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DIPLOMAMUNKA

Vargha Csenge

Anglisztika

Angol irodalom

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MA THESIS

A poszthumán Jean Rhys regényeiben: gyarmatosítás, a
táj és az élettelen

The Posthuman in Jean Rhys's Novels: Colonialism,
Landscape and Inanimation

Témavezető:

Gyuris Kata

Egyetemi tanársegéd

Készítette:

Vargha Csenge

Anglisztika

Angol irodalom

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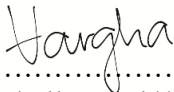
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Budapest, 2024.04.11


.....
a hallgató aláírása

Abstract

This paper focuses on the posthuman in Jean Rhys's two later novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. This interpretation is informed by Rosi Braidotti's theory of posthumanism as articulated in her book entitled *The Posthuman* and her essay on "Posthuman Critical Theory" on the one hand, and by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ideas on the rhizome, becoming and deterritorialization explained in *A Thousand Plateaus* on the other. The first chapter discusses character construction in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, detailing the implications of the postcolonial condition on the subject. The following chapter emphasizes the constructive role of natural and urban spaces, making comparisons between the two novels under discussion. The final part of the thesis works closely with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome and positions the heroine of *Good Morning, Midnight* as representative of a rhizomatic subjectivity. The conclusions drawn in this thesis stress the importance of Jean Rhys's categorization in multiple fields and her deconstruction of modernist individualism in favour of the more complex, posthuman condition.

Introduction

Scepticism about humans is a general tendency in Jean Rhys' works, which brings about different coping mechanisms such as inanimation, indifference, and addiction, initiated by the desire for numbness. Her modern female characters are outcasts who enter a condition that exhibits the signs of the posthuman, allowing them to experience both the shame and the pity involved in this position. They are representative of rhizomatic subjectivities, using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's term, entangled with material and spectral elements. These are also in close connection with images of the creole, the uncanny and the nomad, all showcased in Rhys's novels.

In my thesis, I would like to explore different instances in which Rhys's female protagonists can be read as posthumanist, a term that is informed by my understanding of Rosi Braidotti's work and enriched by Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome. Taking on the term of the posthuman as understood in the framework of the New Materialist branch of Posthumanism, I will focus on relationality in two later novels by Jean Rhys, namely, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which were chosen for the present enquiry based on their relevance in ideas, spaces and characters. It will be suggested that although posthumanist investigations of Jean Rhys are relatively rare, her novels concentrate on struggles which fall under the same spectrum of destabilizing well-known expectations about what 'human' stands for. I will argue that Rhys paints disrupted portraits which encourage scepticism but which do not limit the understanding of humans or sympathy towards them.

At the start, it is necessary to discuss the way in which Rhys's postcolonial discourse can be extended for a better understanding of her view on modern subjectivity, focusing mainly on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Then, contrasting the space of the above-mentioned novel (the Caribbean)

with that of *Good Morning Midnight* (Paris) can lead to conclusions about the constructive role of landscapes in the posthuman condition. Finally, it is worth focusing on the novel set in Paris in search of instances in which Rhys's protagonist finds inanimation the only escape from her abject condition. The posthumanist turn in literary studies speaks to our inability to relate to and engage with the human as understood through the Vitruvian Man. Therefore, a posthumanist interpretation of Jean Rhys's works will lead to a more complex understanding of the two novels chosen for this exploration, perhaps reshaping the traditional definition of modernist individualism.

Chapter 1 – Modernist Individualism Questioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

“Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?

Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,

in that grey vault. The sea.”

- “The Sea Is History”, by Derek Walcott

In her unfinished autobiography entitled *Smile, Please*, Jean Rhys confesses: “I like shape very much—and again a novel has to have a shape and life doesn't have any” (Rhys, *Smile, Please* 10). Born in Dominica and educated in Britain, not quite at home in either of the European cities in which she chose to dwell, Rhys was drawn to stories of displacement and multiple identities and took up the challenge to transpose her own experience onto the page. On the one hand, she was undoubtedly influenced by the modernist writers whom she encountered and worked with, on the other, however, her work shows a continuous tendency to oppose well-established principles of language, narration and subject matter.

Linguistically, the 'shape' she chooses is always just as meaningful as the silences she includes in her narratives, this is how her novels and short stories become similar to her beloved pieces of music. Her plots are constructed in a way in which the reading experience offers a sense of wandering, echoing the everyday reality of her characters. The subject matter she works with offers her a place, though relatively unresolved, among postcolonial and Caribbean writers, since most of her fiction takes place in the Caribbean and European capitals, or contains reminiscences of the lost Dominican landscape. In the first chapter of my thesis, I will investigate how Jean Rhys constructs the characters of her last novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, starting with its quality as a prequel to a well-known British classic, followed by an inquiry about the author's conformity with and opposition to modernist ideas about the individual, and concluding with the description of ways in which her characters deconstruct white mythologies. An expected result of this interpretation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Jean Rhys's categorisation as a posthumanist writer who foreshadows the crisis of modernism from within its borders by arguing for the inability to essentialize what it means to be human in postcolonial times. I will allude to Rosi Braidotti's description of the problematic nature of the classical ideal of 'Man' and relate it to the context of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Chapter 1.1 – The Multiplicity in Jean Rhys's Response to *Jane Eyre*

Most critics, such as Mary Lou Emery or John J. Su agree that Jean Rhys's power lies in her "strangeness," (Emery, "Foreword" xi) since she "never fit terribly well within the categories of modernist, feminist, or postcolonial authorship" (Su 171). Some of them, most notably Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, interpret the uncertainty of her categorisation as 'haunting', commenting upon her unfortunate "marginal canonicity" (Johnson and Moran, "Introduction" 4)

in all of the fields she has been associated with. Some of these should be enlisted and elaborated upon in order to be clear on certain characteristics of Rhys's writing before claiming a distinctive position for her in English literature, without an insistence upon a holistic description of her style and focusing instead on the understanding of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in connection with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Through the parallels drawn between these two texts, I will investigate how separate literary fields that Jean Rhys works with collaborate in achieving an effect through which she changes conventional cultural narratives, before turning to the posthumanist stance I argue she takes in her construction of identities.

The earliest studies focusing on Jean Rhys's work discovered her for her quality as a woman writer and interpreted her work from a feminist point of view. They argue that "her heroines are victims" (Staley 1) and that her attitudes "toward women in their relationships with men and each other, come remarkably close to our own deepest human concerns" (Staley 2). Indeed, all of Jean Rhys's stories feature enigmatic female characters in the role of the protagonist who always appear in opposition with their surroundings and in an eternal confrontation with their own selves and the people they get into contact with. Interestingly enough, *Jane Eyre* is also widely read as a proto-feminist novel which offers us a starting point for our understanding of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in light of its relationship with the Victorian origin text. Both of these novels present women's issues as central to the plot and they both investigate ways in which male dominance can be overruled. However, despite their efforts to free their female heroines from the bounds of patriarchy, both Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys let them be dependent on certain male power structures, represented by an uncle, an employer, or a husband, and not even the modernist Rhys offers an escape for Antoinette other than death itself.

The question remains whether the most important criteria through which Rhys can be considered is her stance as a woman writer or the feminist ideas expressed in her novels. Certainly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers a more comprehensive account of the female experience than its Victorian counterpart, emphasizing the fate of a character under a triple bond: being a woman, struggling with her mental state and lastly, experiencing a hybrid ethnic identity. Considering all three together is productive in the sense that it does not only take into account the decline of women characters in relation to external power structures but also based on their internal realities. More importantly, Jean Rhys creates a narrative considered peripheral by Brontë, where the focus is not only on the break from the conventional understanding of familial structures and gender roles but also on a complete detachment from traditional definitions of humanity and subjectivity as understood since the Enlightenment and reinforced by the domestic novel. Through rethinking *Jane Eyre*, Rhys does not only extract and highlight a previously silenced character from an English classic but opposes a whole tradition through the introduction of the posthuman condition, exposing the idea that the concept of the human is loaded with relations of power.

When she writes of the creation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys always refers to the inspiration and the process as an invitation that was impossible to decline, since *Jane Eyre*, overflowing with “the all wrong creole scenes, and above all [...] the real cruelty of Mr Rochester” (Rhys, *Letters 1931-1966* 64) shows only the British side of the story. She could not accept that despite Bertha being necessary to the plot, she always “shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry – off stage”, and this is why she offered her a place “right on stage” (Rhys, *Letters 1931-1966* 156). This is the reason why Rhys has been, and still is, most commonly understood in the context of postcolonial studies. *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives the impression of being a deeply personal project, the first version of which fell prey to the same passion that created it, when the

author, after an altercation with her husband, destroyed the manuscript (Rhys, *Letters 1931-1966* 39). Nevertheless, the second version of Antoinette's story, focusing on characters surrounded by a Caribbean environment and unsettling historical and social changes, made its name partially building upon the widely known origin text.

Such endeavours born of the effect of English imperialism are considered by Homi Bhabha "signs of a discontinuous history, an estrangement of the English book" which "mark the disturbance of its authoritative representations by the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences which emerge in the colonial discourse as the mixed and split texts of hybridity" (Bhabha 113). Jean Rhys, therefore, does not only offer corrections to certain implications of *Jane Eyre*, but opposes the whole of 'the English book', questioning the veracity of its claims in alternative contexts of a postcolonial setting. The narrative of the dominant discourse that Bhabha mentions is challenged by Rhys through her choice of focalization and narrative structure as well, aspiring to take advantage of the intrinsic value in the hybrid text. Rhys's position as an educated middle-class (white) woman living in European capitals made her Dominican origins less viable for many readers, but she in turn could validate her claims about hybridity. Erica L. Johnson refers to this idea by emphasizing "[Rhys's] consciousness of her own fraught racial identity within a colonial rubric that defined her as white, but as 'not English'; as a British subject but one whose ethnic belonging was equally problematized by her Creole and Celtic heritages" (Johnson, "'Upholstered Ghosts': Jean Rhys's Posthuman Imaginary" 210). We must understand Rhys's modernist aesthetics through this duality which inspired so many of her character portraits right from the beginning of her career starting with *Marya*, followed by several heroines of her short stories and concluding in *Antoinette*.

Rhys is usually further categorised as a modernist writer, given the adjacent chronological position of her work and her connections with modernist artists such as Ford Madox Ford, Adrian Allinson and Peter Warlock. She is also frequently mentioned on the same page with writers like Henry James and Virginia Woolf. The overlap of postcolonialism and modernism in the case of Jean Rhys's work urged critics to come up with fresh categorisations that might be more productive for her recognition, according to which she is a "transnational modernist", more specifically "a diasporic Caribbean modernist" (Thomas 3) in Sue Thomas's overview of the critical work around her. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and her previous novels, certain modernist techniques can be noted through which she opposes chronological linearity, feigned morality and the pastoral, experimenting instead with fragmented narratives, often stream-of-consciousness, multiple subjective perspectives and the uncanny. Jane Eyre's character is found at the dawn of modernity where the individual is allowed to develop and to create a *bildung*, but the same modernity is twisted when it is presented in connection with Antoinette, who experiences it as economic, social, and personal decline.

Certainly, a separate categorization is demanded for a writer with Rhys's background, and her approach to modernity, which many have found closer to the posthuman condition. After all, Rhys contradicts the metanarratives of the European or metropolitan discourse, employs hybrid subjectivities and works with irony as a means to question and deconstruct binary oppositions. Johnson and Moran similarly contextualize her as part of the 'spectral turn' in literary and critical studies "not only because of the way in which she haunts multiple fields, but also because spectrality is a central theme of her fiction and personal writing alike" (Johnson and Moran, "Introduction" 6). This idea is the one which leads this broad overview of her style and the importance of her rewriting of conventional narratives towards a more specific interpretation of

her last novel, through which I seek to show how Rhys presents modernist individualism and individuality and how her novel points toward the posthuman condition.

