

“Her old, old language of words that are not words”:  
Haunting, Trauma, and History in the Works of Jean Rhys

by

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My heartfelt thanks to Christina Crosby, to Sally Bachner,  
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## Introduction: Hearing the Ghosts Speak

To think about the “Jean Rhys woman” is to think about ghosts, and to consider the work that their haunting is capable of doing. If we are to hear these ghosts speak—and I will insist that we must hear them, because they are desperate to communicate—we will need to shift our framework of comprehensible language and what constitutes it. Rhys’ ghosts speak in a glass of absinthe, a longing look, a broken mirror; haunting is a work of affect, and the language of the ghost is affective language. Jean Rhys’ women are unresolved figures, dissonant and spectral. It is the unsatisfied and unsatisfying nature of their stories doing the work that I will attend to.

We want to say, *Tell us! Tell us what you need*. And the ghosts are trying to, but theirs is the language of the unlucky object, of foreboding weather. It is the language of red curtains set on fire. It is up to us, then, to adjust the register of speech.

Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters*: “Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely... when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view” (AG xvi). This is the kind of haunting that Jean Rhys’ women are doing, and they are asking us to see, asking us to hear.

I will be reading *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*; *Voyage in the Dark*; *Good Morning, Midnight*; and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The protagonists in these books are, to my thinking, iterations of the same ghost, caught up in the same project of haunting. I will argue that Julia, Anna, Sasha, and Antoinette are, within this framework, ghosts of Rhys herself (as she has been constructed historically). They speak the same traumas, the same losses. The women repeat themselves through time and space, unbound by linear or temporal reason. Time means very little to the ghosts who exist beyond it.

Rhys was born in Dominica in 1890 and moved to England at the age of sixteen. Most of her protagonists have similar trajectories, in which they are uprooted from their Caribbean homes and sent to Europe to forge a new and presumably better (after)life. The historical and political context of Rhys' life and work is necessary to read her ghosts critically—we must consider her marginality and her whiteness together. Rhys and her ghosts are implicated in, but also subject to, the violent colonial logics of domination and exclusion. The traumas expressed by the ghosts are inseparable from the kinds of colonial violence that they both experience and inflict. To do the ghosts justice—and to do justice to the racialized others exploited by Rhys and those like her—we must hear and see them within this more complex framework.

How, then, do these women become ghosts? In Gordon's reading and in mine, women are made ghosts through certain kinds of violence done to them. Their haunting testifies to it, calls upon us as witnesses. We can look to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys' prequel to *Jane Eyre*, to read a process of ghost-making. The first instance of

Antoinette *becoming* a ghost is when her husband (Rochester of *Jane Eyre*, though never called by name in the novel) begins to call her “Bertha” while the couple are newlyweds in Jamaica.

In Jamaican obeah, Antoinette tells us, names have power—and Rochester’s violent act of renaming Antoinette (changing her name to something distinctly British, un-exotic, plain) does the work of disappearing her. It places Antoinette in a temporal and spatial past—Bertha is the ghost of Antoinette. She tells us, “Names matter, like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking glass” (WSS 106-7). Antoinette disappears with the material trappings of her former life.

This transformation also thematically links Jamaica with life, and England with death: Jamaica is hot and vivid, England dark and cold. Antoinette cannot survive in England, she says in a letter. “Dear Richard please take me away from this place where I am dying because it is so cold and dark” (WSS 108). Antoinette’s whiteness is a source of ostracization and hatred in post-slavery Jamaica, and her racialized otherness because of her upbringing there marks her as unsuitable for modern English life. Her inability to exist *easily* in either place is a ghostly quality. Her in-between status is both unsettled and unsettling.

Antoinette’s reality—imprisonment in an attic in England—is an unreality to her, but she is no longer the Antoinette who lives in Jamaica, and she knows this. What she seems not to know is that she herself is the ghost at Thornfield. “...it seemed to me that someone was following me, someone was chasing me, laughing.

Sometimes I looked to the right or the left but I never looked behind me for I did not want to see that ghost of a woman who they say haunts this place” (WSS 111). The conflation of madness and ghostliness will be important in reading all of Rhys’ women. Antoinette hears voices, feels as if she is being followed—she is the haunted and the haunting both.

The women of Jean Rhys’ novels ask to be heard and to be understood on their own terms. Rather than pathologizing their melancholia (or their drinking, or their illicit sexual encounters, or any other deviant behaviors) we would do well to pay attention to the affective political work that their haunting does. It is in doing so that they might come into fuller view, that the ghost might appear to us in her entirety. In reading Rhys’ novels, I will be following the threads of ghostly work as they relate to sexual deviance, race, gender, and domesticity—bearing in mind that these themes are inextricably bound up in one another and so must be read together.

The first section of my project concerns Julia, the protagonist of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, specifically. She will help illustrate conceptions of the ghostly in the everyday, in the mundane. While the figure of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a straightforward example in her haunting of Thornfield, I would like to draw out the ways in which these other women—women kept, abused, and abandoned—also manifest the uncanny and the ghostly. Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* will help me theorize these ideas. This section will elaborate on the idea that the Jean Rhys woman *is* a ghost: how her economic marginality, her social invisibility, and her lack of sexual propriety force her into a space where she is illegible and phantasmic. My

drawing out of Julia's ghostliness will apply to the other Rhys women, too: we might then hear them speak together, in a kind of supernatural conversation.

The second section of my project will address race in Rhys' work: her depiction of racial difference helps her illustrate the links she makes between trauma and the body, between whiteness and femininity. Rhys' characters' complicated identifications with the racial other—and her conflation of that other with the uncanny and the ghostly—is a driving force in her novels. The problematic work of race in the novels can tell us about whiteness, “madness,” and abjection in a way that it could never do about the Black Caribbean, and it will be most important for us to read Rhys' work with this in mind. Blackness and the uncanny are collapsed in Rhys' work, the ghosts relying in part upon certain framing structures of blackness and whiteness to manifest haunting. Those black specters implicated in slavery's legacy will always do different haunting work than will their white counterparts.

Avery Gordon's reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* will be useful in situating embodied trauma, the ghostly return, and the work of affect in haunting within my project also. Gordon writes about Morrison's characters bearing witness to violence and enacting care in the face of it; she discusses the ghostly qualities of refusing to let the past become past and of intervening in the structural violences of the archive. Gordon writes: “...*Beloved* will not only retell the story of Margaret Garner, but will also imagine the life world of those with no names we remember, with no “visible reason” for being in the archive. Morrison does not speak for them. She imagines them speaking their complex personhood as it negotiates the always

coercive and subtle complexities of the hands of power” (AG 150). While Rhys’ novels ask the reader to reject this historicized archive, the myth of positive progress, they do not fully account for the traumas of slavery and colonialism experienced by black Caribbean communities. We should not collapse what Morrison’s novel does with what Rhys’ novels do, and we cannot ignore the differentiated structures of race in each of the ghost stories. I do think, however, that Gordon’s reading of *Beloved* is an excellent framework for thinking about histories of violence, the personal and the political together inseparably, and the varied modes of ghostly signification.

The third part of my project will venture into the haunted house. Antoinette haunts Thornfield just as her mother haunted the plantation house in Jamaica, and Rhys’ other women haunt the sad hotel rooms that they frequent. The haunted house always asks us to think about domesticity, the mundane, the routine—both the ways in which ghosts interrupt these patterns and the ways the patterns themselves are haunted and haunting. Rhys’ women do not have normative domestic or sexual lives, and this disrupts the haunted house motif. In thinking about domesticity, we must also think about motherhood. Rhys’ women have fraught relationships with their own mothers, with their roles as mothers and caretakers. The constant disruption of a comfortable or comforting mother-daughter relationship is a concern of Rhys’ and a concern of all her ghosts, too.

The end of my project will return to the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and will consider the kinds of language available to Rhys’ ghosts. In all her novels, Rhys invokes the dualities of heat and cold, of light and dark. The ghosts in these

novels speak in these dualities, in descriptions of *quality* and *feeling* and *sensory experience*. Finally, Antoinette's ghostly language is the language of fire. Burning down Thornfield is her last communication and the most complete speech act in all of Rhys' work; it is feeling made action. Antoinette is the only one of Rhys' protagonists whose communication is so felt and heard, and she is, in effect, freed by it. Those other ghostly women have more unfinished business holding them, precariously, within their novels. They are less heard, and it will be my project to listen closely.

## One: The “Jean Rhys Woman” as Ghostly Matter

“To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories,” Avery Gordon tells us (AG 17). “To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material affects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows.” The two things I want to emphasize: stories concerning exclusions are ghost stories. Ghosts are real. To read Jean Rhys’ works as ghost stories, I want to listen to the women ghosts, but I also want to know how others are interacting with them—*the ghost is nothing without you*, as Gordon writes.

Lately I’ve been compulsively reading one- and two-star reviews of Rhys’ novels on the websites Amazon and Goodreads. The reviews are ones written by purchasers and amateur critics. Some of my favorite reviews of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*:

“Dark tale of how following empty life styles as a young person lead to dire circumstances in aging years. A cautionary tale.” —Tamra

“I don’t understand why Jean Rhys protagonists are so tiring and fragile. I guess I need to read more books with strong female leads. I struggled to finish this” —Nicolette

“Wow is this lady depressing. All her characters drink themselves to death. A very well written downer.” —Liz

“Seriously annoying central character plus a dumb plot” —David Taylor

I think there is an important link between the *unlikeability* of the Rhys women, the “aimless” plots they drive, and their social ghostliness. They are the kind of fragile, depressing women we would like to make disappear. Instead of confronting their demons, these women drink them away; and so they send us in search of stronger female leads. If women are to take up literary space, the social text tells us, they must be certain kinds of women: selfless, hard-working, independent. They possess the ability to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, to *make* something of themselves within a capitalist, patriarchal framework. They are the Jo Marches of the narrative, the Jane Eyres, even the Hermiones.

Jean Rhys’ women do not do this. They do not have normative sexual or marital relationships, so they won’t raise children or maintain families. When they work—which they often do not do—they perform sex work, or else emotional labor (not “real work”) for the men who keep them. Though we couldn’t call them individualists, Jean Rhys’ women are concerned primarily with themselves and their own survival, and they often aren’t very *good* at even that. Perhaps this is why David Taylor, members of my “Modernist Writers: Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys” seminar last year, and so many others find these women to be insufferable. I think we must pay attention to the literary women we dislike.

In her book *Ferocious Things: Jean Rhys and the Politics of Melancholia*, author Cathleen Maslen argues for a critical reading of Rhys that politicizes her protagonists’ inertia and melancholy. “The apparent futility of the melancholic

sedition in these novels guarantees that Rhys's ethnically and socially marginal protagonists will not present us with attractive, emancipatory role models," Maslen writes. "Yet Rhys is committed to representing their desires and frustrations, even their flaws, without apology or condemnation, and with as much honesty as possible" (CM 30). Maslen posits that Rhys' works places the reader in a position of witnessing—I would add that ghosts, too, demand a witness. Because of this, I see affective parallels in the work of melancholia and the work of haunting in the world of the Rhys women. "In melancholia," Maslen writes, "[the psyche] is also a haunted space, darkened by the ghost or 'shadow of the object' that is no longer accessible" (CM 18). We will return to Freud, melancholy, and the psyche momentarily, but first I would like to visit some haunted places.

