalization—one actual ("It seemed to her"), the other virtual (Heidler's eyes "would not be" like hers)—highlights the self-referentiality, the subjectivity, of these impressions, including the impression that one can enter another's mind.

The formal analysis of the passage should also consider the grammatical. There is a shift from the indicative ("there he was") to the conditional mood ("would not be"; "they'd be"; "they'd think"). Such grammatical signs indicate the hiatus between a narrator's access versus a character's access to fictional minds, access that can be proven wrong. The novel's narrative interest turns on the subjectivity of Marya's account, especially while this subjectivity is itself narrating what it presumes is going on in other minds. The narration thus indicates when objectivity falls and

subjectivity reigns, but also when that distinction is blurred, in intersubjective moments when social reality becomes more like a shadow than a substance.

VI. Resisting the "sadisms of epistemology"

Marya's (hypothetical) focalizations, marked as they are in the previous passage with the conditional mood of doubt and probability, create an interesting "modulation of intimacy and distance," in Brian McHale's terms (275–76). When one character seems to focalize another, is it an attempt at empathy? Or, on the contrary, as in the "species wife" episode quoted above, is it a bit of parodic focalization? Focalization is usually reserved for external narration. *Quartet*'s character-level use of hypothetical focalization, however, rhetorically reinforces the thematic obsession of the narrative with narration itself. Specifically, hypothetical focalization allegorizes how narration, or storytelling, is the central theme of the novel. Not storytelling *tout court* (Rhys is too canny for that) but storytelling from a particular point of view. Whose point of view is it? How fallible is that account?[23] These are the kinds of questions the novel poses to the reader. It plunges the reader into the shadow, the illusion, the "lack of solidity and of fixed backgrounds" of subjective accounts, which seem accurate, even objective, but can prove otherwise.

I began this essay with the well-trod background of *Quartet* as a *roman à clef*, since it represents a partial account, one inconsistent with those written by the other principals. The real "Stephan," Jean Lenglet, wrote one of these, *Sous les verrous*.[24] Rhys translated Lenglet's novel as *Barred*, cutting approximately seven thousand words from the original French because it seemed to paint her in a very harsh light (Kappers-den Hollander 45). But what interests me is not the veracity of *Quartet*, measured against the other accounts of the affair. Rather, what interests me is how Rhys formally incorporates the thematic preoccupation—the obsession—with point of view and with the limits that point of view places on the veracity, even the verifiability, of any story. Members of "l'affaire Ford" projected their perspective with varying degrees of success. However, Rhys formulated the mood of the story by foregrounding the ethical and romantic shadows cast by the four central characters. These shadows are cast most

of all by the narrative technique of *Quartet*: one is the extensive use of hypothetical focalization and the self-referential narrative focus on this act as a problem, perhaps the main problem, of the story. The seduction of Marya by Heidler is rendered, as Carole Angier argues, without shedding light on Marya's own culpability and motivations (183–219). But the narrative devices of the novel, especially hypothetical focalization, indicate how the psychological drama of the story lies in its telling and may indeed be a lie in its telling—one can never be too sure. The novel, then, while siding with Marya, engages other aspects of narration that trouble the reference world of the story as seen by the protagonist. Rhys' narrator largely sustains Marya's point of view, while complicating the ruse of focalization itself. This narrative focus on narrative focus at a technical level corresponds to how the narrator describes Marya's background as the lack of a (fixed) background, indicating the radical doubt that permeates even the objective narrator's accounts.

An interesting example of hypothetical focalization at the narrator level encapsulates this existential "lack of solidity" as definitive of *Quartet*'s narrative mood. Monsieur Hautchamp, a minor character, reads the newspaper. With "an expression of disapproval," the narrator notes, "he continued his article which . . . began thus: '*Le mélange des races est à la base de l'évolution humaine vers le type parfait.*' *['Racial mixing is the foundation of human evolution toward creating the perfect human specimen]*. 'I don't think,' thought Monsieur Hautchamp—or something to that effect" (32–33; emphasis in original).[25] The "something to that effect" casts a shadow over this moment of focalization. Here, the omniscient narrator is ironically unsure if Hautchamp actually thought in the moment "I don't think." The probability that language gets in the way—for Hautchamp did not think in English—melts into the probability that fictional minds are not so transparent after all.