Chapter 1.2 – Postcolonial Rhys – Modernist Individualism and the ‘Other’

When confronted with Jane’s disheartened questions about Bertha Mason, Edward Rochester starts revealing the story of his wife and tries to prove that she “allured” him even though he “had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners” (Brontë 309). He proceeds to give an account of the history of mental illness in Bertha’s family hoping to rationalize the inhumane treatment she receives in his attic by negating her agency, using “mind and manners” as points of reference. Jean Rhys includes a posthuman turn into modernist individualism, thus negating the claim that the individual is singular and stable, or possible to be understood through measuring degrees of “modesty”, “benevolence” or “candour”. She proceeds to do so through the postcolonial perspective which affirms the positivity of difference and objects to the categorization of “sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 15). This choice is partially due to Rhys’s understanding of hybrid subjectivities as a Dominican-born Englishwoman, constantly in search of new definitions of identity for her characters.

I will take on the concept of hybridity following Homi Bhabha’s theory of postcolonialism to suggest that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can find its manifestations in multiple ways, along with the practical results of mimicry and mockery from the part of the colonized subject. I will argue that Rhys does not only work towards the presentation of Antoinette as a victim of Western colonialist and masculine power but also succeeds in dismantling the differentiation between white

or aboriginal subjectivities by taking away the original system of comparison. She employs several modernist techniques through which she identifies their dehumanizing effects, as Delia C. Konzett observes, noting how Jean Rhys's work "reveals that the crisis of modernism is intimately linked to the colonial tradition and therefore calls for a thorough rethinking of its premises" (Konzett 132). I would like to add that the way in which she reworks traditional identities is one of the most notable characteristics of her works and it is through this strategy that she distinguishes herself from modernist writers and thus her stance additionally points towards an early posthumanist perspective. She chooses to include two narrators in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, both attaining equal importance, and I want to suggest that in the novel, we can discover a third one, who is a mute storyteller creating a necessary gap in the narrative by charging silence with meaning.

Antoinette opens her narrative in Part One of the novel by positioning her family's situation in military terms, mentioning "white people" and that the residents of Coulibri estate were "not in their ranks" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 5). On that same note, she proceeds to enlist instances in which members of the black population in her hometown expressed their hatred for her mother in speech or actions. Therefore, right from the start, the overwhelming duality of her condition as a young Creole girl is exposed. Her mother, Anette, is from Martinique, therefore already a foreigner to the Jamaican population, and her English father, Alexander Cosway, is an ex-slave-owner, unrelatable for obvious reasons. The Emancipation Act of 1833 led them into poverty, quickly noticed and much celebrated by the black people, who stood around in groups to jeer at her mother, "especially after her riding clothes grew shabby" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 5). Anette's second marriage to Mr Mason offers financial security on the one hand, and an inducement for further hostility from the community on the other. Antoinette thus understands that her position in the community is pre-determined and defined in racial and financial terms from a very early age.

First, her family is bundled off as a result of the profound hatred from the part of the black population in Jamaica, and she is further conditioned into a sense of uncertainty by her husband, who makes her sure she knows she is not English or European either. Secondly, her fluctuating social and financial status, resulting from her mother's marriages, gives way to more layers of projections coming from her surroundings, articulated when she remarks: "The black people did not hate us quite so much when we were poor. We were white but we had not escaped and soon we would be dead for we had no money left. What was there to hate?" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 16). The relationship between families in Dominica is a racial issue only when it is accompanied by the newly found social standing and financial situation that Antoinette's family experiences. Homi Bhabha observes how "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha 45) Antoinette is in a constant process of transformation through events that she suffers rather than acts out herself, therefore becoming a passive spectator of the image mentioned by Bhabha, unable to fully integrate it into her identity. According to this, the image Antoinette assumes is that of the eternal outsider as opposed to that of the English or Jamaican girl. Although these images might temporarily be present in her narrative, for example in the illusion Mr Mason creates with the English habits they adopt or in the way in which she aspires to be like Christophine, her Indigenous childhood caretaker and the voluntary slave of the household, they are always contradicted and unveiled as desperate attempts to be clearly categorized and therefore become part of a community.

The term "Creole" itself does not do justice to her ethnic identity either, since it is understood by her surroundings as a peculiar middle position rather than a valid racial identity of its own. In an interpretation of the discourses of Jean Rhys, H. Adlai Murdoch emphasizes the

same idea of “creole indeterminacy that is presumed to lie beyond a boundary, unlocalizable and, for all practical purposes, undefinable as well” (Murdoch 164). He further argues that this indeterminacy is the cause of the precipitation and cementation of a “split subjectivity” (Murdoch 164) in the case of Antoinette. Indeed, the protagonist herself expresses a strong sense of disorientation and a heightened awareness of the racial identity of the people in her surroundings, especially Mr Mason, “so sure of himself, so without a doubt English” and her mother “so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 18). It is notable that when it comes to her mother or her own Creole identity, Antoinette chooses to express herself in negatives, unable to locate ways in which she can articulate her condition based on what she is as opposed to what she is not. As a result, she becomes vulnerable to both external forces, as mentioned above, and internal ones, articulated by Delia C. Konzett too, who emphasizes that Jean Rhys’s heroines “are not merely battling with the concrete forces of oppression but, more significantly, with those that they perpetuate from within their own unconscious and assumed notions of humanism and humanity” (Konzett 133). Antoinette is chronically unhappy and is destined to lose control over her self-determination until the point where she does not recognize herself in the mirror.

I used the word destiny with purpose and in connection to her vulnerability since her eventual mental breakdown is foreshadowed right from her childhood. One relevant episode is when at the second wedding of her mother and Mr Mason the “smooth smiling people” make remarks about the two children: “the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind and the girl going the same way” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 13). The introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea* calls Antoinette’s fate an “uncanny doubling of her mother’s story” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* xiii) and certainly, her marriage to a wealthy Englishman and her eventual mental decline follows the same

pattern as her mother's perplexity which she witnesses as a child. Along these lines, Konzett argues that Rhys deploys the modernist style of abstraction and serialization purposefully, "to depict a false consciousness of commodified gender, racial, cultural and national identities" (Konzett 139). It is the modernist manner of serialization which foregrounds repeatable identities and plotlines without the need for self-recognition from the part of the characters themselves. This way, Antoinette can repeat her mother's mistakes without discerning them as such and through her, Rhys can make a scornful statement about the Victorian novel's emphasis on personal development, manners, and the availability of the social ladder.

Rhys's importance and innovation in constructing identities do not only come from her choice to allow Antoinette to speak but also from the way in which she presents the disorientation of her husband and the process through which his ideas about humanity and truth are dismantled in the Caribbean. The unnamed young Englishman of *Wide Sargasso Sea* arrives to Jamaica thinking he has done well for himself, happy with his newly acquired fortune but slightly uncomfortable in the new environment. This slight discomfort deteriorates when he finds out more about his wife's family and her heritage of mental illness. In his narration first we can find accounts of blanks in his mind that cannot be filled, then of despair in the face of the secret of the islands and lastly of an unhealthy obsession over and possession of Antoinette. His character can be interpreted based on Homi Bhabha's "idea of a man and his alienated image; not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity" (Bhabha 44). Rochester's understanding of his standing and importance is unveiled as a manifestation of pure self-deception, and his sense of this uncanny uncertainty is extended in the novel to the whole of English and European civilization, presenting their discourse as struggles to uphold a false image of authority. Rochester's newly found identity, however, is just as unresolved as that of his wife,

and towards the end of the story we find textual references to the inevitable and constant nature of a quest for identification on his part: “She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 111).

The Mr Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is torn between the ideas he believed to be stable and unshakeable and the secret of the islands, which he is simultaneously cynical about and scared of. The part of him which aspires to understand the secret also believes in the transient and irresolute border between reality and dreams, reason and magic, and his troubled consciousness does not find points of reference in a simple racial or ethnic identification anymore. It is through the unsettled mind of the colonialist that Rhys succeeds in dismantling white mythologies, as articulated by Konzett, who considers her successful in “exposing the formerly unchallenged race as merely another ethnic construct, devoid of any internal legitimation” and therefore able to deepen “traditional modernist accounts of the fragmentation of an Anglo-American cultural legacy” (Konzett 127). She further argues that Rhys’s take on European culture “proceeds from two ends, stressing on the one hand the fate of a white, outmoded, nineteenth-century Europe, and, on the other, the increasing dehumanization to which all modern culture is subject” (Konzett 129). *Wide Sargasso Sea* thus lies between the modern and the postmodern, scrutinizing Bhabha’s ‘beyond’, presenting dislocation as a transnational condition which makes it impossible to make valuable distinctions between white and colonial subjectivities. Rochester loses himself and upon return to England fails to remain unchanged by the recognition of the otherness of his Self.

Besides putting the husband in this position of uncertainty as opposed to that of strength and authority, Rhys also uses the very simple technique of not naming him in order to stress the structural absurdity of the colonial condition. Antoinette’s husband is presented as the repeatable character of the white male colonizer, an individual without true significance when lacking the

projections of respect and obedience presumed prior to Emancipation. *Wide Sargasso Sea* unsettles the colonizer's power through the uncertainty it introduces about the premises on the grounds of which his respectability was built. As part of his theory of mimicry and mockery, Homi Bhabha starts his argument by observing that the discourse of mimicry is intrinsically ambivalent because it "must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" and through this it is "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 86). The English mode of living, much aspired to by Antoinette's brother and practiced by her family after Mr Mason's arrival, is always presented with slight differences from the imagined ideal, in a way that the ideal itself becomes superficial, and loses its authority of being a point of reference. The young heroine's admiration of the painting *The Miller's Daughter*, "a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 18) is developed by Rhys into a mirroring image of Antoinette in her adulthood, the sole account of which comes from the male narrator. Rochester, however, notes about her appearance that her dress "slipped untidily over one shoulder and seemed too large for her" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 81), both acknowledging her resemblance to the girl from the painting and at the same time rejecting the idea which this artwork represents for Antoinette, namely, the discourse that being similar to the colonizers is not only possible but also a goal one should aspire to. Antoinette's vision of England is unveiled by her husband himself as only a dream, a picture she presumes and desires, existing only in the imagination profoundly created by the colonial structure.

Bhabha develops this condition further in his distinction between mimesis and mimicry and identifies "a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (Bhabha 87-88). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can also see the way in which mimicry solely repeats and does

not necessarily represent, and in this mimicry Rochester's self-questioning becomes irreversible. One related scene from the novel might be pinpointed when Amélie describes Daniel Cosway's house, explaining that he has "a house like white people, with one room only for sitting" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 76), but when Rochester asks her about the pictures on the wall she reports that his parents were both coloured. Once presented with the house in question, Rochester feels sick and is required to recognize the setting as Cosway's desperate attempt to acquire wealth, taking advantage of Rochester's marriage of convenience. Illegitimate son of a slave-owner and English son-in-law of a plantation-owner come very close in this encounter, and once he is forced to face the menace of this mimicry, Rochester feels sick and disgusted in his encounter with the Other in his Self. It is at this point that he leaves behind all the morality that he has been struggling to maintain.