In Part Two of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia has returned to London after spending some time in Paris. She has separated from Mr. Mackenzie, who has sent her a final check, severing all ties with her. Julia is heartbroken and very alone, and she enters an old neighborhood:

"The little old man in the bowler-hat who sold violets was at the corner of Woburn Square when she passed the next morning. While she was still some way off the idea that he might recognize her half pleased and half embarrassed her. She stopped and bought some flowers. He was just the same—shrunk, perhaps, under his many layers of dirty clothes. His light-blue eyes, which were like bits of glass, looked at her coldly. He turned his head and went on calling: 'Violets, lady, violets,' in a thin, feeble voice. She walked on through the fog into Tottenham Court Road. The houses and the people passing were withdrawn, nebulous. There was only a grey fog shot with yellow lights, and its cold breath on her face, and the ghost of herself coming out of the fog to meet her.

The ghost was thin and eager. It wore a long, very tight check skirt, a short

dark-blue coat, and a bunch of violets bought from the man in Woburn Square. And she had the feeling that, like the old man, it looked at her coldly, without recognizing her” (MM 49).

The question of being recognized, and being unknown or unrecognizable, is a primary concern for Rhys’ characters. They often feel invisible, or else intentionally ignored. It is a ghostly quality and also one dealing with the logics of respectability—to some degree, Julia cannot even register in a public space because of her marginalized status as an aging, impoverished sex worker. The alienation from the self that these women experience is mirrored in the exterior world in a totalized experience of strangeness. (Further along in the novel, Julia’s own mother will fail to recognize her—a melancholic motif we will need to examine.)

In the above passage, Julia sees the “ghost of herself,” and even this ghost seems not to recognize her. This alienation is a characteristic of haunting—it is when the familiar becomes strange and unknowable. In this case, the “familiar” is Julia herself, because she is both the ghost and the haunted woman. Julia’s encounter with this ghostly other is never addressed or accounted for after the fact. The reader will not know whether she sees a reflection in a window or another woman dressed like she is, because Julia simply continues walking. A page later, alone in a café, Julia has a brief interaction with a man who sits near her:

“The two women left quickly. They melted away, as it were, and their place was taken by a little man who, in the midst of his meal, uttered an exclamation, seized his bill, and rushed off. ‘Your gentleman friend has left his hat behind,’ said the waitress amiably. ‘Oh, has he?’ said Julia. She began to put on her gloves.

When she looked up the little man was once more seated opposite her. He said excitedly, ‘A most extraordinary thing! I’ve just seen a man I thought was

dead. Well, that's an extraordinary thing. A thing like that doesn't happen every day to anybody, does it? A man I thought was killed in an earthquake.' 'Were you pleased to see him?' asked Julia. 'Pleased to see him?' echoed the little man cautiously. 'Well, I don't know. But it gave me a bit of a turn, I can tell you.'" (MM 50).

Again, this scene sits without further address, a little bit strange, a little bit funny. It is not referenced again in the novel. Rhys' stories are full of these kinds of atmospheric anecdotes; they are not so much structural as they are affective. Rather than advancing the plot, they serve to illustrate a certain kind of haunted lifeworld. It is a world in which you see ghosts, in which inanimate objects become sinister. To be "given a bit of a turn" by the appearance of a man presumed dead is surely a haunting experience, in the same way that seeing the ghost of one's self in the fog might be. In this lifeworld, Rhys suggests that there is something lurking in the shadows, in the margins of visibility.

Avery Gordon writes about the figure of Sabina Spielrein and her role in the field of psychoanalysis in the second chapter of her book. She writes, "I was on my way to a conference with an abstract and a promise. But then I got distracted by a photograph and had to take a detour in order to follow the traces of a woman ghost" (AG 32). Sabina Spielrein was a patient, student, and colleague of Carl Jung's and Sigmund Freud's; for a time, she was romantically involved with Jung. The photograph in question is one of the Third Psychoanalytic Conference at Weimar in 1911—at which Spielrein was present—and does not include Spielrein herself. Gordon is haunted by the woman's absence. For Gordon, she is not in the photograph nor is she properly historicized as a contributor to the field of psychoanalysis. These

exclusions are haunting ones, and they turn Spielrein into a ghost who Gordon seeks to hear.

“Sabina Spielrein saw spirits,” Gordon writes, and, “Sabina Spielrein haunts the institution of psychoanalysis” (AG 36). She is haunted, and she also does the haunting. As a patient of Jung’s, Spielrein was diagnosed and studied as a schizophrenic. The aura of *madness*, of female hysteria, permeates Spielrein’s story. Freud described Spielrein’s theorizations on the death drive as “personally conditioned” and therefore unreliable. (Nearly ten years later, he would borrow heavily from her work in his own writing on the subject.) In other words, Spielrein’s personal and emotional involvement with the work rendered her an illegible narrator.

But Spielrein saw spirits, and we ourselves are interested in what she saw, what she said, and what the ghostly others said, too.

*When I looked at myself in the mirror before going to bed, I was taken aback; that couldn't be me, that stony gray face with that uncannily grim, burning black eyes staring out at me: it was a powerful, baleful wolf that lurked there coldly in the depths and would halt at nothing. "What is it that you want?" I asked myself in horror. Then I saw all the lines in the room go crooked; everything became alien and terrifying. "The great chill is coming..."* (Spielrein 19).

Sabina Spielrein detailed this abject encounter in her diary in September of 1910, according to Gordon. She looked in the mirror, and saw someone else, *something* else; her surroundings became unknown and frightening. This interaction with the uncanny is most notably marked by Spielrein’s question to the wolf: “What is it that you want?”

Spielrein asks the uncanny other what it wants, and it replies. Crucially, she asks her *own* uncanny other: this introspection made possible by the presence of the ghostly, in its appearing to her. The “thin, eager” ghost of Julia herself, seen emerging from the fog, doesn’t recognize Julia, and Julia says nothing to her. Perhaps some of Julia’s melancholy stems from this disconnection, from a missed opportunity to communicate. Indeed, Spielrein reports in her diary the next day feeling refreshed, “transformed” (AG 50) by the interaction with the wolf.

My mother went to college in California in the 1980s, and in her first year away, she began to have a nightmare. The nightmare was about a man standing over her, watching as she slept. My mother would jerk awake in the night to see him there beside her bed, a blond man with his face in shadow, looking down. She would scream, and he would disappear. My mother’s screams awoke her roommate, her sister, her boyfriend. They all began to refer to my mother’s nightmare as her “visitor,” and he visited frequently that first year in Claremont. Sometimes, he visits my mother still. In the middle of the night, I hear my mother yell from the downstairs bedroom, and then my father yells too—a distressed call-and-response.

And my mother will insist, “I was awake. I could swear I was already awake.” I believe her. I don’t think my mother is dreaming when she is visited by this man. Neither did my grandmother, in 1984, when the visits first began. Instead, she told my mother over the phone: “You have to ask it what it wants.”

*Ask the ghost what it wants.* When Sabina Spielrein asked the wolf, “What is it that you want?” the wolf replies, “The great chill is coming.” Perhaps, for Spielrein,

this was important information, or perhaps it was a message that the wolf desperately needed to deliver. While we could choose to read the wolf's message as an ominous prediction of the future—Spielrein's doomed affair with Carl Jung, a mental breakdown, or even her death during the Holocaust in 1942—I do not think that it is useful for us to do so. The communication between Spielrein and her wolf-self is intimate, buried deep, and it ought to belong to the two of them. What I am interested in is the asking itself.

“You have to ask it what it wants,” my grandmother told my mother. I do not know how my mother responded on the phone at the time, whether with skepticism or affection or both. But the next time her visitor came, my mother sat straight up in her narrow dorm room bed, her blond hair streaming and wild from sleep, and she shrieked, “What do you want from me?”

He stopped visiting my mother for a long time, and now, his visits are infrequent. He didn't tell my mother what he wanted, and I suspect he didn't know. I think that he just wanted to be asked, and I think that most ghosts do.

Gordon writes:

“... the ghost cannot be simply tracked back to an individual loss or trauma. The ghost has its own desires, so to speak, which figure the whole complicated sociality of a determining formation that seems inoperative... or invisible... but that is nonetheless alive and enforced. But the force of the ghost's desire is not just negative, not just the haunting and not other or alterity as such, ever. It is... pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had” (AG 183).

“The force of the ghost’s desire is not just negative,” as Gordon tells us. It is heavily laden with *something to be done*, with a reckoning. And in many cases of haunting, I think, that *something to be done* is simply to ask: “What do you want?” The ghost desperately wants to be asked this question; it murmurs, *look at me. Care for me*. When we attend to the ghosts, when we seek to address their wants and needs, we might reckon with the conditions of their haunting: the losses and the traumas that they nod to, are refracted through.

It is this care work—the willingness to listen and to witness—that the ghost begs for. While Jean Rhys’ novels would have the reader do this, the ghosts themselves do not have the socially sanctioned outlets for their sadnesses or desires. In short, no one asks. Their performances of suffering become discomfiting, obscene. “All of Rhys’ novels are permeated with the protagonists’ desire to signify loss, sadness, and suffering outside sadistic parameters of sexual objectification,” Maslen writes. “But more often than not, these cultural parameters prove profoundly resistant to the feminine aspiration to an articulate melancholic identity” (CM 6). Maslen suggests that often, because of their economic and social conditions, the Rhys women are forced to commodify their melancholy into something sexually salable. Their mourning, hopelessness, or world-weariness must manifest as sexual desperation or availability to be rendered legible at all. I would add that this process is a haunting one—that this kind of repression and expression, in violent turns, does the work of *making* ghosts.

This is because these repressed or inexpressible sadnesses leak. Their affective work in Rhys' novels is permeating, cloying even, so it's no wonder that there are so many descriptions of fog, mist, deep water, and darkness throughout all the women's narratives. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia has just visited a well-to-do uncle to borrow money from him. He refuses to lend her anything, saying, "You always insisted on going your own way. Nobody interfered with you or expressed any opinion on what you did. You deserted your family. And now you can't expect to walk back and be received with open arms" (MM 61). Julia replies, "It was idiotic of me to come. It was childish, really. It's childish to imagine that anybody cares what happens to anybody else." She leaves without another word, and the scene that follows is one of total abjection:

"Julia felt bewildered when she got into the street. She turned and walked without any clear idea of the direction she was taking. Each house she passed was exactly like the last. Each house bulged forward a little... Down at the far end of the street a voice quavered into a melancholy tune. The voice dragged and broke—failed. Then suddenly there would be a startlingly powerful bellow, like an animal in pain. The bellow was not fierce or threatening, as it might have been; it was complaining and mindless, like an animal in pain.

Julia thought: 'They might light the streets a bit better here.'

It was the darkness that got you. It was heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls round you, and shut you in so that you could not breathe. You wanted to beat at the darkness and shriek to be let out. And after a while you got used to it. Of course. And then you stopped believing that there was anything else anywhere" (MM 61-2).

Julia's entrance onto the street is one of defamiliarization, her surroundings repetitive yet alien. The "failed" voice of the singer suggests something inhuman—a "mindless" animal in pain—something monstrous, otherworldly, or *other*, but

common and banal also. This voice is an exteriorization of Julia's pain as she understands it qualitatively: ignoble, "complaining." This scene undoes the aestheticizing of so much white women's sadness by making it ugly and routine. Rather than being tragic, the song and its singer are pathetic, just as Julia's experience of being dismissed by a wealthy relative is.