One could say that this paper over-symptomatizes one instance of verb choice ("diagnosed") in the secondary literature on Rhys. But my focus enables metacritical questions that may remain unasked if we elide the category-crossing of clinical and critical domains in the study of literature. Some of these questions include: What does it mean when we "diagnose" literary characters as masochistic? What does it mean when a

literary novel, or corpus, as in the case with Rhys, impels us to read it as masochistic or, more broadly, as "diagnosable," in some vaguely clinical sense, which can then be transformed into an aesthetic principle?

Among other techniques, *Quartet* employs hypothetical focalization to unsettle the fixity of rational objectivity and systematic judgment. This moody book dims the lights in its reference world, refusing to provide the reader with a narratorial "fixed background," in the terms of the novel. Put another way, the use of counterfactual glimpses into other minds, rendered in complex forms of focalization, combines to create a story defined by its narrative mood, antithetical to the mania for classification.

Given *Quartet*'s figural narration, its reliance on key instances of hypothetical focalization does not merely provide multiple perspectives but also emphasizes how these perspectives are often suspended. Such multiplicity and virtuality of focus renders subjective judgments illusory and susceptible to contradicting views—not only Marya's versus the Heidlers', but also, by extension, the reader's. The theme encoded in the title *Quartet* and the character system that it references alerts the reader to the variability of these perspectives. Hypothetical focalizations trouble the actual world of the story by providing competing, conjectural, at times self-cancelling perspectives on the true narrative situation. There is no true narrative situation, in other words: at least not "true" in the objective sense.

The ending of the novel, for example, leaves Marya behind after an altercation with Stephan. After telling him the truth about her involvement with Heidler, Marya threatens to call the police when Stephan plans to kill Heidler (179–84). But surprisingly, the end of Marya's story is not the end of the novel. Stephan leaves his wife splayed on the floor: "*Voilà pour toi,*" he says, obscenely indifferent (185; emphasis in original). We don't know what else happens with her. The story continues with Stephan and his new "girl," who becomes Marya's ostensible replacement in the last page of the novel (186). Marya is left behind, unconscious or dead, the reader doesn't know which. Marya becomes Schrödinger's protagonist, neither living nor dead. Her end is ambiguous and thus open-ended.

Narrative instability strategically weakens the reader's grasp of the ethical and psychological truth of the situation. This instability only deepens as the story goes on, as Marya cannot explain to herself why she continues in the affair despite her deep ambivalence. More importantly, the narrator does not fully explain, choosing only to foreground the absence of comprehensive explanation. The novel includes some perspectives, as we have seen, that "diagnose" the protagonist as "neurasthenic" (174) or "hysterical" (149), whereas others are merely objectifying and oppressive ("this type of woman" [177], "*petite femme*" [118]).[26] Such pseudo-clinical terms are presented as unsympathetic judgments on the protagonist. By contrast, the narrator's focus on Marya establishes the partiality of the story from the outset and provides the reader with an alternative principle for "understanding" her existence, by gauging what it lacks, or by suggesting that what Marya's experience consists of *is* a lack. Readers, too, are presented with a discourse that lacks narrative solidity and fixed backgrounds.

As noted, the social space that the Heidlers occupy is a well-ordered bourgeois existence, one held together by their "mania for classification." However, the novel's use of the psychopathological term "mania" to describe the Heidlers ironically impugns them as misguided for doing the same thing the narrator does: using diagnostic language to classify *them* as classifying others, a reflection of its focus on focalization itself. Nevertheless, the narrative seems to condemn this practice, even given the irony. Rhys' novel rests on such ambiguities of judgment, foregrounding the (lack of) background, transmuting the solidity and fixity of the reference world of the story into shadow and illusion. In doing so, *Quartet* exposes the "mania for classification" that is at the root of the Heidlers' power, which seeks to stabilize and control others through the "sadisms of epistemology." I'm tempted to say that the novel ironically—perhaps, sadomasochistically—invites this "mania for classification" on the part of the reader, even as it denigrates such an operation in its least sympathetic characters.