Rhys's endeavour of revealing the dislocation of Creole and white identities along with the crisis of modernity thereon has been discussed in connection with postcolonial thought, and therefore one last remark should be made in relation to the third narrator I identified earlier, namely, Christophine. Her approach to the colonial encounter is just as meaningful as the silence she decides to include in her conversations with Antoinette or her husband. The structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea* did not allow her a separate perspective in the same way it did with Antoinette in Parts One and Three and Rochester in Part Two, but it is most certainly relevant that her presence is felt all through the novel, telling of an aboriginal truth which simply cannot be translated or interpreted without being distorted. Gayatri Spivak, writing of women's texts in connection with the critique of imperialism, argues that Christophine "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (Spivak 253). And therefore, the strategy Jean Rhys uses is to

allow Christophine to dominate some of the key dialogues in the novel but when it comes to her stories and the past, let her speak in her own language incomprehensible for the readers. This way she becomes a narrator of equal importance to Antoinette and her husband, but her narration is hidden and through this silence, she is allowed her freedom of identification.

The choice of language for Christophine is political and personal rather than linguistic or cognitive, since already in Antoinette's childhood she did speak "good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 7). No other character has the ability to speak all of these languages in the novel and thus Christophine becomes the one understanding everyone without ever being completely comprehended herself. As opposed to the previous characters mentioned, she is confident in her identity in terms of her age, social standing and racial origins as well. The presence of Christophine's Creole patois in the novel reflects upon the silence over a colonial truth which cannot be interpreted or translated, that which tells about the knowledge Christophine refuses to offer to Rochester.

She famously says: "Read and write I don't know. Other things I know" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 104). We might argue that what she juxtaposes here are separate understandings of knowledge that can be identified in European written culture and Caribbean oral collective consciousness. Her secret is disclosed neither by the husband nor the narrative, but this strategy does not coincide with the one Homi Bhabha distinguishes in early modernist 'colonial' literature as the "conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth" which "speaks in riddles, obliterating proper names and proper places" (Bhabha 123). Rhys, instead, uses this modernist strategy not in avoidance of translating Christophine's patois but in order to pinpoint the defects of representation and to suggest that she "baffles the communicable verities of culture" (Bhabha 124) with her refusal to translate. Following Bhabha's understanding of the inability to communicate the colonial

truth, I argue that Rhys's use of the silence around Christophine challenges the dichotomies of written and oral cultures and unveils the practice of naming and verbalizing as acts of possessing and taking charge. We can add Deleuze's theory about the issue of representation which in itself does not inspire creation and builds instead on pre-existing, familiar signs: "Representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything but mobilizes and moves nothing" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 55). Through Christophine, Jean Rhys similarly seems to suggest a dimension imperceptible to the naked eye which instead of focusing on linguistic impulses emphasizes the sensory ones.

She therefore presents Rochester, and at times Antoinette herself, with a silence that can be interpreted as a counter-gaze succeeding in confusing apprehension from their part. Several of the most significant textual references for this point can be found in instances where Christophine's words are not followed by a response either directly or internally by the two voiced narrators, and thus her words are left for the reader to contemplate. Carine Mardorossian argues that the "novel deconstructs the opposition between silence and voice and, in doing so, questions the Western assumption that the speaker is always the one in power" (Mardorossian, "Shutting up the Subaltern" 1082). The silences in the novel are constructive and show the way in which Christophine is a silent rather than silenced narrator, gaining agency and reducing vulnerability through the way in which she chooses to represent her cultural identity. The way in which she represents the posthuman condition lies in her strategy to use silence rather than words to establish agency. She is distinguished from the disoriented and split identities mentioned above and helps us introduce the idea according to which her silence is not the only way in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* contemplates agency in these characters.

Chapter 1.3 – Sexuality, Violence and Obeah as Means of Establishing Agency

We have seen how Jean Rhys criticizes the premises of modern society and employs a posthumanist perspective through the use of hybrid and confused subjectivities, the only exception being Christophine, whose narrative is left inside the mystery of the novel in order not to interfere with the authenticity of her voice. Christophine's silence is only one of the several ways in which Rhys raises controversy in her readers and enlarges the mystery of her characters. In the following, we will explore the intrinsic value of this mystery, which, being at the centre of the novel, overrules any structural struggle for order. Rhys seems to aspire to keep up this uncertainty instead of solving it or suggesting that the secret of the island is able to be deciphered at all. The agency of the characters present in the novel is tied to this specific condition and can be understood through an inquiry into the intermingled use of sexuality and violence in the novel, together with the overwhelming, almost transcendental presence of obeah magic. I will argue that Jean Rhys complicates her own position as a postcolonial or feminist writer with her account of the eroticism available on the honeymoon island and in Thornfield Hall, closely linked to the violence which remains the only functional resource for her characters.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, sexuality appears first as an empowering asset for Antoinette to win the sympathy of her husband and thus ensure domestic security for herself. This is most evident in the way she is offered to the Englishman by her stepfather, together with all the unworn dresses she had received from him over the years in the religious convent. She is thought to be beautiful, and she seems to become conscious of this beauty when she is allowed to manage her own household and choose what she wears. Dress is always meaningful in the Rhysian imagination, and in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, thoughts about dresses accompany Antoinette until her very last decision to set fire to the house. Clothes give Rhys's characters a chance to hide on the one hand

and to express themselves on the other. Antoinette connects choices of dress with scents, flowers and songs in order to explore her sexuality and consummate her marriage, offering herself to Rochester in the manner of a sacrifice offered to absolute authority. One relevant scene is the first night of their honeymoon when she offers frangipani wreaths to her husband who first shudders at her calling him “a king, an emperor” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 44) and then steps on the flowers walking towards the window, away from her. Soon enough, he starts complimenting her on her dress choices and observing her beauty up to the point when even seeing one of her dresses on the floor evokes erotic passion in him.

Writing about the cultural work performed by dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Maroula Joannou notes how vestimentary choices in the novel mark out “subjectivities and identities shaped and complicated by the histories of slavery and migration which are responsible for the particular cultural constructions of race, sex and class that inform the text” (Joannou 127). Indeed, Antoinette’s family is disclosed as deprived of wealth and thus vulnerable to interracial hatred based on their “shabby” clothes, but despite their declining social stature, their pride forces them to burn the aboriginal Tia’s dress when Antoinette appears in it in front of the well-dressed foreign visitors. As opposed to her initial financially strained position, she can later afford to order dresses from a studio in “the Paris of the West Indies” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 49). Her red dress gains crucial importance after the deprivation of her freedom, as it offers her a point of reference in a condition in which she perceives most events as unreal.

Dresses offer readers a guide to the way in which sex and sexuality are constructed in the text and their connection to historical slavery and migration in the novel. Moreover, the use of dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea* emphasizes the posthuman sensibility accounting for the “external dimension, which in fact enfolds within the subject as the internalized score of cosmic vibrations”

(Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 56-57). Antoinette's clothes, chosen from the external dimension and internalized in their essence by the heroine, constitute a meaningful part of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* claims about the constructive nature of the material world, which Braidotti refers to as 'cosmic vibrations'. Rhys's ideas about sexuality and colonial fetishism as presented by the use of dresses, scents and flowers are concentrated in the figure of the *doudou*.

Throughout the episodes of an initially peaceful marriage and even further on, we can find that erotic potentialities are reducing Antoinette to the figure of the *doudou*, a turning point which romanticizes the connection between passion and tragedy in the colonial context and which results in an uncontrollable process of decline for the marriage. Jacqueline Couti examines the mythology of the *doudou* and connects it to the sexualizing of black female bodies, explaining that originating from the Creole term, "the gallicized *doudou* has come to signify a beautiful, loved French Caribbean woman, most likely light skinned or mixed race." This is discussed by her along the figure of "the *da*, the asexual dark-skinned maternal figure who takes care of white Creole children", both of them constituting "the manifestation of the male gaze in a French colonial context" (Couti 132). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can find the creation and upkeep of these colonial roles even after the Emancipation, Antoinette referring to Christophine as her *da* several times, and Christophine calling her *doudou* especially in scenes when she questions her relationship with Rochester. In Rhys's novel, the *doudou* figure is transformed from a colonial erotic fantasy into an alienating force that raises suspicion on Rochester's part. Nevertheless, the qualities often associated with the *doudou* still succeed in casting a chant on Rochester that he confesses to being unable to forget and that motivates his taking possession of Antoinette in the end.

The relationship dynamic between Antoinette and Rochester finally reaches its peak of intensity with the realization that sexuality and violence are irreversibly intertwined in their erotic encounters. Even before finding out about the history of mental illness in his wife's family, which can be considered the most serious decline in the relationship, Rochester connects their intimacy with the image of death: "It was not a safe game to play – in that place. Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness [...] Not close. The same" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 58-59). This issue seems double-sided considering the fact that Rochester does take advantage of Antoinette's position and desire for intimacy, but the heroine might be involved in the creation of violent lovemaking too. An ecofeminist critique offered by Maria Mies discusses the motivations and implications of the female body as a projection screen for male desire and argues that after the Enlightenment "the real living, strong and independent women had first to be physically destroyed and subdued before the men of the new bourgeois class could create a new romantic ideal of womanhood" (Mies 134). Based on this idea, we cannot help but notice how the treatment Antoinette undergoes and the resulting madness she experiences are the necessary aspects for the creation of the Victorian ideal female image that Jane Eyre represents in Brontë's novel.

On the other hand, she might be interpreted as an accomplice in the way their erotic space is moulded, as Jennifer Gilchrist argues when she states that "Antoinette's sexual desire for submission is at once a psychological corrective to her childhood neglect and a reenactment of historical slavery" (Gilchrist 476). Here, Jean Rhys's choices might be interpreted as controversial, since she chooses a sadomasochistic relationship that presents slavery and submission as erotically charged. Notably, the text assumes the benefits of slavery society and the disadvantages of emancipation by presenting them as the reason for the heroine's decline. On multiple occasions, we find textual references to the idea that slavery society offered the only social structure that the

community was familiar with and thus taking it away resulted in an excess of freedom with a heightened sense of vulnerability. This choice problematizes Rhys's stance as a postcolonial writer, but I would argue that her positioning of Antoinette in this sexual relationship does not make her effort to tell her story less meaningful. On the contrary, one can assume that it allows the author to show the reality of Antoinette's psychological, racial and class background and at the same time stress the importance of these factors in the creation of her subjectivity.

The violence of slavery is intertwined with sexuality in the text but it manifests itself on several parallel levels as well, both directly and indirectly. On the level of the violence in the central relationship, we can certainly mention the scars left on Antoinette's body but also the infidelity of Rochester with Amélie or his alienated behaviour towards the end of the text. Lack of passion or even compassion in Thornfield Hall does just as much harm to her as the fierce arguments they have towards the end of their stay on the honeymoon island. Her madness is taboo and is treated with even less professionalism than her mother's illness was considered. Her mother's fate is repeated by her and in a similar fashion, the way in which violence manifested itself in her childhood returns to her and leads her to use it as a liberating asset herself. Antoinette's family house was burnt down by the neighbours as an act of hatred but one of emancipation as well, emancipation from the historical memory that kept the enslaved's scars fresh. Similarly, burning down Thornfield Hall was the only escape that was possible for the hybrid subject devoid of all the identities she had ever assumed, including that of the outsider.

She sets fire to Rochester's house not in desperation but consciously, as in completing a task long assigned to her. She notices the red dress on the floor which looks "as if the fire had spread across the room" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 121) and remembers something she must do, embodied shortly after by a delirious dream where she reenacts her childhood surrounded by fire.

The red dress is successfully linked to the image of fire since both of them are forces that Antoinette recognizes as significant and tied to her childhood in Coulibri and therefore they are both ways through which she was once able to define herself. The act itself does not have to be contained in the novel in order for the readers to understand that her final choice is on one hand, proving her agency and on the other, fulfilling an image that was assigned to and expected of her, that of the savage Creole madwoman. Gayatri Spivak provides a similar interpretation when she stresses that once in England, “she must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction” (Spivak 251). She does not only show an act of violence against other people who have harmed her, and arguably this is never at the centre of her intentions either, but she seems to find relief and intrinsic value in the sight of the fire itself, choosing to become a part of it. The result of this is arguably “the very embodied structure of the posthuman subject as composite assemblage of human, non-organic, machinic and other elements” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Critical Theory” 19). The flames, just like dresses, provide her with a certain type of truth that she can accept, as opposed to Western conceptions of time and justice, which she perceives as false ideals of a stubborn mythology.