And then, the darkness: "heavy," "compelling," "greasy." It has a physical and affective presence—the darkness is a material thing that might act upon you and elicit a response. In this way, the darkness itself is haunting. We also should note that Julia gets *used* to this kind of suffocating darkness, implying that there is something commonplace about her experience of suffering. This tunnel vision is symptomatic of depression, certainly, but it also suggests that Julia is accustomed to living among ghosts. They are the fabric of her everyday life.

In the scene Julia's uncle insists that "everybody has to sit on their own bottoms," that Julia's failures in life are of her own making, and that not to assume individual responsibility of them is a failing in itself. This capitalistic line of thinking underscores much of the disapproval of the Rhys women—both by characters within the novels, and by critics of the novels and of Rhys as a writer. Rhys women aren't *rational*; they depend on others for their basic needs. Understood within these terms alone, they are not valuable contributors to a nationalist-capitalist system of production. They become social ghosts this way, slipping into the margins, rendered illegible in a system that seeks to quantify them within such parameters.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is not so forgiving to this capitalist line of thought, or to the capitalist himself. Julia's uncle informs her that he hasn't any money to give anyone, anyway, which the reader and Julia both know to be untrue. We then take a brief detour into the wealthy uncle's thoughts: "An anxious expression spread over his face as he thought to himself that the time was coming when he would have to give up this comfort, and then that comfort, until God knew what would be the end of it all. In this way he was an imaginative man, and when these fits of foreboding overcame him he genuinely forgot that only a succession of highly improbable catastrophes could reduce him to the penury he so feared" (MM 60). The indictment of the wealthy uncle's greed is drawn into sharper relief when the narrative abruptly returns us to Julia, who "was thinking that she might try to pawn something and that she had forgotten where the pawnshops were... But anyhow what had she to pawn that would fetch even a few shillings?" (MM 60).

*It's childish to imagine that anybody cares what happens to anybody else.*

Julia's overt pessimism is reflective of the economic and social conditions she finds herself in. The excess of the statement is important in understanding the lifeworld constructed in the novel: it is full of affective excesses, of women *feeling* too much, *needing* too much. These excesses have material, haunting presences. They are the greasy darknesses, the single wailing voices.

So there are many ways in which *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is a ghost story as Gordon understands the ghost story. It is a novel concerned with exclusions, with structures of feeling, and perhaps most importantly, with the ghost's own desires.

Gordon writes, "*The ghost's desire*, even if it is nothing more than a potent and conjectural fiction, must be recognized (and we may be able to do no more than feel its haunting impact) if we are to admit that the ghost, particularly as it functions as a figure for that which is invisible but not necessarily not there, is capable of 'strategy toward us'... but the modus operandi of a ghost is haunting, and haunting makes its only social meaning in contact with the living's time of the now... the need of the dead to be remembered and accommodated... is inseparable from the needs of the living. In other words, the ghost is nothing without you" (AG 179).

We must acknowledge the ghost and its desires; we must ask the wolf in the mirror, "What is it that you want?" The ghost asks you to perform care in the face of violence, to pay attention to the things in the shadows. It would like you to really see. "We may be able to do no more than feel its haunting impact," as Gordon writes, and perhaps in this context, that is enough. We do not need to problem-solve, especially in dealing with unresolved traumas. We simply need to listen, to make the space. In this way, the ghost story asks us to be active witnesses, and this always leaves room for something unfinished—it is necessary to leave this kind of room.

A certain feminine-individualist narrative would utilize the Rhys' women's traumas (rape, child loss, poverty, abandonment, addiction) as challenges with available solutions. They would be positioned as obstacles to surmount, the better to assume a "fuller" feminine identity in the course of the women's storylines. But Rhys, Maslen writes, "often seems to make a point of contesting, or at least casting doubt upon, the capacity of her protagonists to give trauma such meliorist or

redemptive shapes. More disconcertingly still, Rhys' work often suggests that identity itself may consist in an interminable emergency or incompleteness, which is in fact more consistent with the psychoanalytic understanding of 'trauma'—that is, the status of trauma as a recurrence of an originary wound, psychic or otherwise, which in its repetitiousness manages to defer 'closure' and recovery" (CM 3).

Rather than being a problem for which there is a concrete solution, trauma in this formulation is repetitive and defiant of closure. Like ghosts, these traumas come back, and come back again, unbothered by linear time or the logic of 'progress.' We might read haunting itself as this impossibility of resolution. Gordon separates hauntings from the experience of trauma, arguing that haunting must always produce a 'something to be done.' While I would also make this distinction, I think it is useful for us to consider trauma as 'unfinished business' in the world of Rhys' novels, particularly as it pertains to the constructed identities of her protagonists.

Further along in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia begins to see a man called Mr Horsfield, who she brings back to her room one night. They are sneaking up the stairs in the dark, so as not to alert the suspicion of the landlady:

"On the third landing she stopped. He knew it, because he could not hear the sound of her dress any longer. He heard her breathing loudly, as though she were exhausted. After a few seconds he whispered, 'Julia.'

She did not answer.

He waited a little longer... he groped and touched her hand, then her arm, and the fur collar of her coat. Then he ran his fingers downward again, as a blind man might have done. He felt a strange pleasure in touching her like that—wordlessly, in the dark. She said in a loud voice: 'Oh God, who touched me?' He was too much astonished to answer.

'Who touched me?' she screamed. 'Who's that? Who touched my hand?'" (MM 118).

Mr Horsfield is disturbed by Julia's behavior, and her screams wake the landlady and several other guests in the boarding house. He shoos them away, and tells Julia that it was he who touched her.

“She shook her head.

‘You were behind me.’

‘Yes, but I passed you on the landing.’

‘I thought it was—someone dead,’ she muttered, ‘catching hold of my hand.’”  
(MM 120).

At this point in the novel, Julia's mother has died, and her sister has disowned her; we might read this passage as Julia's experience of grief, and her visceral, physical fear of death. I do not think it would be wrong to do so. I also think it will be necessary, however, to consider both characters' positionality in the scene. This might help illustrate the ways in which the uncanny manifests itself in the dark stairway, especially in the act of physical touch.

Mr Horsfield takes a perverse pleasure in reaching out and touching Julia in the dark “as a blind man might have done.” He is silent, and her breathing is irregular, and the two cannot see each other: it is a moment in which the familiar becomes alien. Mr Horsfield enjoys this kind of contact with Julia, as one isolated body acting upon another. He is thrilled by his encounter with Julia as an uncanny figure. For Mr Horsfield, as the reader will discover, Julia's poverty and melancholy are exoticized and eroticized qualities. His flirtation with her abject existence is exciting and sexually charged, at least until he must also acknowledge its often disturbing realities.

Her alluring sadnesses, her strangeness, gives way to something more grotesque and unbecoming as the novel progresses.

But where—or how—is Julia located in the scene on the stairway? She is disoriented in space, confused as to where Mr Horsfield is, and as to where she is in relation to him. In the moment of her screaming, “Oh God, who touched me?” she seems to imagine herself alone, frightened suddenly by some spectral (or ‘dead’) figure. Mr Horsfield is absent entirely from the scene as she experiences it. While it is his action of reaching out and touching Julia that startles her, Mr Horsfield himself is not what scares Julia—it is someone or something else she imagines touching her in the dark. Whether a corpse, a ghost, or some other uncanny creature, Julia is in isolation with *it*, not with Mr Horsfield.

And then, banshee-like, Julia screams. She is frightened, but also frightening. Mr Horsfield is embarrassed and disturbed by this behavior; the other guests poke their heads out of their doors at this unsettling interruption of their sleep. *Why*, they wonder, *is the woman screaming? What’s wrong with her?*

The question of *what is wrong with her* will follow all of the Rhys women. For Julia, there are many answers, of course—her estranged mother has died, she has no money, she must rely upon unreliable men for her survival. But the answer that is also all of these other answers is that *something touched her* in the dark. Julia brushed up against a haunting or otherworldly *something*, and it touched her hand. When Mr Horsfield reaches out to touch Julia, Julia feels the touch of “someone dead.” In this

moment she manifests the uncanny, draws it close enough to make contact. Why shouldn't she scream?

As Julia feels a haunting presence in the stairway she also becomes one, to Horsfield and the landlady and the other guests. The two things cannot and will not be untangled: to haunt, and to be haunted. If Julia herself is a ghost, her lifeworld is a haunted one, concerned with exclusions and invisibilities. To give the ghostly Rhys women their due, readers will need to acknowledge them as such: to look the spectral figures squarely on, and ask them what they want. We will need to reach out in the dark, and respond to their touch.

Two: *Voyage in the Dark*, the Specter of the Colonial Other, and the Abject Body

None of Jean Rhys' 'European' novels deal so explicitly with the haunting of a former, othered life as does *Voyage in the Dark*. It is also the closest autobiographically to Rhys' own life. While most of Rhys' protagonists carry with them remnants of their young lives in the colonial West Indies, nineteen year old Anna of *Voyage in the Dark* is not so much remembering as she is *conjuring*. The distinction between present-day London and the Dominica of Anna's childhood is constantly blurring in her narrative—these ghosts, it seems, will not be put to rest.

Maslen writes: "...while the melancholic notion of the hidden horror, or the trauma that must be denied, recurs in all of Rhys' novels, it is *Voyage in the Dark* (and in particular the unpublished conclusion) that introduces explicit and compelling links between this theme and paternalist imperialism, prefiguring the sophisticated interrogation of colonialist desire that Rhys achieves in *Wide Sargasso Sea*... In *Voyage in the Dark*... Rhys implies an historical and political specificity in the theme of the perverse, concealed horror: she is referring to the colonial uncanny—the unwonted encounter with the inaccessible identity and desire of the racial other" (CM 156). In the previous chapter we considered the encounter with the uncanny as a ghostly encounter—now, I would like to focus more specifically on race and place in the context of haunting and the uncanny figure. The 'historical and political specificity' that Maslen notes at work in *Voyage in the Dark* establishes a specific kind of haunting: it is grounded in the violences of patriarchy and colonialism in

1840s Dominica, and in the colonizer's fear of a non-white, non-male entity as disruptive and animal. The ghostly qualities of *Voyage in the Dark* and of Anna herself are drawn from these parameters; they belong to the historical conditions of the text. "The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person," Gordon writes in her introduction, "but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (AG 8).

*Voyage in the Dark* begins with Anna's sense of unease and unbelonging in England, and her desire for her previous home. Anna is fixated on difference, on the exacting opposite contrasts between Dominica and England, and also on her sensory experiences of those places:

"It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light; darkness; purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold. Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or the bed-clothes drawn up around me was sun-heat; or I would pretend I was standing outside the house at home, looking down Market Street to the Bay. When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple as Tyre and Sidon. Market Street smelt of the wind, but the narrow street smelt of niggers and wood-smoke and salt fishcakes fried in lard. (When the black women sell fishcakes on the savannah they carry them in trays on their heads. They call out, 'Salt fishcakes, all sweet an' charmin', all sweet an' charmin'.') It was funny, but that was what I thought about more than anything else—the smell of the streets and the smells of frangipani and lime juice and cinnamon and cloves, and sweets made of ginger and syrup, and incense after funerals or Corpus Christi processions, and the patients standing outside the surgery next door, and the smell of the sea-breeze and the different smell of the land-breeze. Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together" (VD 3).