One curious piece of evidence for the instability of the novel's world, due to its focus on the virtuality or partiality of perspectives—and one that is missed if we focus on psychological interpretations—is

the question of how to pronounce Marya's name. "Marya" is an ambiguous spelling for this virginal name—and she is ironically named, of course—though the ambiguity, not the irony, is the main point.[27] When I last taught this novel, the class asked me how to pronounce Marya's name. Typically, the novel leaves the question hanging, until it quasi-reveals the answer. In their first outing together as a trio, the following scene between Marya and the Heidlers occurs, again representing the hypothetical focalization of one character by another: "Lois began: 'There was a young woman called Marya. *Who thought*, "But I must have a *caree—er*"'" (88; emphasis added). There we have the answer. But it is a passive-aggressive, even sadomasochistic, response; it pretends to speak for Marya only to humiliate her. Notably, the answer is belated, elliptical, and easy to miss. The point, however, is that such a fundamental question needs to be asked at all. While this scene provides ample fodder for the (sado-) masochistic reading, the importance of the name of the protagonist suggests something more fundamental is at stake. And that is, the aesthetic principle that "the shadow can be more important than the substance." Marya is forever an unpronounceable character: a shadow, if you will. And no analysis can get beyond this fact, even if the illusion of an answer—Lois' miming Marya's voice, rhyming Marya's name—shows that (sado-) masochism as well as complex forms of focalization inform its intersubjective dynamics.[28] *Quartet*'s narrative shadows remain. Even without diagnostic certainty, we can certainly feel its mood.

Notes

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1 The reference is to Deleuze's seminal essay on masochism as a clinical and aesthetic entity, "Coldness and Cruelty," originally published in 1967. Deleuze makes a strong claim that sadism and masochism are incompatible and that sadomasochism is an incoherent clinical and conceptual category. This doctrine holds great sway, but I do not follow Deleuze's taboo against thinking sadism

alongside masochism, nor his claim that sadomasochism is a nonentity. Gayle Rubin makes an important case for the lack of material evidence to support Deleuze's claims in her interview with Judith Butler, "Sexual Traffic."

2 The Rhys archive was once defined (some would say, distorted) by the so-called "composite heroine," a construct for interpreting Rhys' oeuvre proposed by Wyndham in the introduction to Rhys' work he published in 1963. (This introduction still appears in the current Norton paperback edition of *Wide Sargasso Sea* [1992], showing its continued influence.) The gendered aspects of this problematic notion have been addressed in various ways, and I do so in a separate study of Rhys that is part of my book manuscript, tentatively titled "Misfit Modernism."

3 Readings of sadism and masochism in Rhys' work are contemporaneous with the novels themselves. A review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931) by Soskind of *The New York Evening Post*, for example, claims that the novel is "a sadistic book in that it presents the cruelty and poisonous satisfaction men take in downing" (or belittling) the protagonist, Julia Martin, "an already-beaten woman." The *locus classicus* of reading psychopathology in Rhys' work is Abel's "Women and Schizophrenia." In our own time, there is a growing field on masochism in Jean Rhys, as well as on modernist masochism. A brief list includes Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Movement in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*; Moran, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*, esp. Chapter 6, "'A Doormat in a World of Boots': Jean Rhys and the Masochistic Aesthetic"; and Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*. For the intersection of modernism and masochism, see Sorum, "Masochistic Modernisms: A Reading of Eliot and Woolf"; Howarth, "Housman's Dirty Postcards: Poetry, Modernism, and Masochism"; and "Modernism/Masochism," a special issue of *New Formations*.

4 Mitchell addresses the narrative style at length, though she does not delve into the specifics of focalization that I do here (200–02, 207). She writes: "At no point in the novel does the narrator reveal herself to be Marya. Instead, narrative control momentarily shifts to Marya so that her interpretation of Lois' and H. J.'s behavior is the reader's only point of entry" (202). Mitchell's focus on limited omniscience as a form of "control" is consistent with her interest in the psychodynamics of masochism. However, my argument is that resistance to psychoanalytic interpretation is a formal principle of the novel, primarily in the focalizing techniques I outline. But Rhys uses others, such as ellipsis (152, for instance), which leave meaning permanently expected yet permanently suspended.