The gap between reality and imagination plays a key role in the novel, together with the idea that words can transform one into another, obeah being the all-encompassing power that makes this possible in the context of the islands. Obeah is used not only by Christophine but also by the two main narrators, both consciously and unintentionally, in the struggle to establish certain power dynamics. Practitioners of obeah in the Caribbean were thought to be either witches, inflicting pain on others, or healers, who did the opposite. Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is presented to practice both types of obeah once she feels like it is motivated enough. Her presence

demands a certain type of respect which allows her certain rights even in a household where she was initially offered as a wedding present. It is stressed all through the novel that it was Christophine's own decision to stay in the service of Antoinette's family after Emancipation and that this is charged with meaning in the case of a woman with such powers over the secret of the island. She connects historical slavery with legality and positions public workers of the new system on the same level as the slave owners: "These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 11). In reality, however, she remains untouched by struggles to intimidate her through laws and the police, as it turns out from one of the final conversations in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where she formulates yet another self-defining confession, calling her country a "free country" and herself a "free woman" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 103). One can argue that it is through obeah magic and the knowledge about the secret of the island that she can confidently oppose and win over the new order which she experiences as more cruel, violent and restricting than slavery society was. Jean Rhys scrutinizes the meaning of freedom in the postcolonial context and seems to suggest that it can never be inflicted upon the people, only demanded.

Besides the lurking presence of its spectral power, we can only find a handful of direct references to obeah practices. One of them is provoked by Antoinette in desperation caused by the fear of losing her husband's affection. Christophine, quite sarcastically, first seems to deny the existence of obeah and calls it "a tim-tim story", "foolishness" and "folly" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 71) and then proceeds to explain that it is not safe to use for a *béké*, which is a term referring to a white person. She thus reflects on the laws passed to forbid the use of different objects for witchcraft, described for example in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's book on the development of Creole society in Jamaica. He mentions that obeah practitioners "would have influence throughout

the district” and therefore “received a great deal of attention from the white legislators of the island” (Brathwaite 162). We might argue that through these laws, the colonizers were ironically providing proof of their own fear of obeah and witchcraft and the influence these practices could have on the community, as opposed to the colonizers’ claims of them being solely products of superstition and delusion. Christophine therefore finds another method of contradicting white mythologies and decides to help Antoinette, the result of which is a liqueur designed to offer one last delirious night for the married couple. Antoinette has complete trust in Christophine’s powers, as she did in the creative power of words in her childhood, reminding herself to “say nothing and it may not be true” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 34). Keeping her family’s secret safe might have seemed the only viable solution for Antoinette, but after her failure, she takes more extreme measures, which finally combine all three of the aspects mentioned above: sexuality, violence and obeah.

The act of lovemaking following the preparations explained by Christophine disappears from the memory of the poisoned husband. It is as if the secret of obeah is hidden from him even while experiencing its effects on his own skin. The image Rhys uses for the morning afterwards is once more that of death since Rochester feels “buried alive” and experiences a “feeling of suffocation” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 87) as if woken by a nightmare. Truth and imagination, reality and spectral elements collide in this sexual encounter, filling him with utter hatred and fear. His loss of memories echoes the cultural memories deliberately erased from the consciousness of the island community, who are for instance no longer aware of the events around the town of Massacre, the story of which “nobody remembers now” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 39). Having met with a self which he is not comfortable with, in accordance with Bhabha’s idea of the ‘otherness of the Self’, and having experienced being utterly controlled by the seduction of his

wife, he reaches the decision to return to England where the power dynamics are in his control as opposed to external or internal threats.

Rochester seems unaware of his own unconscious obeah practice, noted by both Antoinette and Christophine. Antoinette feels ashamed and offended, not to mention even more disorientated between her multiple subjectivities, once her husband renames her Bertha. Her utter belief in the power of words in the construction of her reality makes her confront him about the use of this name by informing him that renaming her for his own comfort is also obeah magic. After this conversation Rochester makes his first comments about Antoinette being doll-like and having a marionette quality, dehumanizing her not only through the suggestion that she is mentally ill but also through taking away her agency. Christophine also notices the power of these suggestions and the effect this marriage has on her *doudou*, when she suggests that Antoinette has “the look of death on her face” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 97) which in the context of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a statement closely tied to the image of the *zombi*. A *zombi* in the Caribbean belief system is “a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 67) and together with another ghost-like creature, the *soucriant*, it becomes a representation of Antoinette’s condition recognized by the person who knows her the most. Christophine connects the young woman’s decline to Rochester’s actions and while confronting him about it, the husband realizes how he manipulated Antoinette into an unhealthy obsession with his phoney gestures of affection. The creation of a *zombi* is considered obeah too which is ironic when one considers Rochester’s grievance against Antoinette’s obeah-induced seduction; they both become enchanted by violent means using sexuality and aboriginal magic as tools and remain as a result *zombi*-like, obsessed with an ideal never achieved. Antoinette is called “thirsty” for Rochester (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso*

Sea 101) and similarly, he in turn confesses to being left eternally “thirsty” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 111) by her.

Jean Rhys’s characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are in an incredibly vulnerable position in which not only people but ghostly or spectral forces are at work, enabled to influence them to the point where boundaries are not clearly set anymore. Historical memory and the postcolonial condition complicate the position of both of the main narrators and subjects, who find themselves in the middle of a process rather than in the place of a proper modernist individual. These 19th-century characters do not find points of reference in the modernist text and thus through the segmentation of the narrative become deconstructed as well. Arguably, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an attempt to show the assets available in this position and to argue that being human does not necessarily imply being in control, not even over one’s own identity. The importance of Jean Rhys’s struggle to set the right scene for Bertha Mason lies in her considerate use of delicate subject matters, and in her refusal to disclose a mystery that might not stay true to its essence once put into words, once it finds a shape. The text emerges as a suggestion that just like life, and just like the secret of the island, the human does not have a definite shape either. In the following chapter, ways in which spaces contribute to these ideas will be discussed to suggest that the islands and the city are constructive in terms of the protection they offer to or deny from Jean Rhys’s characters both in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

Chapter 2 - Spaces of the Caribbean and the European Capital

“And if you think you can't swing high, swing low.”

- The Ink Spots

Wide Sargasso Sea is Jean Rhys's last novel, the only one that she positions in the Caribbean islands, preceded by several novels of urban displacements in London and Paris which only contain reminiscences of life overseas or allusions to stories of migration. While in the first chapter, I focused on the construction of human identities as essentially a process, necessitated by the postcolonial condition, in the following, I would like to connect these hybrid characters to the space they move in and discuss how they interpret and alter social conventions about their environment. I will position *Wide Sargasso Sea* beside one of Rhys's Parisian narratives, *Good Morning, Midnight* to argue that in these novels, nature and the city are presented as constructive as opposed to constructed and that for the transnational characters, the main function these spaces must provide is that of a shelter. The modernist project is further questioned in the use of the landscape and Rhys seems to suggest a certain unity with one's environment in which social and psychological changes collide. I would like to correlate these ideas about space with the general aim of this thesis and suggest that the posthuman condition presented in the narratives requires the subject to move together with their environment. In a process of zooming in on ever smaller places, I will start from the broader landscape of the Caribbean and Paris, then move towards the buildings that Rhys's characters inhabit, finally arriving at the smallest places in which they hide.

2.1. Gendered Nature and City in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Good Morning, Midnight*

Jean Rhys's narratives do not support categorizations. This is the reason why, even though the natural and urban environments described in her novels appear highly gendered at first, their dichotomies are disclosed as social constructs. To perceive the ways in which spaces contribute to the construction of identities in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, we are required to discuss the mechanisms of patriarchy in its connection to the landscape and the contradictions exposed through the perspective offered by Rhys. I will imply that the Caribbean landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is perceived as feminine in its contrast with England only by Rochester and that this idea is only sustainable in case one confirms the perspective that postcolonialism seeks to erase. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the capitalist machine of the city presented in *Good Morning, Midnight* is an overwhelming force which resists being gendered as male due to its spectral presence in modern society and its effect on everyone, regardless of gender.

The first impressions expressed by Rochester upon his arrival on the island all connect the feminine to the landscape. He considers Amélie “a lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant, perhaps, like much else in this place” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 39) and notes about Antoinette's eyes that they were “too large and can be disconcerting” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 40). This excess in size and intensity is further emphasized in his famous account: “Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And she is a stranger” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 42). His view is conditioned by a Eurocentric perspective connecting femininity to wilderness and defined through difference rather than discovery. Therefore, the narrator in Part Two exerts influence upon the reader and advocates the interpretation of Antoinette's behaviour through her connection to nature, which is problematic first if we take into account the colonialist discourse

according to which the indigenous proximity to nature legitimizes institutionalized or voluntary violence in the name of a civilizing mission. Secondly, her ethnicity is combined with her gender to suggest that femininity represents chaos as opposed to the paternal order, an idea expressed by ecofeminist thinkers as well, who suggest that even outside of a post-Emancipation setting, women are closer to the natural and thus vulnerable to degrees of violence and exploitation similar to the ones exerted upon the landscape.

Plantation society in the Caribbean offers us a framework in which landscape and the feminine can be connected through their image as wild, passive and uncivilized. Kamau Brathwaite explains that Jamaica was not an easy island to establish a settlement on, because of the “difficult soil and terrain to cultivate” on one hand and the natural disasters such as “hurricanes, earthquakes, drought, fire and famine” on the other (Brathwaite 4). It was not until the 18th century that sugar plantation became “the chief and most characteristic economic activity within the colony” (Brathwaite 7) making use of slave labour and then rapid industrialization followed in the 19th century. Similarly to the land distributed among new settlers who decided to attempt combating these natural disasters in the hope of an easy fortune, women’s bodies were also conquered and commodified under the slave trade. For instance, Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as I have mentioned before, was originally a wedding gift offered to Anette, able to be purchased together with the plantations. Amélie, in a similar manner to Christophine’s voluntary service, is prepared to sell her body after the Emancipation, searching for “rich men in Rio” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 90).

Based on the account offered by Brathwaite, the sublime quality of nature in the Caribbean combines pleasure and fear, and manifests itself in a way that Rochester initially interprets as dangerous and alien, which gives him enough reason to understand his wife’s behaviour based on

this landscape as well. Sue Thomas notes how later on, he shifts between two registers of Eurocentric ideas of tropicality: “the paradisaal (the seductiveness of the doudou) and the pernicious (the psychological geography of corruption, intemperance, ruin, injury and destruction)” (Thomas 181). It is notable that in parallel with Antoinette being understood through her accordance with the Caribbean landscape, Rochester also projects his ideas of Antoinette to the environment. He perceives himself not only at a distance from the wilderness but also feels like his authority is at stake against forces he does not understand, as opposed to Antoinette, whom he perceives as part of the menace. This is evident from the scene when Antoinette asks him about England and he refuses to accept her dreamy vision of the country since, according to Cathleen Maslen, “it implicitly re-positions the island, Antoinette’s territory, as the true ‘centre’, the point of departure for exploration, observation and comparison”, creating “an othered English realm” (Maslen 210). Rochester represents what Braidotti calls a “universalistic posture and its binary logic”, central to which is “the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 15). What Rochester’s experience proves in connection to posthuman and postcolonial thought is not only the possibility to admire the mystery of ‘difference’ but also the inherent blurred boundaries between binary oppositions. The marriage of interest between Antoinette and her husband is on one hand an economic choice and on the other, towards the end of their relationship, an unhealthy obsession with authority on the part of Rochester, and his taking away of her to England signifies a desperate attempt to take control over the feminine after his failure of taming the natural.