Here Anna echoes a sentiment of Antoinette's in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it... This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England" (WSS 107). The two places, the West Indies of both characters' origin and the England of their present, are positioned such that only one can 'exist' at a time. If Dominica is 'real,' England must be a dream. This toggling of reality and unreality is linked to those affective conditions and racialized differences that Rhys ascribes to location. "Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey," Anna says, but a difference in *feeling*, of how she experiences herself in place. Anna's narrative begins with a vivid description of Dominica even as the novel opens in England—for the reader, this means that the two places are drawn together by their contrasts. One is more easily defined, comes into sharper focus, when thrown against the other. The sun-heat of Dominica is better understood in its absence, in England's present cold.

The heat of the West Indies and the cold of Europe are recurring preoccupations for Rhys' characters, and they suggest unambiguously the ascription of racial differences to each place. Dominica is lively, fragrant, and 'primitive' as the European colonizer would describe it. Dominica is also feminized, which Anna suggests in her first paragraph in her memory of the black women selling fishcakes, carrying the trays on their heads. Europe—in this case, England specifically—must then be all Dominica's opposites. It is reserved, modern, intellectual. If Dominica is

the black women carrying trays at the market, England is a white male doctor, perhaps the one who performs Anna's botched abortion at the end of the novel.

"It was as if a curtain had fallen," Anna says. "It was almost like being born again." The shift from her old life to her new one is so absolute as to be a rebirth—suggesting that between one place and the other there is death, or even a transitional 'undead' space. The closeness of birth and death, and of the dark spaces in between and outside of the two states, is a concern for Rhys throughout *Voyage in the Dark*. The title itself suggests this. Critics have read the novel's title as a reference to the Middle Passage, or to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>1</sup> I think that both interpretations bear weight, engaging as they do with colonialism, slavery, waterways, and the figure of the savage (nonwhite, feminized, and inhuman) in the colonial imagination. I also think that a voyage in the dark is the travel of a ghost, or the pathway of a haunted person; I think it is the space of an 'afterlife,' or even the state of being in the womb. I want to return to this idea in a little while.

Anna says of England and Dominica that she 'could never fit them together,' that only one could be real at a time. It is this unease between the two locations, Anna's divided sense of self, that turns her into a ghostly figure. Straddling two 'homes' and belonging fully to neither, Anna cannot participate in the 'reality' of Dominica or of England—instead, she exists in their in-between space, ill at ease. In colonial Dominica, protected by her whiteness, Anna is more of a voyeur than a local.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella tells the story of a voyage up the Congo River in Africa, narrated by British trader and sailor Charles Marlow. The narrator draws parallels between the supposed 'savagery' of both Africa and London, raising questions about racism and imperialism even as it deals in the logics of both; Africa and London are ultimately both condemned as places of "darkness."

In her first description of what she refers to as home, she is merely watching the activity on Market Street and describes how it ‘smelt of niggers’—a violent and derogatory sentiment that, while illustrating a degree of proximity, also suggests fear, hatred, and lack of compassionate intimacy. And in England, Anna is marked by her status as a poor ‘white creole’ from the West Indies, calling her whiteness into question altogether.

In each place, specific historical and social structures of power determine the work whiteness can and cannot do. They dictate the ways women are allowed take up space, and the feelings they might access or express. (These will of course be different spaces and different feelings depending on the other identities of the women: as Rhys will express, white women must trade their ‘irrational’ behavior or feelings for inclusion in the category of the ‘human,’ while nonwhite women do not have the option at all.) Jean Rhys’ ghosts are not simply figures of repressed trauma, tragic women who’ve been wronged, or the ‘spirit’ of loss or longing. They are created by, (but also, as ghosts, must exceed) existing historical conditions of violence, power, and resistance.

Haunting, Gordon writes, “is precisely what prevents rational detachment, prevents your willful control, prevents the disaggregation of class struggle and your feelings, motivations, blind spots, craziness, and desires. A haunted society is full of ghosts, and the ghost always carries the message... that the gap between personal and social, public and private, objective and subjective is misleading in the first place” (AG 97-8). The prevention of ‘willful control’ or ‘rational detachment’ is the excess

of haunting's structure—the ghost herself works beyond the limits of discursive logic. And yet, she is also implicated in her own social world, in her present. As a ghostly figure, the Rhys woman longs for a specific mother, a specific past, is subject to and participant in specific forms of gendered and racist violence. While haunting may appear to 'transcend' time or space, it also always has direct ties to an event or an individual. In this way a haunting must be both 'personal and social, public and private,' and the two are intimately involved.

In all of her novels and particularly in her writings about her own life, Jean Rhys expresses her so-called identification with black Caribbean women, and the desire to be black herself. Rhys' falsified and idyllic 'understanding' of blackness and the 'other' is an undercurrent in her writing. In her essay "Selective Memory: White Creole Nostalgia, Jean Rhys, and 'Side by Side,'" Elaine Savory writes that "Rhys goes on to describe the self-loathing which is intertwined with being the palest of her siblings... There was no easy nostalgia for Rhys, even whilst she continued to remember and repeat the casual racist generalizations which side-by-side living produced about 'them,' those who were close only in a very limited sense... at least she understood that racism was the defining principle in the separate lives which black, brown, and white lived in Dominica" (ES 18). The 'nostalgia' that Rhys and her protagonists express isn't straightforward—often, the past or the home that they long for is one of their own imagining, a whitewashed, colonizer's Eden. Those memories of the West Indies are not always happy or fulfilling ones, either; they are full of specters, full of illicit desires.

In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna recalls her black nurse, Francine: both a mother figure whom she claimed to love, and a servant and ‘friend’ whom she often bullied. (The character is essentially an autobiographical figure for Rhys.) Lying ill in bed, Anna thinks, “*This is England, and I’m in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed*” (VD 18). Then she remembers:

“I felt as if there were weights on my legs so that I couldn’t move. Like that time at home when I had fever and it was afternoon and the jalousies were down and yellow light came in through the slats and lay on the floor in bars. The room wasn’t painted. There were knots in the wood and one of them was a cockroach, waving its feelers slowly backwards and forwards. I couldn’t move. I lay watching it. I thought, ‘If it flies on to the bed or if it flies on to my face I shall go mad.’ I watched it and I thought, ‘Is it going to fly?’ and the bandage on my head was hot. Then Francine came in and she saw it and got a shoe and killed it. She changed the bandage round my head and it was ice-cold and she started fanning me with a palm-leaf fan. And then the night outside and the voices of people passing in the street—the forlorn sound of voices, thin and sad. And the heat pressing down on you as if it were something alive. I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there, and I watched her hand waving the fan backwards and forwards and the beads of sweat that rolled from underneath her handkerchief. Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad” (VD 18-9).

‘Being white is cold and sad,’ according to Anna, and she maintains this conviction in Dominica and England both. Anna is haunted by her memories of Francine and by her conception of blackness, especially when they’re cast against the somber white background of England. The ‘warm and gay’ black woman of Anna’s imagination—and she *is* merely a product of the white colonial imagination—haunts Anna because she is all that Anna herself can never be. It’s impossible because Anna

is white, but more importantly, because that woman is only a specter: hailed into (un)being by structures of domination, misogyny, and racist fear of the ‘other.’

Anna’s ‘clean English room’ has its dirt swept under the bed, but in Dominica, nature is out in the open, a cockroach waving its feelers at you. There’s dirt everywhere, it seems, but it’s a different sort of dirt. Rhys’ lush descriptions of the plants and climate of Dominica are interspersed with the sparse European setting throughout *Voyage in the Dark*. The suggestion of pink frangipani flickers against rows of gray London buildings as the reader experiences Anna’s present, her visceral memories turning into a kind of double vision. With the timespace of each location overlapping, conflicting with each other and upending the protagonist’s sense of place (and ours along with hers), they both become spectral signifiers. I imagine Anna walking down a street that shifts between tropical sunshine and a chilling fog: as the climate warps and changes, so too does Anna, sliding in and out of the realm of visibility. Her marginality as a social figure is literalized in her physical ghostliness—the way she feels invisible, the way she seems not to know herself. As Anna is haunted by Dominica, so she haunts England.

In his essay “Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter,” Michael F. O’Riley writes that “the haunting of the colonial frequently turns on what is undoubtedly a well-intended desire to relate to the Other, the silenced, and the hidden, but it also reveals a more problematic inability to situate resistance, and mobilize memory for such purposes” (MO 1). This is an important concern to raise—I do not want to end up turning the ‘Other’ into a mere figment of

the past, an insubstantial or ineffective ‘trace.’ But here I think that O’Riley doesn’t give the ghosts enough credit. I want to think of the ghost as a figure *capable* of resistance and subversion—even when her methods might be a little unorthodox. And perhaps they have to be: ghosts can’t rely on the usual methods of communication or mobilization to express themselves.

“Haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality,” Gordon writes (AG 201). “I might even suggest that haunting is the most general instance of the clamoring return of the reduced to a delicate social experience struggling, even unaware, with its shadowy but exigent presence. Haunting is the sociality of living with ghosts, a sociality both tangible and tactile as well as ephemeral and imaginary.” *The sociality of living with ghosts*: they are not traces so much as they are a community, and so demand communion with us. The question then becomes one of this communion—how is it done, and with what, and perhaps most importantly, for whom?

For Rhys’ women, this ghostly communiqué will take the form of a tumbler of whiskey or a too-tight dress or one’s own startling reflection in a window. The materiality of the women’s worlds embodies their haunted state—but the materials, the lifeworlds, are themselves imbued with ghostly matter. As a ghost figure, Anna may haunt her “nice, clean English room,” but the room is itself haunted also, independent of (but always, in communication with) her presence. That dirt swept so neatly under Anna’s bed is not just dirt, but a skeleton in the closet; it is a heart pounding beneath the floorboards. Most crucially: such haunted materials are

temporally, historically specific. They do their haunting because of, not in spite of, the conditions they are forged under. Avery Gordon writes about this carefully and beautifully in her chapter on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

“A woman recognizes a hat, a knot of half-signs, which weaves a story, binds the time of the now with a hungry past, and marks a limit. *No. Nono. Nonono.* No explanation, just a ritualistic recognition of the signs of violence and a refusal. There is no explanation not because she cannot provide one, but because what we could just call culture, a synthetic tradition of reading and responding to signs, is almost always the medium by which property relations meet their limits and their capacity to explain. A woman sees a hat and a man and she flies... There are things that cannot be remembered without admitting that a knot of half-signs weaving a story and marking a limit is the story, a story that exists in the profound Everywhere between ‘Slavery with a capital S’ and a seemingly anonymous slave woman who killed her child... The hat now signs what before it only displaced. An event is passed on, reimagined, dictating different conventions. We have to interpret anew the signs of this event to grasp it... To get to the ghost story, it is necessary to understand how something as simple as a hat can be profoundly and profanely illuminating, if you know how to read the signs. To get to the ghost and the ghost’s story, it is necessary to understand how the past, even if it is just the past that flickered by a moment before, can be seized in an instant, or how it might seize you first” (AG 163).<sup>2</sup>

*Beloved* recalls the true story of Margaret Garner, a former slave woman whose life became public in the 1850s for killing her child rather than see her enslaved. The quality of exposure in Garner’s life shifted then, marking her public, making her a named woman. The scene Gordon references here is the one in which Sethe, the Garner character, sees a man in a hat approaching her home—the hat intimately

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<sup>2</sup> Here Gordon references Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” and his phrase ‘profane illumination.’ Benjamin writes: “Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was.’ It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger” (WB 391).

familiar to her because it was worn by her previous master—and she “flies,” killing her baby before the man can reach them. “The hat now signs what before it only displaced,” Gordon writes. A haunted, haunting object, the hat itself is a malleable signifier. Margaret Garner speaks through Morrison who speaks through Sethe who speaks through a hat. *To get to the ghost story, it is necessary to understand how something as simple as a hat can be profoundly and profanely illuminating, if you know how to read the signs*: this is that ghostly business of attending to the dead, to the past that is not past.