5 This style is also called *vision avec*, or the figural narrative situation.

6 An anonymous contemporaneous review of *Quartet* states that the novel is another chronicle of "the lost generation" that Gertrude Stein described: "Here, for the first time since Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, is an un-sentimentalized development of an impossible situation in that curious corner of Paris where the spurious constantly rubs shoulders with the real."

7 Empathy and sympathy are both ways of emotionally understanding another's situation. Sympathy as I use it is based on a certain social distance and asymmetry between self and others, where one feels pity (or sympathy) for them. Empathy, on the other hand, entails the proverbial "putting oneself in another's shoes," or being able to connect across social distance to see the world through the other's eyes. Marya accuses the Heidlers of being incapable or uninterested in empathy, and even of spurious sympathy. Their taking up Marya during her time of distress is manifestly self-interested. They are not Good Samaritans but are rather scheming to use Marya for their own purposes: Heidler to have her as his mistress, and Lois to keep an eye on Marya and thus retain a modicum of control over the trying situation.

8 One of Rhys' early short stories is titled "Illusion," and concerns the contents of a wardrobe belonging to a prim and proper middle-class British woman living in Paris (*The Left Bank and Other Stories*). The story reveals a discrepancy between the woman's dour, sober appearance and the rich riot of her fantasy life, as represented by fantastically colored gowns and negligees that she never wears out in public. This early short story, like Rhys' first novel, illustrates the aesthetic principle of shadow and illusion that resonates as *Quartet*'s mood.

9 The "sadisms of epistemology" is a phrase I borrow from Kurnick, who uses it in his discussion of Leo Bersani's body of work (402).

10 Readers of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* will recognize the phrase "sense of proportion" as indicative of a point of view that, in that modernist classic, also stands as the antithesis of the sympathetic viewpoint of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. The Heidlers' "mania for classification" and "sense of proportion" are thus of a piece with the "sense of proportion" of Sir William Bradshaw (99, 100, 101, 109), the psychiatrist whose baleful intervention precipitates Smith's suicide.

11 The other modality of mood is what Genette calls narrative distance, which denotes how obtrusive the narrator seems, or how mimetic (or scenic) the narrative is, from most mimetic (extensive use of dialogue and minimal narrative commentary) to least mimetic (abundant narrative commentary, supplanting the story itself). For more on mimetic versus non-mimetic narration, see Cohn, "Signposts of Fictionality," and Martínez-Bonati, *Fictive Discourse*.

12 See David Herman on hypothetical focalization. Herman makes this point about the limits of existing narrative theory when confronted with probabilistic, as opposed to deterministic, storyworlds: At the beginning of his article, Herman writes that he "should like to examine a kind of focalization that the classical structuralist typologies do not include" (231). Rhys' novel is a case in point that extends Herman's concept of hypothetical focalization and draws on the ideological significance of subjective versus objective accounts of reality.

13 Character-based focalization and its presentation in free-indirect discourse are the chief technical means by which the Proustian narrator of *À la recherche du*

temps perdu—Genette's example—sustains the narrative mood while telling the story of various characters, including the famous free-indirect narration of the love affair between Swann and Odette.

14 *Transparent Minds* is the title of Dorrit Cohn's significant contribution to the understanding of various forms of fictional focalization.

15 Lenglet wrote under the pen name Édouard de Nève. He composed his account in French, published as *Sous les verrous* (1933), and in Dutch as *In de Strik* (1932). Rhys translated it as *Barred* (1932). Ford's and Bowen's accounts are represented in Ford's novel *When the Wicked Man* (1931) and Bowen's memoir *Drawn from Life* (1941).