Antoinette seems much more aware of her surroundings and yet significantly less concerned with understanding them than her husband. She positions herself as part of a landscape which resists ownership and which can turn against those with the most knowledge about it just as well as foreigners, as a spectral power. Rochester confesses that he feels like a stranger in Granbois

because the place seems like an enemy and on Antoinette's side. As an immediate reaction to this, she questions Rochester's demagoguery and places Christian fate in line with her affection towards the spaces she inhabits: "You are quite mistaken," she said. "It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it's something else. [...] I loved it because I had nothing else to love, but it is just as indifferent as this God you call on so often" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 82-83). We could argue that Antoinette's vision points towards a perspective in which the human is not entitled through their rationality or morality to commodify a landscape which is in its essence spectral and all-encompassing. Therefore, our female narrator does not seem to confirm the view according to which she can simply be assigned her place in the dichotomy of nature and culture. Along similar lines, Elaine Savory notes how Rhys "did not make nature into a totally innocent entity, but rather assigns it an uncontrollable and untamed and unknowable potential that her most alienated characters perceive as reflective of their own emotional landscape" (Savory 103). It is because Antoinette is more conscious of her own complex subjectivity that she does not aspire to claim the Caribbean landscape for herself or suggest that it is in any way superior to England.

Jean Rhys echoes her own heroine's dilemma in *Smile, Please*. While Antoinette claims to love Granbois "as if it were a person", even "more than a person" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 55), Rhys confesses that upon returning to Dominica, she experienced a painful realization of how much she "loved the land" which seemed "alive" and this made her want to identify with it: "But it turned its head away, indifferent, and that broke my heart" (Rhys, *Smile, Please* 66). In her novel, Rhys also appears to argue that a change of perspective is needed in the way we look at the environment, and therefore she deliberately blurs the line between reality and imagination, between human and non-human. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies conceptualize this gap by

explaining how “capitalist patriarchy or ‘modern’ civilisation is based on a cosmology and anthropology that structurally dichotomizes reality and hierarchically opposes the two parts to each other: the one always considered superior, always thriving, and progressing at the expense of the other” (Shiva and Mies, “Introduction” 5). They further explain that in order to achieve a new concept of the relationship between humanity and the environment, it is necessary to reject “the notion that Man’s freedom and Happiness depends on an ongoing process of emancipation from nature, or independence from, and dominance over natural processes by the power of reason and rationality” (Shiva and Mies, “Introduction” 6). I do not suggest that Jean Rhys might have demonstrated an early environmentalist sensibility. Rather, I believe that her perspective focuses on the human in its relation to non-human and even spectral elements and the transitional position experienced as a result. Her female characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* do seem closer to the landscape but they do not claim ownership over it and thus imply that human and environment are essentially the same living matter, in accordance with the posthuman relationality with concrete creative material.

This results in the idea mentioned at the beginning of the chapter according to which the landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* appears not as a background, but “alive”, conceptualized by Carine Mardorossian as a form of landscape-function, building upon the Foucauldian analysis of authorship. According to Mardorossian, this landscape-function “challenges approaches that foreground the environment as a pre-existing space that evolves outside of the subject and instead sees it as a function of discourse in its constitutive relation to humanity” (Mardorossian, “Caribbean Formations” 108). She concludes that we must “account for the ways in which it is our very conception of the human as we know him/her that is constructed through our association with nature” in order to “undermine the hierarchical nature of the human/environment relationship”

(Mardorossian, “Caribbean Formations” 119). Rochester’s simplification of wilderness as feminine and therefore inferior lies in the average person’s fear of losing the authority and comfort offered by the hierarchy mentioned above. Being connected to the non-human, the feminine or the less-than-human simultaneously means an allowance of rights for the previously subordinated category and a loss of rights for the opposite group. Through unveiling Rochester’s ideas as expired remains of a white mythology, Jean Rhys seems to argue for a type of posthuman ethics that Rosi Braidotti defines as a “non-unitary subject” with an “enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human, or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 49-50). Further on, I would like to investigate ways in which these ideas can be applied to the urban landscape that constitutes Rhys’s main preoccupation.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jensen comments upon the way in which she perceives the city as man’s world, and expresses her heightened awareness of her gender in an urban space which continually rejects her. This offers us the chance to interpret the city in the novel as essentially a male space, in which female characters can only lead minor roles and are in need of continuous financial assistance in order to survive. There is an overwhelming presence of money in Sasha’s narration, both in her thoughts and in the conversations she has with other, predominantly male, characters, and her obsessive consumption shows her need for approval in urban society. Her ways of obtaining money or avoiding paying altogether come with the assistance of the men around her, and thus she perceives them as essentially more likely to succeed than her. We find out about the ways in which Enno provides for her and then the charity that the foreign men offer her in cafés and restaurants, or by paying for her taxi rides. Without male charity, working women in Paris appear stagnant, in the way of the girl from the room behind the tabac bar

“who does all the dirty work and gets paid very little for it” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 87). Sasha describes her working in a coffin-like room, alluding to the ways in which continuous serving without compensation causes inanimation.

The beginning of the novel offers us a background of the jobs Sasha took on in order to sustain herself, highly defined by the figure of Mr Blank, the embodiment of Sasha’s idea about the gendered city. From a lengthy internal monologue we find out how Mr Blank grows to be the representative of “Society” for Sasha, a man who decides her “market value” and determines her living conditions (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 25). She then contemplates upon the dehumanizing effect of *capitalist* patriarchy offering a radical allegory: “Let’s say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple – no, that I think you haven’t got” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 26). Therefore, Sasha experiences the economic gap between her employer and herself as a dismembering inequality, which she perceives as predetermined and unchangeable. According to Cathleen Maslen, Mr Blank can be interpreted in psychoanalytical terms as “the Father – that is, paternalist-symbolic discourse and values” (Maslen 128), which is presumably the underlying reason why Sasha, the “inefficient member of Society” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 25) decides to leave the shop. The end of her monologue reveals that her abjection extends to the point of her inability to verbalize it: “Did I say all this? Of course I didn’t. I didn’t even think it” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 26). This might remind the reader of an idea prevalent in postcolonial studies according to which the uncanny violence of colonialism lies in the contribution of the colonized to their own oppression. In Sasha’s case, the oppression inflicted on her by Mr Blank stops her from truly contemplating her position at all. On a related note, Maslen suggests about the commodity culture that in the context of Mr Blank’s shop, “power is synonymous with sadistic pleasure, and depends on totalizing narratives

of absolute empowerment contra absolute abjection” (Maslen 131). However, I do not believe that in Jean Rhys’s presentation of Paris the dichotomy of absolutes mentioned by Maslen coincides with the gendering of urban space experienced by Sasha.

Just as the Caribbean landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* turned out unable to be assigned to the feminine, Rhys’s Paris also goes beyond its initial categorization as man’s world. The first detail complicating this idea is Rhys’s choice of a female flâneur in Paris. Writing about the role of the poet and the flâneur in modern culture, Catherine Nesci explains how “the invention of the flâneur was rooted in the emerging consumer culture and the urban milieu” of the 19th century (Nesci 71) and came to signify “a passionate, invisible, male observer of diurnal and nocturnal life in the arcades, parks, boulevards, and cafés” (Nesci 72). Jean Rhys redefines the character of the flâneur not only by positioning a woman in this role but also by exposing the lack of heroism in it. Sasha shows profound affection towards the streets of Paris, experiencing them as private spaces, and even feeling understood by them: “Nobody else knows me but the street knows me” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 89). However, in stark contrast with her perception of these places as animate, she breeds profound hatred towards the human aspect of the Parisian jungle and continually refers to its inhabitants using inanimate images. Therefore, Rhys’s flâneur does engage in aimless walks and can be considered an observer as opposed to an active participant in the cityscape but her sensitivity to and avoidance of human contact prevents her from reading the crowds.

Once choosing to engage in conversation with the participants of the Parisian nightlife, Sasha shows her awareness of the commodification of relationships and feels vulnerable to them in light of her age. Her wariness of humanity peaks in her encounter with René, an attractive young man whom she associates with sex workers taking advantage of the wealth of elderly women.

Although her funds are limited, she owns a fur coat which she uses to keep up a respectable appearance and which might suggest wealth for him. Through Sasha's profound suspicion all through the novel, Rhys suggests that the city is as merciless to men as women and that sexuality is a tool available to both of them in the struggle to make a living. Sasha and René discover that in their previous years, they did not only use similar strategies to achieve the trust of the wealthy but also reached the same results, ironically being offered a room in the same millionaire's house. Besides René, we can identify Sasha's neighbour as representative of the influence modernity has on everyone, regardless of gender. Mentioning the commis voyageur, Cathleen Maslen argues that "as a salesman presumably obliged to identify himself with his unidentified wares in order to exact a profitable exchange, he signifies, like René, commodified humanity" (Maslen 145). The end of the novel brings all of these three commodified characters together in an encounter where, ironically, nothing is exchanged. Based on the male characters mentioned above, we can argue that Rhys complicates the power dynamics of the genders by showcasing them in the struggle to obtain livelihood and comfort against the forces of capitalism instead of against each other.

Despite her struggle to find a single subject to blame for her misery, similarly to Mr Blank, Sasha must repeatedly return to the idea according to which the whole of humanity is in a battle against her, or at least there is nobody who stands beside her in her loneliness: "Human beings are cruel – horribly cruel" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 41). But this type of hatred cannot offer her comfort, because it is essentially unfocused, directed towards her whole living environment and thus unable to be channeled into one single entity. We might interpret Sasha's struggle in light of the spectrality of capitalism, defined by Slavoj Žižek as "the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, which is much more uncanny than direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence" since it "is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions; it is purely

‘objective’, systemic, anonymous” (Žižek 15). While colonialism is the spectre that haunts the Caribbean in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is commodity culture that rules Paris in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The commodity culture presented by Rhys through the perspective of an unemployed Englishwoman temporarily living in Paris reveals that there is much at stake with the rise of modernism and the price is a loss of a familiar type of humanity. In the Paris of *Good Morning, Midnight*, it is not through the qualities of the individual, nor their gender or nationality that one can achieve respectability. On the contrary, Rhys seems to present a subject which has little to do with the way their lives are shaped. In the following we will look at the movements Rhys’s characters are required to make and draw conclusions about the semi-private spaces they temporarily inhabit.

2.2. Nomadic Ghosts and Modern Homelessness

Rhysian characters are in constant movement and do not possess roots which might allow them to breed nostalgia for a preferable past. They are therefore ghost-like, experiencing multiple deaths, desiring peace rather than a permanent dwelling place. They can create a certain type of home anywhere and can even feel momentary bits of happiness, but once disturbed by occurrences of more or less intensity, they become estranged and seek a new beginning in another place. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can follow Antoinette’s movement through several different buildings of multiple functions, through the presentation of which I would like to argue for her spectral perseverance and nomadic sensibility, inspired by Braidotti’s conceptualization of the nomadic subject. *Good Morning Midnight* showcases multiple travellers as well, but I would like to focus on the heroine to show how her homeless condition is extended by Jean Rhys upon the whole of modern culture, similarly to the way I have discussed the spectral violence of capitalism in the

previous section. By focusing on the houses and hotel rooms presented in these novels, I would like to show the way in which Antoinette and Sasha's experience as nomadic subjects speaks to the posthuman condition.