To attend to the dead in such a way—through the sign, through the charged object—refuses a clean narrative of historical progress. This is what the ghost asks us to do. Historicism would turn the past into a link in a chain, binding us to the present; the ghost contests this. A haunting suggests that history is not a chain, but instead a wave, spitting its discontents into the present moment as it rolls in and out. The ghost wants to remind us that slavery in the United States isn’t a chapter in our past but, say, a fact of our present prison system, and at the same time, she urges us to read the essential sign of the bad man’s hat. This is because these things are bound to each other. The hat is itself frightening because of all the past it brings with it. It has ghostly qualities even though it is *there*.

In all of Rhys’ work, but most prominently in *Voyage in the Dark*, we are not dealing with slavery’s legacy in the United States but in the colonial West Indies. The subject of and interlocutor for the haunting is a white Creole woman of the planter class rather than a black slave. It is important to make these distinctions because they

will direct our consideration of haunting, of the things that haunting attempts to do. Any socio-political power that is concentrated or refused at certain sites of identity produces different sorts of ghosts. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade is a vast archive with many roots;<sup>3</sup> and so these manifest in many sorts of hauntings in time and place. I cannot do justice, here, to Toni Morrison's ghosts, but Gordon's reading of *Beloved* will remain an imperative framework for situating slavery, race, and haunting together.

*Voyage in the Dark* was written first with the clear intention of concluding with Anna's death during her abortion.<sup>4</sup> Rhys' publisher found this ending too gloomy to be salable, so Rhys changed it: now the novel ends more vaguely but still ominously, allowing more room for speculation about where exactly Anna has gone or will go. After performing the procedure, the doctor tells a friend of Anna's that she will be alright, that she'll be ready to start all over again in no time. And then Anna, who's been listening silently to their conversation, tells us: "When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again..." (VD 115). Rhys' ellipses allow the space for ghosts to glide in. While a straightforward reading of this scene suggests that Anna will indeed heal and return to her sad, small life, it has also been interpreted such that she does die after the doctor

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<sup>3</sup> Roots and *routes*, too.

<sup>4</sup> According to Rhys' unfinished biography, *Smile, Please*, published after she died in 1979; and cited in *The Gender of Modernism* by Bonnie Kime Scott, 1990.

leaves her in the operating room. By abandoning Anna in this liminal space at the end of the novel, Rhys makes a specter of her protagonist—she is neither properly living nor properly dead, and she will have no resolution in either state.

In the context of the abortion and its effects upon the woman's body, I want to pursue some of the motifs of *Voyage in the Dark*: the woman's body in pain, and the wholly queer states of pregnancy and abortion that Anna experiences. More generally I want to think about history and the body: about the womb as a space of transition, as dark and watery and submerged. I want to think about the 'you' and 'not-you' of pregnancy—a body carrying a baby, and the question of its aliveness or unaliveness, its attachment and detachment from the mother—and what possibilities might exist between these states. And I want to think very carefully about *the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out*, the refusal or negation of memory itself. Somewhere along these planes I suspect that we can find ghosts belonging to colonial memory and countermemory, to transatlantic crossings, and to the specific grief of mother- or child-loss. Of course where there is grief there are ghosts.

A man called Vincent has been taking care of Anna since her last romantic interest, Walter, left her. Prior to the final scene in the novel—though where exactly in time we are at this point is unclear—Vincent rapes her. From this point onward Anna's narrative becomes its most Faulknerian, more fragmented and chaotic, switching almost imperceptibly back and forth between past and present. During the rape she describes a carnival during her childhood in Dominica. In her memory she watches from the window a celebration involving frightening white masks, masks

made to look like the faces of the white people. She is reminded of the masks by Vincent's own face, or perhaps she sees a certain pressing connection between the two.

“I said, ‘Stop, please stop.’ ‘I knew you’d say that,’ he said. His face was white. *A pretty useful mask that white one watch it and the slobbering tongue of an idiot will stick out—a mask Father said with an idiot behind it I believe the whole damned business is like that... the masks the men wore were a crude pink with the eyes squinting near together squinting but the masks the women wore were made of close-meshed wire covering the whole face and tied at the back of the head—the handkerchief that went over the back of the head hid the strings and over the slits for eyes mild blue eyes were painted and then there was a small straight nose and a little red heart-shaped mouth and under the mouth another slit so they could put their tongues out at you—*” (VD 113). It is significant, I think, that Anna is transported back to this particular memory during her rape. The pain and violation that she is experiencing in the present draws her to the childhood memory of a mockery of whiteness.

As a child, Anna seems to find the theatricality of the performance more disturbing than its social or political implications. The masks themselves are frightening, more so than the fact of Black Dominicans parodying the white planter class. We know that Anna *does* find whiteness itself frightening, existing uneasily in her body as a white Creole woman, and I think that it is as much a material reaction as it is an ideological one, perhaps more so. (Whiteness, as we have been assured by

her, is cold and sad: it is a physical and experiential way of being.) I don't think that Anna is going to give us a direct link between the two events, her rape and this specific childhood memory, because it isn't a precise logic that draws the two together. It is instead their affective nature, the shape and color of sensation and memory. Anna sees in Vincent those white masks, feels something intimately familiar in his monstrosity and theirs. The violence of his body upon hers signals to Anna something about the violence of whiteness in Dominica, refracted through her physical pain and vibrant recollections.

Rather than a set of facts or a line from one point to another, then, they're memories and sensations that are collected relationally, irrationally, *by feel*. The discreet experiences—the rape, and the carnival—cannot be organized or mapped clearly because of their spectral, affective quality. As ghostly phenomena there can be no rational explanation for their relationship. What Anna is feeling, however tangentially and troubled by her whiteness, is that the woman's body in pain—*her own* body in pain—ties her to the colonial histories of the West Indies. They're shared sites of violation, otherness, and resistance. Her politicized body is implicated in the violence of colonization in Dominica. At the same time, no less importantly, those white masks *are* frightening; Anna is jealous of the carnival's participants and wishes she too could participate; and a man is hurting her very badly.

As the two final scenes in *Voyage in the Dark*, the rape and the abortion position Anna's body as a contested site of sociality. Her memory of Vincent raping

her blurs with her painful experience of bleeding out following her abortion, and through it all she is still in the mind-space of the carnival:

*Stop stop stop—I thought you'd say that he said  
My darling mustn't worry my darling mustn't be sad—I thought say that again  
say that again but he said it's nearly four o'clock perhaps you ought to be  
going  
You ought to be going—I tried to hang back but it was useless and the next  
moment my feet were groping for the stirrups—there weren't any stirrups—I  
balanced myself in the saddle trying to grip with my knees  
The horse went forward with an exaggerated swaying tilting motion like a  
rocking-horse—I felt very sick—I heard the concertina-music playing behind  
me all the time and the noise of people's feet dancing—the street was in a  
greenish shadow—I saw rows of small houses on each side in front of one of  
them there was a woman cooking fishcakes on an iron stove filled with  
charcoal—and then the bridge and the sound of the horse's hoofs on the  
wooden planks—and then the savannah—the road goes along by the sea—do  
you turn to the right or the left—the left of course—and then that turning  
where the shadow is always the same shape—shadows are ghosts you look at  
them and you don't see them—you look at everything and you don't see it only  
sometimes you see it like now I see—a cold moon looking down on a place  
where nobody is a place full of stones where nobody is  
I thought I'm going to fall nothing can save me now but still I clung  
desperately with my knees feeling very sick (VD 114).*

Anna is riding a horse; she's back in Dominica; she's with Vincent, ostensibly recovering. She's in a place full of stones where nobody is. Instead of assuming that Anna's imagination has run wild with delirium, the reader must heed Anna's demand that we accompany her to all the places she is, to all the locations of her body—in pain, she is in all of these places at once. The fragmentation of her narrative effectively fragments and scatters her person. And in this way, Anna becomes that ghost we must follow: to go where she leads, to bear witness.

She tells us: “*shadows are ghosts you look at them and you don’t see them—you look at everything and you don’t see it only sometimes you see it like now I see—a cold moon looking down on a place where nobody is a place full of stones where nobody is.*” Now Anna can really see it, the ghosts and the shadows and the cold moon looking down. The place full of stones. Anna can see it all because she’s among the haunted, doing the haunting, and she doesn’t want to be there alone. Gordon writes that “we are led to conclude that the ghost is a living force. It may reside elsewhere in an otherworldly domain but it is never intrinsically Other. It has a life world, in the strongest sense of the term, of its own. And it carries this life world with all its sweet things, its nastiness, and its yearnings into ours as it makes its haunting entry, making itself a phenomenological reality” (AG 179). Anna makes this intimately, bitterly clear in the above passage. Her life world, with its “sweet things” and “nastiness” and “yearnings,” is both diffused and compacted through the brutalization of her body. We are to understand that the violence done to her is done by Vincent, and by the doctor, but also by those structures of haunting that would mark her as ghostly to begin with.

What is this place full of stones, the empty place where a cold moon looks down? I find myself haunted by this image in particular. I wonder if it is a graveyard, or maybe a shallow beach in Dominica. Does Anna count herself among the *nobody* there, negating her own presence? I wonder if the place full of stones is the bottom of the Atlantic ocean where it is dark and quiet.<sup>5</sup> I don’t know if Anna wants the cold

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<sup>5</sup> I imagine this as pointing, perhaps, to the many enslaved African bodies that remain on the bottom of the Atlantic ocean: tossed overboard a slave ship, or having jumped themselves during the course of the journey.

moon to look or not, but I suspect she'd rather have a cold, detached witness than none at all. And I do think that the moon must be witnessing, because Anna sees it looking down; as she says, she sees everything.

Anna experiences the discovery of her pregnancy as a defeat, as an impending betrayal by her own body. "Of course, as soon as a thing has happened it isn't fantastic anymore, it's inevitable. The inevitable is what you're doing or have done. The fantastic is simply what you didn't do. That goes for everybody. The inevitable, the obvious, the expected... They watch you, their faces like masks, set in the eternal grimace of disapproval. I always knew that girl was no good. I always knew that girl was... Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you do that? Why didn't you bloody well make a hole in the water?" (VD 101). Becoming pregnant by one of the men keeping her is exactly what Anna believes she deserves, being the 'no good girl' she is. All the things she might've done differently could never have been done, not by her. This is what her body was made for, she tells herself, the concept a threat and an admonition rather than a blessing or even a simple fact.