16 Psycho-narration is Dorrit Cohn's term for the narrator's discourse regarding the characters' internal cognitive and affective experience, normally rendered in a more formal and distanced idiom from other styles of focalization, such as quoted monologue (Cohn's term for interior monologue) or narrated monologue (free-indirect discourse). Psycho-narration differs from interior monologue (generally presented in the first-person and in the character's own idiom) and free-indirect discourse (generally presented in the third person, but colored by the character's emotion, idiom, and spatiotemporal frame of reference). See *Transparent Minds*, Part I (21–140).

17 Passages of hypothetical focalization can be classified otherwise: as instances of "ambiguous" or "double" focalization (Bal 158–59; Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 209). If focusing on the discursive dimension of the passage, such moments can be described as instances of "imaginary," "modalized," or "complex" representation of characters' discourse (Moore 18; Sanders and Redeker 296; McHale 277).

18 Herman's example is drawn from Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1961), in a passage where, he writes, "the hypothetical focalizors are not themselves virtual entities; rather, their acts of focalization (may) have virtual status in the reference world around which the narrative propositions center themselves. Because the focalizing acts are not subject to (dis) confirmation in the reference world of the narrative, those acts figure as hypotheses constructed by a protagonist" (238).

19 Genette's section on "Mood" discusses paralepsis, his label for instances in which the narrative information exceeds the modal restrictions inherent in character-based focalization (*Narrative Discourse* 207–211). Genette discusses wildly improbable narrative passages in À *la recherche du temps perdu* in which Proust's protagonist focalizes Mlle. Vinteuil's thoughts while watching her through a window. As a first-person narrator, Genette argues, Marcel is technically unable to enter other characters' thoughts, except by some "violations" of the narrative code of representation, as in the case of Mlle. Vinteuil. But my preference for Herman's terminology to discuss such forms of paralepsis in *Quartet* is the emphasis on the virtuality of the focalization—instances that explicitly and clearly indicate its "hypotheticality." See Herman (249n16) for a discussion of Genet-

tian paralepsis and how Herman's account of hypothetical focalization is consistent with, but goes beyond, Genette's concept.

20 As I mentioned, other examples of character-based insights into other fictional minds, many of which include the modal markers of doubt, possibility, or conjecture, abound in the novel (*Quartet* 11, 17, 51, 92–93, 97–98, 112, 115, 118, 161, 177).

21 Note that these expressions in the conditional tense ("would") are not temporal markers of futurity, as they are in the conventional representation of free-indirect discourse. As Cohn notes in "Narrated Discourse," the standard tenses for memory and anticipation in narrated monologues . . . [are] the pluperfect and the conditional[,] which correspond to the simple past and future in direct quotation" (127). The moments I am describing are contextually marked as character-level focalizations of another character, with the conditional used to denote the hypothetical status of the perception. See Cohn (133–34) on "narrated perception," which includes, in her example, a moment from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* that Herman would characterize as hypothetical focalization.

22 See the chapter on *Quartet* in Angier's biography for an excellent reading of this moment in the Rhys/Ford affair and its real-life significance.

23 As opposed to a narrator, which can be reliable or unreliable, a character can be more fallible or less fallible. On the distinction, see Fludernik (28) and Dan Shen's entry on "Unreliability" in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*.

24 For an account of the discrepancies between the Rhys account of "l'affaire Ford" and Lenglet's—as well as Ford's and Bowen's—see Angier, "Ford: 1924–1927" and "*Quartet*"; see also, Kappers-den Hollander. For more on the "scandal" of these warring accounts, see Latham, Chapter 6, 153ff.

25 My translation.

26 Nowhere in the narrative does the term "masochism" appear. Rather, there are other clinical terms, such as "mania," "hysteria," and "neurasthenia," that are used to describe the protagonist. But, of course, there are many more non-diagnostic descriptors used in the novel.

27 Marya's nickname, "Mado," also invokes the virginal trope.

28 Latham makes a very different argument, which focuses on the scandalous, real-life aspects of *Quartet*, arguing that critics have "generally avoided a direct engagement with *Quartet* as a *roman à clef*" (163). He views formalist analysis, such as mine, perhaps, as evading this larger and more urgent historical context.

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