Several critics have interpreted *Wide Sargasso Sea's* Coulibri Estate and its surrounding garden as symbols of a post-lapsarian world. Antoinette, talking about the garden which was "large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible" with the "tree of life" inside, ties the gradual decay of the whole property to the Emancipation Act: "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery. Why should *anybody* work?" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 6). The house experiences multiple flourishing periods and decays, and is essentially Antoinette's only point of reference until its final destruction. It is highly defined by its historical significance, attracting hatred as the estate of a former plantation owner. Once the house gets in the hands of another rich Englishman, the young Antoinette internalizes her premonition that everything "would change and go on changing" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 12). The house is further tied to vulnerable personal relationships and the childhood innocence Antoinette is required to leave behind once faced with the cruelty that humanity is capable of exercising. No matter how tied she feels to her initial home, she is surprisingly quick to relinquish it after her family is irrevocably uprooted. This is supposedly a reaction justifiable through Vandana Shiva's idea about the desacralization of the soil which alters the meaning of space and through which "[s]acred space, the universe of all meaning and living, the ecological source of all sustenance, is transformed into a mere site, a location in Cartesian space" (Shiva, "Homeless in the 'Global Village'" 103). The ruination of the Edenic Garden and Coulibri Estate and its inevitable desacralization results in her sudden uprooting and her conviction about the possibility for multiple deaths through the madness of her mother.

Her first escape after the fire of Coulibri leads Antoinette to Mount Calvary Convent in Spanish Town, Jamaica. She finds friends and seems to move familiarly in the community, reporting on a newly found happiness on arrival: “I could scarcely believe I had ever been miserable” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 29). She further verbalizes the function this religious space fulfils for her by calling it her “refuge, a place of sunshine and of death” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 31). She shares her space with girls of her age, finding comfort in accordance with the rules and invisibility. Once sheltered, however, she is presented with the news of her further movement towards England which makes her different from the other girls at the convent, a difference which she perceives as threatening as opposed to the safety of the convent. Once again, she is displaced without her consent, carrying the weight of her nightmares alone. Delia C. Konzett argues that “Rhys depicts dislocation mostly as a single rather than collective fate,” since “her heroines can no longer find any shelter in a group or collective identity” (Konzett 128). Finding shelter is a central objective of Antoinette’s nomadic sensibility, empowering her with perseverance that trusts blindly in the abilities one place can offer.

Antoinette arrives in Granbois feeling ecstatic, aspiring to fully enjoy the honeymoon suite and obstinately ignoring signs of the historical past evident from the ruins surrounding the house in Dominica and its neighbouring town, Massacre. She channels her unprocessed trauma into her marriage and into her sexual life, immersing herself in pleasures which are available to her as the person responsible for the estate. Granbois significantly becomes the first place where Antoinette can feel in control of her environment and sheltered from the gaze of strangers. Once removed from her position and faced with the terms of the marriage contract, she loses her perseverance and finally becomes what everyone manifested her to be, a subject devoid of agency. We might argue that her movement through the houses mentioned above and finally Thornfield Hall speaks

to the way in which spaces contribute to the gradual subjective complexity that Antoinette goes through, peaking in her enclosure in the attic.

Their life in England is calculated and the English house surrounded by English trees drawn by Rochester functions as a way to respond to Antoinette's doll-like, marionette quality. Alluding to the intertextual quality of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Patricia Moran and Erica L. Johnson argue that Antoinette does not become the ghost of Rochester's house once she arrives at Thornfield, "so much as she is this spectral figure from the first pages of the novel in that she bears within her the secrets of other women and other texts" (Moran and Johnson 226-227). Relying on this idea and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, we might interpret *Wide Sargasso Sea* as an account of the ways in which Antoinette's becoming-madwoman is imagined by Rhys as the unity created through the exchange between Bertha Mason and Antoinette Cosway. Antoinette is portrayed as an always already ghostly or spectral character in a process of movement through ruins, bearing witness to Bertha Mason's unmarked grave as presented by Charlotte Brontë.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys offers a similar account of the dehumanizing effect certain private or public spaces can exercise on the individual, or what becomes of the individual once stripped of their defining qualities and merged into the masses. Sasha Jansen is an urban nomad, whose living space is 'the hotel room' as a repeatable concept recognized by the narrator as such, once she realizes that essentially "All rooms are the same" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 33). Sasha's self-recognition is special since several of Rhys's characters are deployed in connection to the modernist technique of serialization but rarely are they conscious of their own repeatable subjectivities. In his widely quoted essay on the allegorical implications of the hotel lobby in connection to modernity, Siegfried Kracauer defines the hotel as "a space that encompasses and has no function other than to encompass" (Kracauer 175-176) and which "merely

displaces people from the unreality of the daily hustle and bustle” (Kracauer 176). As a result, one is distanced from actual life, but “without being subjected to a new determination that would circumscribe from above the sphere of validity for these determinations” (Kracauer 179). Through this position of being undefined and in a constant movement, Kracauer’s ideas can be connected to the posthuman condition present in Sasha’s perception of Paris and more importantly, Parisian hotel lives.

The narrator contemplates the anonymity inherent in temporary dwellings offered by hotel rooms and the subsequent invisibility of the people who are reduced to its guests: “This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 120). For Sasha, names and being renamed is a way of adapting to her condition as a European citizen, and a constant guest, but being devoid of a name signifies for her a lack of definition. Her identity cannot remain untouched by the effect of the hotel, and she needs to find her own coping mechanisms as part of the great commodity culture that rooms embody, the truth about which would “undermine the whole social system” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 33). Presenting the displaced masses of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Delia Konzett argues that in this novel, “Rhys approximates the new mass culture that redefined not only bourgeois respectability but the entire concept of the autonomous subject as well” (Konzett 156), resulting in “a different definition of social, and cultural identity that transcended the bourgeois confines of a humanistically conceived and wholly individualized subject” (Konzett 164). The alternative that she seems to offer has to do, again, with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the subject as a continuum that resists representation. I would like to extend the description of the ways in which Sasha finds possibilities of becoming in the third chapter.

The public space which further speaks to the mass movements of modern culture is the Exhibition from Sasha's dream, which she eventually visits and which therefore offers a frame structure to the novel in a highly significant way. The *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* took place in Paris in October 1937, as an act towards an internationalism which would stop the deteriorating effects of the interwar Depression. According to Christina Britzolakis, the Exhibition "almost immediately became a signifier of global imperial crisis" (Britzolakis 464) and in the framework of *Good Morning Midnight*, "becomes a sign for the operation of commodity spectacle more generally" (Britzolakis 459). I would like to connect her ideas to Sasha's dream at the beginning of the novel, where the Exhibition appears as a spectacle towards which everyone advances at the London tube station: "This Way to the Exhibition. This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition - I want the way out" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 12). If we extend the interpretation of the Exhibition to the display of ads, shop windows and sites of entertainment in Paris, we might argue that Sasha's final desire to visit the Exhibition is justifiable through her acceptance of the nothingness that modernity elicits through it. Her visit is an extension of her hotel existence, where she can be one with the void, "cold, empty, beautiful" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 137).

What Jean Rhys seems to portray in *Good Morning Midnight*, through the blurring of the border between the public and the private, is an awareness of the invalidity of humanist ideas in the modern era. The Parisian hotel rooms and the famous Exhibition of technological advances gather masses of uncertain origins, and the multiplicity of individuals under the aegis of cosmopolitanism is threatened by the forces of the Capital. Sasha articulates her sense of merging with this depersonalizing crowd, confessing to have "no pride, no name, no face, no country" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 38). This lack of roots is identified by Vandana Shiva as a unifying

condition where “[t]he cumulative displacement caused by colonialism, development and the global marketplace has made homelessness a cultural characteristic of the late twentieth century” (Shiva, “Homeless in the ‘Global Village’” 98). It is through this homelessness that Rhys connects the “mannequins”, “empty forms” or “ghosts” (Kracauer 183) of the hotel lobby to the condition of the posthuman. Ways in which Rhysian characters move in their semi-private spaces will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

2.3. Rhysian Hiding Spaces – Rooms, Shops, and Cafés

The constant movement described above happens with the aim of finding a shelter or hiding place from the world outside. The spaces Rhys’s characters inhabit negotiate public and private dimensions and are related to Antoinette and Sasha’s melancholy and consumption. Rhys seems to argue for a subject that can never remain isolated and that is never sheltered from the powers of the public sphere. On the contrary, the public will eventually be encapsulated inside the subject. In this chapter, I will discuss the contrast between Antoinette’s room and her husband’s space in order to show the ways these shelters contribute to their identity. Furthermore, based on what I have discussed about the spectrality of capitalism and the significance of the Exhibition in *Good Morning, Midnight*, I will present rooms, shops and cafés as spaces that highly define Sasha’s movement through Paris and which all have a hiding function in various ways.

Rosi Braidotti defines the critical posthuman subject “within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 49). If we consider the function of rooms of *Wide Sargasso Sea* with this idea in mind, we can see that the way they are constructed accounts for Antoinette’s multiple

belongings discussed in the previous chapter as well. In Coulibri, she articulates her how “feeling safe in bed” already “belonged to the past” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 5) in which her father still lived, and even after the renovations made by her mother’s second husband, she seems anxious about the possible dangers of the rooms, which always have a door or a window open. She religiously keeps a stick next to her bed to keep safe from harm, believing that everything is alive, “not only the river or the rain, but chairs, looking-glasses, cups, saucers, everything” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 19). Christophine’s room also awakens a fear in Antoinette, feeling “certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man’s dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 14). The warnings of Christophine are also notable in terms of what these half-enclosed spaces signify for Antoinette’s development since she is aware from an early age that the *glacis* is not safe at night and that sleeping too long in the moonlight when the moon is full has severe consequences. Obeah magic unites all these convictions but we can add that the rooms and the way Antoinette inhabits them are highly defined by historical, cultural and social factors due to their architectural planning and therefore exercise a profound influence on her subjectivity.

The pinnacle of the Caribbean architectural features that Rhys emphasizes in Coulibri and Granbois as well is the veranda or *glacis*. The veranda is a colonial formation through which plantation owners could showcase their power and in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it serves as an in-between space where public and private spheres connect. In her interpretation of the multiplicity of words Rhys uses to refer to this space, Mary Lou Emery conceptualizes the verandas present in the novel as “threshold spaces” which “portray contradictory and swiftly changing relationships among displaced characters of uncertain origins” (Emery, “On the Veranda” 65). The veranda offers a chance for intruders to catch a glimpse of the rooms as well, which Rochester takes advantage of

multiple times to spy on his wife. The existence of a door between their rooms only adds to my claim that nothing is ever private in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Moreover, nothing is ever singular or stable, including the subjectivities that Antoinette assumes in the separate rooms she inhabits.

As we have seen in the first chapter of my thesis, Antoinette is not the only character who experiences a type of subjectivity that might be interpreted as posthuman. Rochester is also affected by environmental impulses but due to his strong objection to these changes, he never fully accommodates the idea that difference is acceptable. This is why, in Granbois, he is in need of a space that reassures him of his rationality and moreover, of the superiority of rational knowledge over whatever the secret of the island might be. He finds Mr Mason's old study, which becomes his room, not only comforting, but "a refuge" solely by looking at the carpet, the press, and most importantly, "a writing-desk with paper, pens, and ink" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 45), which signifies written culture and the chance to communicate with his relatives in England or the officials he contacts regarding his misgivings about Christophine. Through this room, Rochester internalizes an image of the intellectual colonialist which is in stark contrast with his experience on the island where his identity is questioned instead of respected and he is presented with a system of knowledge that he does not comprehend. His hiding in this study is just as ineffective as Antoinette's retreat, both experiencing a disharmony between their expectations and the way their marriage takes shape on the island. Through their rooms, Rhys complicates these characters who find themselves in an in-between space both externally and internally, a space that Braidotti might explain through the posthuman "inter-connection between self and others" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 49).