*Why didn't you bloody well make a hole in the water?* Why didn't you jump in and drown yourself? This invocation of water, of drowning, and of the hole/hull is not coincidental. The ocean is marked as a site of death or transition or release, a place to put one's body for a (final) voyage.<sup>6</sup> When Anna crossed the ocean and arrived in England, she became a specter; she was haunted by a Dominica not left wholly behind. Anna's transatlantic crossing made a ghost of her. Now, in England,

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<sup>6</sup> In reference to my previous footnote: this too might invoke the image of a slave jumping overboard.

pregnant, she is herself a vessel of a kind. It is not an option for Anna to bear a child—not only because of her status as a poor, young, unmarried woman, but because she is an abject host. Like the ship that bore her to England (and perhaps because of it), Anna discovers her own body to be a cursed object, ghost-making rather than life-giving. This body, she tells herself, is not a mother's body. In such a lifeworld as this, Anna could only ever have an abortion, and specifically a wretched one.

I would like to return to the title of the novel. If there is a single voyage of reference, I believe we find it in the final scene, within the spaces of those last ellipses: “And about starting all over again, all over again...” (VD 115). Anna's “voyage in the dark” has been her passage to England, and her haunting of its streets, and her long nights with violent men. But most of all it is her unknown future, if she is to have one; it is the ghostly silence of that unfinished sentence. There is no rest at the end of the novel, no resolution for the living or the dead. Instead we are given an endless setting-out, a voyage just begun again and again. This lack of completion is the very nature of haunting, the signaling of *more, there's more*. For Anna there will always be more, more unfinished business, here in this in-between place where the past isn't past. But now we are there too. As readers we are stranded, and Anna would not have us forget it.

### Three: Haunted Rooms, Haunted Houses

In the past chapters I have written about geographic location and a sense of *place*, but now I want to consider more specifically domestic and urban spaces—those hotels and rented rooms that the Rhys women haunt, and the circumstances under which they wind up there. “In their exhausting wanderings,” Judith Raiskin writes, “Rhys’ heroines are simultaneously seeking and avoiding the security of what Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* calls being ‘taken care of,’ the gangster vocabulary of a violent silencing tied to the benevolent promise of economic security. Some critics have criticized what they see as Rhys’ heroines’ self-destructive attacks on their own would-be caretakers. We can understand these otherwise inexplicable rejections as expressions of the women’s frustration with the exploitation inherent in this ‘caretaking’ and of their fear of being shut away in silent acquiescence” (JR 168). Here Raiskin references Antoinette’s fate in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and so I would like to position the two works and the two women together: Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and Antoinette of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Antoinette is the only truly home-bound Rhys woman; all the others drift from room to room, city to city, man to man. Sasha’s narrative in *Good Morning, Midnight* focuses on this aspect of her life more than the other “European” novels do, in part because Sasha is older than the other women. Her face is aging; she’s been doing this longer; she has haunted so many different rooms. Because this is the shape of her life

these locations matter very much to her, the cafes and the bars and the bedrooms. But, Raiskin writes, “although Sasha attributes immense importance to the difference between this restaurant and that, this cafe and that, she is also haunted by the belief that these physical places to which she anchors herself are really indistinguishable” (JR 169). There is something deeply unsettling in the idea that the specificities of one’s urban life ultimately mean nothing, especially when they do matter so much to Sasha. Her melancholy—which I would like to situate in the context of the domestic in this chapter—is bound in part to the spaces she inhabits.

Sasha tell us: “Yes, I am sad, sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken, sad as a woman who is growing old... my life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don’t, streets that are friendly, streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking glasses I look nice in, looking glasses I don’t, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won’t...” (GMM 46). Sasha’s ‘simple and monotonous’ life is fixed in this rotation of spaces and commodities, a repetition of variations on a theme. This haunting pattern of repetition is, ironically, what binds Sasha to the time and space of her life. The fear of it all being *the same*, none of it *matter*ing, is what Raiskin describes as “the bleak side of modernism, the sordid fragmentation of urban existence” (JR 169).<sup>7</sup> Raiskin goes on to explain:

“Perhaps because of Rhys’s own ambiguous position in colonial race classification systems—her complex national identity, her unstable class

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<sup>7</sup> I think that here Raiskin invokes “modernism” as both a style and as a way of understanding the world; I wonder if “modernity” is a better word for my purposes.

position, and her occupation of several sexual categories (mistress, wife, divorcee, widow)—her heroines recognize that the distinctions available in this world are ultimately fictitious. Rhys's modernism not only questions Victorian cultural structures but also challenges the... ideologies of capitalism that posit an economy based on free agents who both freely sell their labor and freely choose and purchase goods and services. Sasha's recognition of the randomness and the lack of true differentiation in her environment is a denial of the false comforts modern capitalist society seems to offer" (JR 169).

The objects and locations, mundane and unremarkable, are imbued with melancholy as Sasha encounters them. Her haunting presence manifests this; at the same time, the places and things already have a ghostly quality of their own in her melancholic world. The unlucky dress or the unflattering looking glass operate as haunted objects in Sasha's ghost world, influencing her just as her presence influences them.

As Raiskin discusses above, one of the more troubling qualities of all the Rhys women is their constant, seemingly self-sabotaging rejection of the men who look after them, and of the locations that they confine them to. Raiskin describes this as an expression of "the women's frustration with the exploitation inherent in this 'caretaking,'" and I think that this is true. The Rhys women's refusal to be easily 'kept' is another way in which they eschew their prescribed social roles, disreputable as even those might be. The 'domestic' spaces in Rhys' novels, both the hotel rooms and the houses, cannot fully contain the women; the men can't, the walls can't. The Rhys women exceed their bounds but also cannot really be free of them. In this way they are ghostly, bound to a location or locations, times and spaces, even when they desperately want to escape.

A distinction that I will insist on is that the haunted room is *not* the haunted house (Thornfield being the haunted house in question) and that different sorts of hauntings are necessary to occupy these different spaces. A hotel ghost is not the same sort of specter as a house ghost; Sasha Jansen does different ghostly work than does the first Mrs. Rochester. The modes of operation of emerging urban capitalism, Victorian social customs, and the roles of (white European and white Creole) women in public and private spheres dictate this. Certainly, though, all of the Rhys women do haunt the spaces they are confined to—and confinement is almost always a prerequisite for a haunting to occur.

*Good Morning, Midnight* begins with Sasha's description of her new hotel room. "‘Quite like old times,’ the room says. ‘Yes? No?’ There are two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a curtain. It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible. The street outside is narrow, cobblestoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse... I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life" (GMM 9). There is nothing remarkable about this space. It is just as it has always been, "quite like old times." Sasha finds that her familiarity with rooms like these is saddening and alienating to her, rather than being a source of comfort. When she steps back a little to look, she finds herself lonely and isolated even within the site of the familiar. Sasha's "little life"—its public walking, its cast of unfriendly women and deceitful men, its patterns

of drinking and sleeping—can be so easily arranged in these rooms. This is an existence that pushes against the idea of a forward-moving life trajectory. (Again we must think of the ghost that resists historicism.) When we use the term ‘haunting’ colloquially, perhaps to refer to a ‘neighborhood haunt,’ we simply mean a place visited often or a site of frequent return. This is exactly what Sasha and the other women are doing in their small rooms and their cafes, of course, and it is also much more than that. It must be both, the mundane and the spectral at once.

Sasha’s maudlin descriptors for her sadness—a circus-lioness, an eagle without wings, a violin with a single broken string—amplify and refract her melancholy, making it too big and too strange, terrible and obvious and unreal. In the first scene of the novel, Sasha cries loudly and drunkenly in a bar, alone, making all the other patrons distinctly uncomfortable. Sasha’s externalized, overwrought sadness disturbs the delicate social order. Her feelings take up too much space, and so she does not execute her feminine melancholia correctly. Sasha needs too much, demands too much. She is without guile, and her lifestyle is unbecoming as she ages. It is awkward in a public space. Social norms would demand that she marry, have children; she should quiet down, or at least goes somewhere more private to cry. Sasha tells the bartender tearfully that it was just a memory she had, one thing reminding her of another. He gives her no reply.

Within such a social framework, no respectable woman should have so public a life, especially when her suffering is made this apparent. As Sasha’s pain is rendered a spectacle, she becomes invisible as a social actor: something so pathetic

cannot also be totally human. This kind of logic turns people into ghosts. If one's wretchedness is too loud, too demanding or alarming or sexually charged, it must be put away—into a small hotel room, or perhaps an attic.

Gordon writes: "Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future" (AG 22). To follow the ghosts is to make visible again the sad Rhys women, the madwomen in the attics—those who leave disturbing, ghostly traces but are not allowed a fullness of being. As Gordon writes, it is also working to understand "the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place," which is ultimately a project of social and historical reckoning.

Rochester's Thornfield is a site that demands this reckoning, haunted as it is by his first wife. The house's ghostly matter is both a product of Antoinette's presence and of its historical conditions—she could not haunt it without certain existing structures of power to conjure her there. Antoinette haunts Rochester's sprawling English estate because she is a product of British imperialism, racism, and misogyny, but also simply because she is a *bad woman* who will not be told what to do. Her 'madness' exhibits itself as a haunting, because haunting will always have an undertone of the unhinged, the irrational, the hysterical. These qualities are racially

and sexually charged; in the logic of British colonialism it is only a woman like Antoinette, a sexually depraved Creole woman, who could manifest such spectral hysteria.<sup>8</sup> It is critical to note that the two things are inseparable: Antoinette's supposed non-whiteness and her 'wild,' animalistic sexual nature reinforce each other. She is a savage, a heathen, inhuman. Confined to the attic of the house, Antoinette becomes a ghost—and when confronted in full form, a beast or demon. To be a ghost is to be otherworldly, but also to be made up of all the darkneses in this world—that is the paradox that binds Jean Rhys' ghosts in place.

To see this at work, let us turn momentarily to *Jane Eyre*. This is the scene in which Richard Mason interrupts Jane and Rochester's wedding to say that Rochester is in fact already married. Rochester confesses to this and tells all assembled:

“Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. I had a charming partner—pure, wise, modest: you can fancy I was a happy man. I went through rich scenes! Oh! My experience has been heavenly, if only you knew it! But I owe you no further explanation. Briggs, Wood, Mason, I invite you all to come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole's patient, and *my wife!* You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human. This girl,' he continued, looking at me, 'knew no more than you, Wood, of this disgusting secret: she thought all was fair and legal, and never dreamt she was going to be entrapped into a feigned union with a defrauded wretch, already bound to a bad, mad, and embruted partner! Come all of you—follow!’” (CB 337).

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<sup>8</sup> I should acknowledge that the diagnosis of “hysteria” in white European women follows different rules than does the prescription of “madness” for questionably white women like Antoinette, but their underlying logics—of the irrational, animal female—are inextricably linked.

The small wedding party goes back to Thornfield and up into the attic, where Jane finally gets a good, long look at “Bertha.” Jane says:

“In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face... the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet...

The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognized well that purple face—those bloated features... Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled... ‘That is *my wife*,’ said he. ‘Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know—such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have’ (laying his hand on my shoulder): ‘this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon’” (CB 338-9).