Hiding spaces look very different in *Good Morning, Midnight*, but they prove to be similarly effective in shaping the hybrid subject. Concerning Sasha Jensen's rooms, I have

demonstrated the way in which Rhys presents hotel living and nomadic subjectivities as an allegory for modern culture. Here, I would like to stress the function of the hotel room as a shelter and hiding space for the heroine of *Good Morning, Midnight*, again focusing on the merging points between public and private. The rooms inside the hotel have a hierarchy too, an illusion that causes Sasha to create an escape strategy even inside the framework of the hotel, from her own room into “room number 219” which signifies for her “a different plane” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 32) of life due to its slightly different description offered by the hotel. The public enters her room in the sense of failure she feels whenever she imagines what the other ones might look like. She nevertheless offers a self-assuring remark about the sameness of rooms, including hers, which is after all “a place where you hide from the wolves outside” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 33). In her struggle to hide, however, she becomes one with her empty and cheap hotel room, finding herself vacant as well while extending her consciousness to objects such as the bed where she can “pull the past over [her] like a blanket” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 49). In her room, all past traumas saturate, and she further articulates the significance of this shelter in the context of her rootless lifestyle: “It’s all the rooms I’ve ever slept in” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 91). Sasha’s becoming-nomadic results in an accumulation of unresolved experiences which are embodied in her hotel room(s) and which define her constant movement between the hotel and other public spaces.

In accordance with this, Sasha arranges her life around places to sleep, drink and eat in. The narration tells of a profound decision-making process about the right places to consume in, about the importance of which she confesses: “My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don’t, streets that are friendly, streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be” (Rhys,

Good Morning, Midnight 40). Her orders in bars and restaurants grant her an illusion of control over her life and she enjoys pretending to have an inexhaustible amount of funding for food and beverages. Moreover, the way in which the narration mentions food and alcohol speaks to the way in which they are the most significant ways through which Sasha can influence her own mood. Besides the food, she enjoys the anonymity of busy bars and restaurants and avoids places which are charged with any sort of private dimension, mostly related to the mental breakdowns of her past. Therefore, the bar, a space conventionally understood as public, is internalized by Sasha in her merge with strangers.

We might argue that besides the illusion of being in control and the comfort in finding oneself between strangers instead of familiar faces, the attraction to restaurants is in connection with Sasha's addiction to consumerism. Shops are representative spaces for those who seek the illusion of power: "Just the sensation of spending, that's the point" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 121). The episode of her search for the perfect hat is representative here, together with the constant urge to change her hair. The hat shop becomes a space of a ritual once she spends two hours trying on hats just to let the shop assistant choose for her in the end. We might even say that instead of enlarging the value of the hat by choosing to wear it, the hat extends its influence upon her. She even reports feeling happy after the change in her looks: "I am feeling happy, what with my new hair and my new hat and the good meal and the wine" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 60). Sasha's identification with shops and hairdressing salons can arguably be connected to a process that Braidotti conceptualizes as a "re-grounding of subjects in the radical immanence of their embodied and embedded locations" (Braidotti, *Posthuman Critical Theory* 22). Rooms, cafés and shops offer her reference points through the connections she makes between her embodied existence and her environment, human and non-human alike. All these spaces contain objects, non-

human animals or spectral elements which Sasha identifies with or evokes, which further contributes to the subject matter of the last chapter of my thesis.

Chapter 3 - Inanimation and Rhizomatic Subjectivity in *Good Morning, Midnight*

*“When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn’t go, and doesn’t suit me.”*

- “Warning”, by Jenny Joseph

The previous two chapters outlined the reasons for which Jean Rhys’s characters appear as abject, isolated, and sceptical about the trustworthiness of the humans around them. Rhys’s female characters show signs of subjectivity in a constant movement which speaks to the way they interact with other people and their environment as well. In this chapter, I intend to follow up on the ideas articulated above with a slightly more detailed discussion about the mechanisms of rhizomatic subjectivity and inanimation in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha Jensen does not fit in and therefore she evolves a mixed sense of empathy and hatred towards others while searching for methods through which she can limit her identification with the human species. She employs identification with ghosts, animals and objects as a way to separate from human society on the one hand, and to achieve a more complex sense of subjectivity on the other. She also engages in alcohol consumption to a concerning degree, aspiring through this way to achieve machine-like numbness. The struggle for indifference turns into a hopeless endeavour causing her depression and melancholy to worsen, but the processes Sasha goes through help us pinpoint her humanity and sympathy towards those suffering as well as her posthuman sensitivity. By drawing attention to

the ways in which Rhys connects Sasha to spectral, non-human or material entities I strengthen the general claim of the paper according to which her characters can be interpreted as posthuman.

3.1. The Rhizome and *Good Morning, Midnight*

An inescapable term that one encounters once engaging with theories of the posthuman is that of the rhizome. Therefore, before turning to concrete examples of Sasha's multiple belongings, I would like to present this term relying mostly on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "Introduction" to *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they offer the fullest definition of it. I will start with some general remarks about the rhizome and then turn to the principles Deleuze and Guattari identify in connection to it, relating them to Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*. I will argue that their theory can be used effectively to describe the modernist gaps in Rhys's text and to complete the interpretation of Sasha's subjectivity towards a more precisely posthuman one. This brief presentation serves as a base which we can turn back to in the later part of the novel's analysis.

Deleuze and Guattari start their theorization of the rhizome by relating it to themselves in an almost comic remark: "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 3). What they refer to here is their idea about the possibility or rather inescapable condition of multiplicity inside the subject which they conceptualize in the form of flow. They stress the impossibility of delimiting one single entity and focus instead on the connections the individual enters with their surroundings, contemplating the changes that happen inside of it as a result. They consider the rhizome the only logical solution in a world that "has lost its pivot" and in which "the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 6). We might argue that Sasha's presence in *Good Morning,*

Midnight can also be characterized by a movement or “flow” in her nomadic travelling through Europe and in the way she inhabits her rooms, cafés, and shops as well, as we have seen in the second chapter. She moves together with the flows of the urban atmosphere and finds herself in a condition that embodies what Erica L. Johnson has called the “porousness and rhizomatic nature of the amorphous figure of the human” (Johnson, “‘Upholstered Ghosts’: Jean Rhys’s Posthuman Imaginary” 211). She is ambivalent since her looks do not coincide with her internal or financial reality but she is labelled as well, with signs that she cannot identify with.

The first two principles of the rhizome identified in *A Thousand Plateaus* are connection and heterogeneity. By this, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the rule according to which “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). They use the image of the tree and the root in opposition with the model they describe, which does not point toward a point, nor fixes an order. Deleuze and Guattari connect this idea to that of linguistic codes from different regimes of signs, concluding that “there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). What Jean Rhys suggests in *Good Morning, Midnight* through the disruption of the linear narrative and the impossibility of her heroines to verbalize their struggles, is a regime of signs unattainable through conventional semiotic chains. When Sasha articulates her idea of truth as it is withdrawn from words, she contemplates her profound mistrust of linguistic signs as representative of reality: “You imagine the carefully-pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is truth. That is just what it isn’t. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it’s in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 63). The improbable is what Deleuze and Guattari call rhizomatic.

The third principle of the rhizome is that of multiplicity according to which “it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, “multiplicity,” that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 8). Multiplicity in this sense can grow and changes might happen to its nature as a result but regardless of the number of its dimensions, it can be flattened on a single “plane of exteriority” which Deleuze and Guattari identify as the ideal for a book: “lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 9), all on a single page. This ‘plane of exteriority’ or ‘consistency’ refers to a multiplicity of connections made between entities in which their separate nature is overruled. What Rhys’s novel comprises in this sense as a continuation of her earlier works is not only Sasha’s past and new lived experience but also the interbellum, commodity culture, *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys’s biographical information and jazz music, all encompassed in the everyday reality of a nomadic subject of multiple belongings. The narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight* often contemplates the opportunities that the multiplicity of her narration has access to and those it cannot reach. In the course of the novel, a significant number of doors are mentioned which at times allow entrance but mostly deny it, starting in Mr Blank’s shop which she perceives as a maze in which “all the doors are shut” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 23) and which leads her to other jobs which reassure her that “the doors will always be shut” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 28). Doors open for a brief amount of time during her travels with Enno, but they soon shut again “in [her] head” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 114) upon the death of her child. These doors complicate and define the dimensions of the multiplicity through which Sasha’s subjectivity is formed.

The following principle of asignifying rupture works “against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 9). Deleuze and Guattari explain this principle by presenting the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization which are distinguished from simple imitation in the sense that they result from an ‘asignifying rupture’, which marks the irreversible change one undergoes in different exchanges with the outside world, through which parts of the rhizome are reconstructed. They offer an example about the hammer orchid and the wasp in which the flower deterritorializes by forming the image of the insect which through this tracing is reterritorialized, but they both go through the opposite procedure once the wasp becomes part of the orchid’s reproductive process through transporting its pollen (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 10). They are careful to stress that this is not solely imitation, they become part of each other in this connection which causes a rupture in the rhizome. Musical allusions in *Good Morning, Midnight* might be interpreted through this perspective. One of the significant songs is Paul Robeson’s version of ‘Gloomy Sunday’ which Rhys alludes to on the first page of the novel and which is deterritorialised through its reduction to a humming by a stranger but is reterritorialized in Sasha’s recognition. Sasha, on the other hand, starts to cry and from this point onwards refers to Sunday as “a difficult day anywhere” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 15). In this sense, music offers lines of flight in rhizomatic assemblages which make changes in them possible, also present in the case of ‘Swing High, Swing Low’ or ‘Maladie d’amour, maladie de la jeunesse...’. Additional examples of asignifying ruptures will be elaborated on in the following sections of this chapter.

The last two principles of the rhizome are that of cartography and decalcomania which state that “a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model” (Deleuze and Guattari,

A Thousand Plateaus 12). Deleuze and Guattari imagine the rhizome in the form of a map instead of tracing and stress the importance of multiplicity in the understanding of this constantly changeable image which has “multiple entryways” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 12) instead of a tree-like structure. Multiple entryways in their understanding mean that for example the burrow is an animal rhizome which sometimes maintains a line of flight as a passageway or living strata for small animals (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 12). What this signifies in the case of Rhys’s novel is a performance influenced by several impulses, animate or inanimate, which result in the complexity of Sasha’s subjectivity as opposed to her granting of a resolution. *Good Morning, Midnight* ends after a series of choices made without real influence exercised upon them, through chance, improbable alterations to the rhizome and a strong death drive on the part of the heroine, but there is no traceable plot and therefore there cannot be a finite resolution that might explain the narration and its course. What matters in the following parts of my thesis is the creation of multiple dimensions of Sasha’s becoming through her identification with entities ultimately included in her rhizomatic subjectivity.

3.2. Inanimation – Rhysian Characters as Animals, Objects, and Ghosts

Sasha Jensen’s posthumanism starts with a profound disarray between the way she expects to be treated in the world and her everyday reality. She is excessively melodramatic and consciously exaggerates at times when she has the chance to articulate her misfortunes. Humans, in Sasha’s words, are “horribly cruel” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 41) and therefore the “horrible laughter of the world” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 115) overrules her experience in society. Erica Johnson suggests that Rhys’s characters seek “to remove themselves from the status of ‘human’ that figures so negatively in others” and therefore they are modelled as “complex

intersubjective and interstitial beings” (Johnson, “‘Upholstered Ghosts’: Jean Rhys’s Posthuman Imaginary” 213) I would like to add Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the rhizome to show concrete examples of Sasha’s identification with external entities in a struggle to distance herself from humanity. I will suggest that she extends the scope of her subjectivity towards non-human and inanimate others but the more dimensions this rhizome gains, the more distanced she is, and the greater her death drive becomes, leading her into the arms of the ghostly neighbour.

Sasha is aware of her utter dependence on the kindness of others and therefore some of the images she invokes relate to her condition of financial and emotional instability once deprived of support. The first category we might identify in connection to her rhizomatic subjectivity is that of non-human animals, more specifically companion or entertainment animals, also highly dependent on the generosity of their owners. The line of flight through which she can connect to them is firstly a shared lower position in the dichotomy of absolute power and absolute abjection and secondly, a common mortality. Complementing an idea expressed first by Jeremy Bentham, Jacques Derrida notes that theories discussing the essential differences between humans and animals focus on the capacity to speak or reason while the “*first and decisive* question would rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*” (Derrida 27). What Sasha’s identification with them proves is also a shared vulnerability to suffering, a representative scene of which is the one that features her encounter with the kitten in London.

She reports that the kitten “had an inferiority complex and persecution mania and nostalgic de la boue and all that” which could be depicted by her “terrible eyes, that knew her fate” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 47). Excluded by her companions, the kitten found shelter in Sasha’s London flat, only to be sent away by her, after which “out into the street she shot and a merciful taxi went over her” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 47). The way the tragic end of the kitten is

portrayed in Sasha's narration is informed by her own experience of suicidal thoughts as a result of being an outsider. What she does not internalize, however, is the way in which she was complicit in the suffering and death of the cat, similarly to the way in which humanity, described by her as "a pack of damned hyenas" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 144), is complicit in her abjection. Besides the kitten, she evokes other animals which she connects to, being in the position of a dog in front of Mr Blank (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 23), and feeling "sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 39). I suggest that Rhys includes these animals into the novel with the aim to show their intrinsic value as opposed to highlighting the ways in which they signify human concerns. The narration supports the claim made by Bentham and Derrida: suffering is a line of flight, as understood through the theory of the rhizome, through which human and animal can connect.

The second significant category through which Rhys complicates Sasha's subjectivity is that of the objects through which she deterritorializes. Erica L. Johnson, in her analysis of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, calls Julia a "prosthetic form in that she feels as much – if not more – a part of the jumble of objects in shop windows as with the people surrounding her on the street" (Johnson, "'Upholstered Ghosts': Jean Rhys's Posthuman Imaginary" 212) Sasha Jensen possesses a similar 'prosthetic' quality once she contemplates the possibility for the animation of inanimate objects and the other way around. She, for example, envies the "damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 16) and differentiates between looking-glasses she looks good in and those she does not, "dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 40). On the other hand, through her job as a mannequin and through the way she contemplates her image in the mirror, she becomes one with these objects around her, in a constant process of becoming. The

way in which this deterritorializes and reconstructs her subjectivity is illustrated by her confession about the inanimate materiality of her body: “Besides, it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 37). She makes a related remark about the West African masks, which, “complete with legs and body” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 76) constitute her perception of the people around her. Sasha’s connection to the objects around her results in her awareness of the instrumentality of her body on one hand and the depersonalizing effect of commodity culture on the other, which not only her but everyone is subjected to.

What all of the processes mentioned above result in is a spectral presence that is foreshadowed from the beginning of the novel by the narrator through the frequent allusions to suicidal thoughts. She is questioned by “the very respectable” about her decision not to “make a hole in the water”, not to “drown [herself] in the Seine” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 36) and therefore gains an understanding about the way in which society can vacate someone of life once they expose difference. Again, Erica L. Johnson remarks Rhys’s invocation of suicide in the case of Julia from *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* only to defy it and argues that through her refusal to allow her to cease being, “Rhys suggests that Julia enters into a posthuman ontological state of spectrality” (Johnson, “‘Upholstered Ghosts’: Jean Rhys’s Posthuman Imaginary” 222). Sasha also internalizes the idea of a failed suicide and becomes instead a spectral presence in the narrative, describing how “the lid of the coffin shut down with a bang” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 37) over her in the hotel room, as a result of which she became the “frail ghost” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 48) in her hotel room.

What makes a difference in her spectrality and reminds her of her materiality is the last scene together with René when she experiences pain in her mouth and breasts “because it hurts,

when you have been dead, to come alive” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 153). Rhys seems to suggest that through her connection with another human being on an erotic, physical level, Sasha regains a sense of belonging not only to animal and inanimate others, or the spectral presence of the less-than-living, but also to persons with their own ways of becoming. Her lack of trust in this man sabotages their relationship but her misrepresentation of René proves the way in which Rhys combines a posthuman subjectivity with sympathy towards others and sensitivity to a broader understanding of suffering. Although Sasha is at times presented as utterly self-centered and excessive in self-pity, I argue that her understanding of depression and loneliness proves the way in which her subjectivity is expanded not only towards non-human others but also towards her own species, no matter how hard she tries to delimit her connection to them. In the following and final section, I will analyse Sasha’s struggle for numbness and indifference and the ways in which the text negotiates and finally contradicts her chances to achieve a machine-like state and offers instead one which is closer to Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of becoming.

3.3. Becoming-Machine - Addiction, Numbness, and Indifference

In her connection to non-human others, Sasha enters a mission to escape her misery through becoming insensible to external impulses and therefore less vulnerable to them: “Of course, you must make your mind vacant, neutral, then your face also becomes vacant – you are invisible” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 17). Numbness and indifference are two ideals that she is working towards and this process can be understood not only through her rhizomatic subjectivity but also through her addiction to alcohol. What I would like to show in this part of the thesis is that Sasha’s strife to become senseless can be understood through Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of becoming-machine. Even alcohol, which is arguably quite a conventional way of coping with trauma,

functions as a way to achieve bodily, cognitive and emotional numbness in the case of Sasha, who aspires for machine-like detachment through her excessive consumption. The success of this endeavour, however, will be challenged as I will posit Sasha's sensitive humanity and her emotions as barriers between her distress and a machine-like numbness. Her struggle to achieve the unachievable makes Sasha even more miserable, and through her experience, Rhys enables the readers to contemplate the degree of scepticism about humans that remains constructive as opposed to the opposite.

Deleuze and Guattari explain drunkenness "as a triumphant irruption of the plant in us" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 11) which is a rather unconventional way to look at the effects of alcohol on the human body but which speaks to Sasha's experience of the posthuman condition. She consumes with the purpose of getting as drunk as possible and therefore chooses strong drinks such as "whisky, rum, gin, sherry, vermouth, wine with the bottles labelled 'Dum vivimus, vivamus...'" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 37). The label on these bottles, which can be translated as 'while we live, let us live', is one of Rhys's ironic details in a narration where the heroine is struggling with suicidal thoughts and plans at some point to drink herself to death. As a result of the excessive amount of alcohol, she notices her "face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 37). Her bodily integrity is therefore deconstructed, and the changes she goes through have a profound effect on her self-image and consequently on the way she behaves. If a rhizome is composed of "dimensions, or rather directions in motion" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 21), then Sasha's self-destructive tendencies and her sympathy towards others move in separate directions, allowing her to contemplate a kind of humanity she can accept and live with.

Rhys presents a profound conflict between Sasha's hatred towards other people and her understanding of suffering. Alcohol is a way to avoid negotiating her relationship with others, and therefore she expresses an ache for its effects: "I have an irresistible longing for a long, strong drink to make me forget that once again I have given damnable human beings the right to pity me and laugh at me" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 78). Sasha's narration seems to suggest that the 'horrible laughter of the world' is escapable solely through complete distance not only from society but also from oneself. She identifies feelings as innate to humans, and given that the feelings she experiences are predominantly negative if not suicidal, the logical solution for her is to become numb and indifferent, anything but human. She confesses to being an "automaton" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 10) and describes her agitation as only the surface hiding the "stagnant water" underneath, "the bitter place that is very near to death, to hate" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 128). However, materiality without the suffering involved, is an ideal unachievable for Sasha. Not only does she prove to be ineffective in her instrumentality, and in the function her body could achieve in case she really was an automaton, she also experiences nervous breakdowns inappropriate for one. One radical example of the way in which her body denies her certain functions which another more powerful machine is able to provide is her inability to feed her infant, who is "taken out and given Nestlé's milk" (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 51) instead. Furthermore, machine-like indifference would stop her from seeking opportunities to socialize, and the rationality involved in this condition would not allow her final embrace of the commis either.

In her narration, Sasha extends her desire to become numb to the whole world in the image she creates of the steel machine. She describes it as such: "All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long,

thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 156). Erica L. Johnson understood the machine as the embodiment of “Sasha’s drive toward oblivion, toward her escape from a humanity that cannot sustain itself” and argues that through this image, Rhys “criticizes the smug metropolitan cruelties of her characters’ persecutors and presents a deeply coherent world view of human vulnerability and radical contingency” (Johnson, “Upholstered Ghosts’: Jean Rhys’s Posthuman Imaginary” 225). It has additionally been analysed together with Picasso’s two versions of *Weeping Woman* by Sue Thomas, who describes the paintings portraying “figures with mask-like faces painted in cubist style” (Thomas 104). What these ideas suggest is a fragmented reality where perception and illusion, cityscape and dreamscape create a confusing collage of separate parts that can be rearranged into completely different structures. In this sense, the steel machine echoes our analysis of Sasha’s rhizomatic subjectivity too.

In the dimensions of her becoming(s), there is one that Sasha aspires to escape but cannot, and her sensibility grows every time she cries for herself and “for all the sadness of this damned world, for all the fools and all the defeated” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 25). Arguably, her melancholy is the more unbearable given the way in which she allows the external to enter her subjectivity and thus becomes vulnerable to a multiplicity of reasons to cry for. Until the last page of the novel, she is certain that machine-like numbness is possible, as she looks into the commis’s eyes and promises herself to “despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 159). Rosi Braidotti presents posthuman ethics as “enacting sustainable modes of relation with multiple human and nonhuman others that enhance one’s ability to renew and expand the boundaries of what non-unitary subjects can become” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Critical Theory” 26). In Sasha’s inability to lose her feelings on one hand but extensive tendency

to include multiple human and nonhuman others into her subjectivity, Rhys strengthens her claims about the crisis of modernism and seems to suggest an alternative to the strict insistence on the boundaries of the human.

Conclusion

In one of the unfinished fragments of *Smile, Please*, Jean Rhys outlines a fictional trial in which she reveals that it is possible to believe in human love, and not humanity, because “sometimes human beings can be more than themselves” (Rhys, *Smile, Please* 120). Once confronted with a metaphysical explanation about the ways in which “human beings can be taken over, possessed by something outside, something greater” (Rhys, *Smile, Please* 120) for instance, by love, the subject of the trial expresses disapproval:

“It is in myself.

What is?

All. Good, evil, love, hate, life, death, beauty, ugliness.” (Rhys, *Smile, Please* 120)

The aim of this analysis was to follow through this idea of complexity inside the subject and allow Jean Rhys’s novels more possibilities to expand towards the posthuman condition. Her female characters constitute a complexity of dimensions on their own but intertextual connections between them might be established as well once we discuss them on ‘a single sheet’.

Posthuman theory comprises several struggles for bearing witness, such as postcolonialism, ecocriticism or feminism, all of which argue for the appreciation of difference and the need to distance ourselves from rigid categorizations. In a similar manner, Rhys’s novels have been interpreted in these chapters through their refusal to accept social conventions deeply embedded

in the humanist tradition. Her modernism was presented as an ironic commentary on the utter dependence of humans, a position which compels her characters to exhibit shame and pity alike.

The postcolonial condition, spaces of the rural or urban landscape and their separate elements all became meaningful while negotiating the ways in which humans can become more than themselves. What one gains through a similar analysis is an appreciation of difference, of vulnerability, and the improbable, in a world where uncertainty might be avoided but remains omnipresent nevertheless.

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