Now the ghostly Antoinette has materialized fully as Bertha: a demon, a lunatic, a wild animal. Where before she could only leave a trace, a suggestion of her presence, she now appears in all her embodied, inhuman monstrosity. This is necessary to define Jane against her: Jane as a deeply *human* individual, possessed of depth and righteousness, a woman of *character*. To know Jane, readers must also know Bertha as her perfect opposite, an antithesis the text insists upon in the language of Rochester’s presentation: *that, this*. My own interest, of course, is in knowing Antoinette as Rhys wanted her to be known.<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Spivak critiques Gilbert and Gubar’s psychological treatment of Bertha as merely “Jane’s dark double” in their

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<sup>9</sup> When Rhys was asked about her decision to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* after reading *Jane Eyre*, she said of Bertha Mason: “She seemed such a poor ghost, I thought I’d like to write her a life” (*Smile, Please*, 1979).

famous chapter on the subject, and I would do so as well: Spivak writes that “at least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister’s consolidation” (GS 251). How might we better understand the hauntings at work in Rhys’ novel if we read *Antoinette* on Rhys’ terms?

*Wide Sargasso Sea* sets out explicitly to give “Bertha” a substantive life, and in order to do this her character cannot be wholly *other*—to be ‘other’ is to be deprived of the feeling of autonomous personhood by the violence of colonialism. So Rhys’ project, in part, is one of re-orientation: we begin in Coulibri rather than in England, and Antoinette is given the power of narration for most of the novel (and when Rochester does take up the storytelling for a chapter, he remains nameless and reveals himself a remorseless colonial patriarch). Rhys’ desire to give the ghost a life is most fully articulated in her final novel.

I believe that this desire is present throughout all Rhys’ works, though it manifests differently in the ‘European’ novels than it does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jansen’s ghostly sociality is drawn into fuller view, given lengthier and more compassionate consideration. Sasha’s character doesn’t have a literary or historical past the way Bertha’s does, so her significance as a protagonist is marked primarily by her articulation of her pain and marginality. *Wide Sargasso Sea* seeks to revise a classic English text so as to draw out and amplify its historical ghost; *Good Morning, Midnight* demands that its reader bear witness to those nameless social figures who occupy the shadows of streets and houses and imperious men. “I have no pride—no pride, no name, no face, no country,” Sasha

says. “I don’t belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad... It doesn’t matter, there I am, like one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm. Two-pound-ten a week and a room just off the Gray’s Inn Road...” (GMM 44, ellipses hers).

The Rhys women are so lonely. Most of them, if not all of them, are grieving the loss of a mother or a child or a lover or some iteration of a former self. This grief and loneliness seeps into the spaces that they live in. How could it not? “A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that’s all any room is,” Sasha tells us (GMM 38). But as her readers, we know that it isn’t so simple, that not all the wolves can be kept at bay. Any room that Sasha enters will become a haunted one, has *been* haunted since before she set foot in it, and she can do nothing about it. This is because her haunting isn’t a decision, exactly, but a way of being in time and place. It does not concern her alone but rather is central to her lifeworld, and the lifeworlds of the other Rhys women. What Gordon describes as a “shared sociality of haunting” is both an admittance of Rhys’ reader to this experience of haunting and tenuous personhood—and the acknowledgement that Rhys’ women are leaky vessels. They cannot contain their ghostliness. In Sasha Jansen’s world, for example, her haunting presence, her uncontainable and untouchable grief, spills out and over. To read Rhys is to be touched by a ghost.

Gordon writes: “You are walking down the road or into the building and you hear or see something so clearly, something that isn’t necessarily visible to anyone

else. You think, ‘I must be *thinking it up*, making it up.’ Yet in this moment of enchantment when you are remembering something in the world, or something in the world is remembering you, you are not alone or hallucinating or making something out of nothing but your own unconscious thoughts. You have bumped into somebody else’s memory; you have encountered haunting and the picture of it the ghost imprints. Not only because this memory that is sociality is out there in the world, playing havoc with the normal security historical context provides, but because *it will happen again; it will be there for you*. It is *waiting for you*. *We were expected*. And therein lies the frightening aspect of haunting: you can be grasped and hurtled into the maelstrom of the powerful and material forces that lay claim to you whether you claim them as yours or not” (AG 166). That this “bumping into a memory” is a facet of haunting is crucial to understanding the social worlds of the Rhys women. The hauntings are material—*tactile*—and they will draw you in, lay claim to you, whether or not you would lay claim to them. Sasha will sit and cry in a cafe over a passing sad memory, and now you, the reader, have been touched by a specter that will compel you to bear witness whether you would choose to or not. This “playing havoc with the normal security historical context provides” is some of the most important work that ghosts perform: you can no longer rest easily in the comfort of a narrative of forward historical progression when the ghost demands attention in the present moment. It is approaching you.

Poor Sasha Jansen keeps bumping into the memory of her baby who died, a ghost who cannot leave her be, and one she will not leave alone. “What do I care

about anything when I can lie on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket?” she asks (GMM 57). Sasha was much too poor and unmarried to be having a baby, as all of the Rhys women are when they become pregnant, or have abortions—though in the case of *Good Morning, Midnight*, she gives birth to the baby. But there can be no viable children delivered into in the haunted worlds of the Rhys women, who cannot, by definition, be *good* or *proper* mothers. Their lives are lived in public; they are too exposed to shelter or care for another.

Here Sasha tells the story of her baby’s birth.

“When I climb the stairs again I am not feeling so well.

‘Courage, my little lady. Your room is ready now.’

A room, a bed where I can lie down. Now the worst is surely over. But the long night, the interminable night...

‘Courage, courage,’ she says. ‘All will be well. All is going beautifully.’

This is a funny house. There are people having babies all over the place. Anyhow, at least two are having babies.

‘Jesus, Jesus,’ says one woman. ‘Mother, Mother,’ says another.

I do not speak. How long is it before I speak?

‘Chloroform, chloroform,’ I say when I speak. Of course I would. What nonsense! There is no doctor to give chloroform here. This is a place for poor people. Besides, she doesn’t approve of chloroform. No Jesus, no Mother, and no chloroform either...

What, then?

This.

Always?

Yes, always.

She comes and wipes my forehead. She speaks to me in a language that is no language.

But I understand it.

Back, back, back... this has happened many times.

What are you? I am an instrument, something to be made use of...

She darts from one room to another, encouraging, soothing, reproaching.

‘Now you’re not trying. Courage, courage.’ Speaking her old, old language of

words that are not words.

A rum life, when you come to think of it. I'd hate to live it. However, to her it is just life...

Afterwards I couldn't sleep. I would sleep for an hour or two, and then wake up and think about money, money, money for my son; money, money...

Do I love him? Poor little devil, I don't know if I love him.

But the thought that they will crush him because we have no money—that is torture. Money, money for my son, my beautiful son...

I can't sleep. My breasts dry up; my mouth is dry. I can't sleep. Money, money...

'Why!' she says. 'Can't you sleep?' This will never do, never do.' She probably knows why I can't sleep. I bet some of the others here can't either. Worrying about the same thing. (This is not *a* child; this is *my* child. Money, money... )

'Well, why can't you sleep?' she says. 'Does he cry, this young man?'

'No, he hardly cries at all. Is it a bad sign, that he doesn't cry?'

'Why no, not at all. A beautiful, beautiful baby... But why can't you sleep?'

She has slanting eyes, very clear. I like people with clear, slanting eyes. I can still give myself up to people I like. (Tell me what to do. Have you a solution? Tell me what to do.)

She pats me on the shoulder and says, 'You're worrying about nothing at all. Everything will come right for you. I'll send you in a tisane of orange-flower water, and tonight you must sleep, sleep...'

I can't feed this unfortunate baby. He is taken out and given Nestle's milk.

So, I can sleep...

The next day she comes in and says: 'Now I am going to arrange that you will be just like what you were before. There will be no trace, no mark, nothing.

That, it seems, is her solution.

She swathes me up in very tight, very uncomfortable bandages. Intricately she rolls them and ties them. She gives me to understand that this is usually an extra. She charges a great deal for this as a rule.

'I do this better than anyone in the whole of Paris,' she says. 'Better than any doctor, better than any of these people who advertise, better than anyone in the whole of Paris.'

And there I lie in those damned bandages for a week. And there he lies, swathed up too, like a little mummy. And never crying.

But now I like taking him in my arms and looking at him. A lovely forehead, incredibly white, the eyebrows drawn very faintly in gold dust...

Well, this was a funny time. (The big bowl of coffee in the morning with a pattern of red and blue flowers. I was always so thirsty.) But uneasy, uneasy... Ought a baby to be as pretty as this, as pale as this, as silent as this? The other babies yell from morning to night. Uneasy...

When I complain about the bandages she says: 'I promise you that when you take them off you'll be just as you were before.' And it is true. When she takes them off, there is not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.

And five weeks afterward there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.

And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease..." (GMM 57-61, all ellipses hers).<sup>10</sup>

Sasha need never use the words 'guilt' or 'fear' or 'dread' or even 'anger' in her recollection. These affects are the seething undercurrent of the story she tells. They shape the nurse's language that is no language and Sasha's incantation of "uneasy" and "money, money, money." Her frequent use of ellipses and her abrupt paragraphs mark her silences, her pauses for space and breath. Sasha's grief and guilt are devoid of language, out of time entirely, and the absence of marks on her body from her protracted, painful labor only serves to reinforce this. The death of her baby haunts Sasha with its inevitability, when it will turn her out again into the public. There the violence of her grief will be a disruptive, discomfiting force; the infant "with eyebrows drawn very faintly in gold dust" becomes a spectral presence visible to her alone.

In the passage, also, is the undercurrent of Sasha's fear that she might not love her baby at all, her ability to love him being so predicated upon her ability to provide

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<sup>10</sup> Sasha echoes the ending of *Voyage in the Dark*, in which Anna, all healed up, is ready to "start all over again."

for him. “Do I love him?” she asks. “Poor little devil, I don’t know if I love him. But the thought that they will crush him because we have no money—that is torture.” The logic of necessity that Sasha is forced into navigating, being poor and unmarried, suggests that the baby’s death is ultimately the only reasonable option for either of them. She cannot bear to see him so silent, so deathly, simply because she has no money—but does she actually love him? Does her love matter if it cannot translate into material care? These questions are ugly, unseemly, shameful for a new mother to be asking in the first place. They are questions of pride and self-protection, while women—and mothers especially—ought to be humble and selfless. What *kind* of a woman is Sasha if she is *unsure whether she even loves her child*, unsure if she is capable of caring for him? While the other women beg for Jesus, for Mother, Sasha begs for chloroform. “What nonsense!” she says, ashamed at her to be drugged while giving birth. Her longing to absent herself from the labor that *defines* womanhood further attenuates her personhood.

Sasha is rarely self-pitying; she does expect to avoid pain however possible even when she senses it is coming. She is incapable of making a properly domestic home. Instead she will rely on institutions such as the house where poor women give birth, and on men who exploit and then abandon her. This continuous passivity marks Sasha as a bad “model” for a woman: she’s lazy, selfish, unambitious. Her status as a single woman—even when she’s being kept by a man—is reinforced by her lack of a permanent home or any significant social bonds with friends or family. Unlike ghost stories in which the domestic is disrupted (as in *The Haunting of Hill House* or *The*

*Turn of the Screw*),<sup>11</sup> Sasha's story notably lacks a domestic foundation. This is consequential because it casts her outside the protections of privacy—it makes her a public woman, which is to say, hardly a woman at all.

Haunting without a home forces the Rhys women into cafes for a drink and then back into the streets. Properly domestic women do not walk out at all hours. Rhys women have no business in domestic spaces, in the security of the home, because they are from the first *unheimlich*,<sup>12</sup> unhoused, and uncanny.

“Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters,” Sasha says. “If you have money and friends, houses are just houses with steps and a front-door—friendly houses where the door opens and somebody meets you, smiling. If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors, no lit windows, just frowning darkness. Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another. Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer. And they know who to frown at. They know as well as the policeman on the corner, and don't you worry...” (GMM 32, ellipses hers). The homes that Sasha has no place in come alive above her at night. They jeer at her as she walks back to her solitary hotel. By animating these houses from the outside, rather than the inside, Rhys locks Sasha in to a haunted world, one in which she herself has become a ghost.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Haunting of Hill House*, by Shirley Jackson, 1959, and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, 1898.

<sup>12</sup> As used by Freud to describe the “strangely familiar,” where the everyday becomes eerie (“The Uncanny,” 1919).

Sasha's social isolation is reinforced by the spaces she is not allowed to enter, rather than by those that she cannot leave. Being unrooted as she is, Sasha is only a hotel ghost; a café ghost; an unmarried, deviant, bad mother ghost. The haunted houses do right to keep her well out.

Antoinette, of course, is kept well in—but not so well as Rochester would like. In Part Three of *Wide Sargasso Sea* she tells us about wandering the halls of Thornfield at night after stealing Grace Poole's keys. "Then I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it before somewhere, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it," Antoinette says. "As I walk along the passages I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard. They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England... This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England" (WSS 107, ellipses mine). When Antoinette leaves the attic she enters another world, "their world." Her spectral existence collides with the plane of existence of the cardboard house, but she is still able to act upon it and its inhabitants—she is of multiple dimensions at once. Thornfield being made of cardboard in Antoinette's description suggests that the house is not altogether real or natural to her. She recognizes, on some level, the deceptive constructedness of it: the convoluted logics of white patriarchal British imperialism that enable the Thornfield's existence; those that bind her to it, and it to her. Antoinette could only ever haunt a place like this, a house whose yellows have no light in them.

At least Antoinette gets a house to haunt—the other Rhys women are allowed only hotel rooms. “Walking in the night. Back to the hotel. Always the same hotel,” Sasha says. “You press the button. The door opens. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room...” (GMM 32, ellipses hers). The repetition of the hotel rooms in Sasha’s life, small and sad and unremarkable, imitates a pattern of haunting in which a moment of crisis is rehearsed again and again without resolution. The hotel rooms repeat themselves to Sasha just as the memory of losing her baby does. And this is the case for all of the Rhys women but Antoinette. For all the others, their familiar tragedies and traumas continue uninterrupted, leaving the women “ready to start all over again,” without allowing them or the readers any ‘redemption’ or release. This is not a shortcoming of these novels—because to represent these patterns of haunting is the crucial work of bearing witness to these ghostly women. In telling their stories—which is the same story, again and again—Rhys recounts their undoing, testifies to it.

The women leave their homes on islands colonized by European powers that swallowed up millions of indigenous and African lives. These white Creole women take the steamer to England, carrying with them the violence done in their name and violence they themselves have done. But these Rhys women are not European, and never English, despite their white skins. So these white-but-not-quite-right women haunt the worlds that will not receive them, and where they will never be at home.

At last we have Antoinette and the final scene of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the blessing of a red dress, and of a fire. “But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was

as if the fire had spread across the room,” Antoinette says. “It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now” (WSS 110-11). I want to bring us into the heart of Antoinette’s fire. She will show how she would like best to communicate with us, and how to get in and out of the haunted house.

Conclusion: “where the shadow and the act converge”

These literary and social ghosts matter to me because they are part of our lives, part of the world. They belong to *this* world even when it is not so apparent that they do, and they want to be seen in it. “It is essential to see the things and the people who are primarily unseen and banished to the periphery of our social graciousness,” Avery Gordon writes. “At a minimum it is essential because they see you and address you. They have, as Gayatri Spivak remarked, a strategy toward you. Absent, neglected, ghostly: it is essential to imagine their life worlds because you have no other choice but to make things up in the interstices of the factual and the fabulous, the place where the shadow and the act converge. It is essential to write about societies and people enthralled by magic, enchanted, possessed and entranced, disappeared, and haunted, because, well, it is more common than you might have considered... all these ghostly aspects of social life are not aberrations, but are central to modernity itself” (AG 196-7). Not aberrations, but central to modernity itself: Rhys’ madwoman in the attic is not just an uncanny spectral figure, but a crucial facet of modern life, of what it means to be in the world.

Antoinette ultimately has a sense of purpose that separates her from the other Rhys women. While all of them would like to be seen, to be addressed and to address, Antoinette’s ‘something to be done’ has material and temporal consequences. Her ‘something to be done’ is done spectacularly and theatrically, in burning down the

house that once held her prisoner. This isn't the act of a "madwoman" but one of a vengeful ghost who must communicate; fire is the language she has at her disposal.

All of the Rhys women-ghosts communicate without and beyond written or spoken language: this is part of what it means to be a ghost, to haunt and to be haunted. The emotive level at which they are able—or even unable—to be understood marks them as ghostly, but it also gives them the subversive power of suggestion, of affective influence. They speak a language we do not yet understand, outside of any logic that could be articulated. Gordon writes that "the ghost makes itself known to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition. Haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (AG 63). The ghost communicates by pulling us into a "structure of feeling," and this is how we see and hear her, and her us.

All of Rhys' novels have this atmospheric quality, of pulling the reader into a structure of feeling that allows us to bear witness to the traumas, sadnesses, and unresolved tasks in the lives of the stories' protagonists. We experience this communion when Julia encounters someone in the shadows on the stairs; when Anna recalls the carnival of her childhood; when Sasha bursts into tears in a lonely cafe. The novels are peppered with such scenes. The lack of resolution in these haunted states make these stories what they are, and that itself is important in representations of trauma and oppression. The ghosts do not want you to move on, to expect that historical or personal violences have been corrected; in fact, they will insist that they

haven't been. It is crucial that the ghosts do this, because that is what their haunting is for.

Antoinette complicates all of this for us. She is allowed the sort of resolution that the other Rhys women are not, and even if it isn't a "happy ending," it satisfies in the way that the conclusion of *Voyage in the Dark* never could. The ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is that place where "the shadow and the act converge," where the ghost's expression takes on a destructive and liberatory physical presence. This is the fire. Antoinette's fire at Thornfield is her missive, the actualization of her haunting power. I wish so much that the other Rhys women would be allowed to destroy something; I wish they would kill a man or at least break a window. But that would be too easy, would let us as readers off too easily—denying us that resolution holds us in the suspended place that the ghost inhabits, and it is our duty to remain there with her. Antoinette walks the line between freeing herself and absolving her spectator. We will not be absolved by her fire, and I'm glad of it.

The fire at Thornfield isn't Antoinette's first fire. In recent post-emancipation Coulibri, her childhood home was burned down: a fire started by rioting former slaves, "a handful of drunken Negroes," as Mr. Mason refers to them (WSS 23). Many of them are people the family knows, including Antoinette's childhood servant-friend Tia.

"The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not

be stolen or burned.

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass” (WSS 27).

The theme of the oppressed setting fire to the home of the oppressor makes its way to the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but it is important for us not to collapse the former slaves’ experience in Jamaica with Antoinette’s in the attic of Thornfield. Antoinette seems to do just this, identifying in the final moment with the black Jamaicans who destroyed her home; as readers we should be critical of this identification. In understanding Antoinette we must know that this is how she positions herself in the world: aligned with members of a community who rightfully hated her and her family, and alienated from other whites, Creoles and Europeans both. It is a sad, lonely place to be, but not one of a simple victimhood. We need not and should not couch Antoinette’s sadness and suffering—or that of the other Rhys women—in terms of slavery’s violences in order to comprehend it. Antoinette is not a black rioter when she burns down Thornfield, however much she would like to see herself as one. She is a white woman who has been terribly wronged, and her anger cannot be contained.

At Thornfield Antoinette is delighted by fire, even before she “remembers” what it is she must do there. She has an intuitive understanding of its power to cleanse

and to destroy. Fire reminds her of her previous life, colorful and hot and alive, far removed from the cold darkness that is her experience of England. During her nighttime wanderings around the house she often plays with fire. "...I saw the wax candles too and I hated them," Antoinette says. "So I knocked them all down. Most of them went out but one caught the thin curtains that were behind the red ones. I laughed when I saw the lovely color spreading so fast but I did not stay to watch it. I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her—the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (WSS 111-2). Antoinette encounters herself as a ghost while she plays with fire, haunts the halls of Thornfield. For her the two are bound together. Soon she will know the ghost, and she will know what she came to England to do.

For all the Rhys women there are moments of self-recognition and also the total lack of it. They are all preoccupied with their own image, and why shouldn't they be? For most of them their faces and bodies are their livelihoods; for all of them they are the only things they have to keep. The materialities of the women's lives are deeply meaningful—a dress, for example, has texture and weight in an otherwise random and cruel world. "Time has no meaning," Antoinette tells Grace Poole. "But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?" (WSS 109). To experience haunting in the body, as a body, means being invisible and hypervisible at once. The women *are* their ghostly traces, here and not-here; they are their spectral bodies. For the Rhys woman to be unsure of who she sees when she encounters her own image is destabilizing, alienating. *The ghost is you and not-you*. It

is when the Rhys women recognize and understand themselves as ghosts that they can best communicate, best make themselves seen and heard.

After Antoinette comes across herself—the ghost—in the hall, she drops the candle she’s been carrying. It catches a tablecloth and sets it on fire. “As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped,” Antoinette says. “There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it” (WSS 112). For her the connections are drawn in an instant: the ghost Antoinette says she knows, the start of a fire, and Antoinette’s invocation of Christophine, her black servant (and mother figure) from Coulibri. *Help me Christophine help me*. In this final push towards an ending in fire, Antoinette calls upon her former home, the past bleeding into the present. Alongside Antoinette, we as readers lost any linear sense of time long ago.

Does Antoinette merely dream of starting the fire and jumping from the battlements at Thornfield? Then she screams, wakes up, remembers what she’s been brought here to England to do? Or, as some have read the ending of the book, does she jump to her death and awake in some afterlife fixed in the same place, in the attic? I am not convinced. I think that rather than dreaming, she is rehearsing, remembering forward slowly. Antoinette has been setting the ghosts of fires and over and over throughout the house, night after night, until she can remember exactly what to do—until she can see herself in the fire. She haunts Thornfield by repeating her fated act to its completion. Antoinette says:

“There were more candles on a table and I took one of them and ran up the first flight of stairs and the second. On the second floor I threw away the candle. But I did not stay to watch. I ran up the last flight of stairs and along

the passage. I passed the room where they brought me yesterday or the day before yesterday, I don't remember. Perhaps it was long ago for I seemed to know the house well. I knew how to get away from the heat and the shouting, for there was shouting now. When I was out on the battlements it was cool and I could hardly hear them. I sat there quietly. I don't know how long I sat. Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and my books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est la? Qui est la?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke" (WSS 112).

Antoinette knows she is familiar with Thornfield somehow, but so much more real to her now is her past in Jamaica. She sees it all around her. The materials of her former life, its color and its character, all rush towards her in an instant in the face of the fire. And there she sees Tia again: her rejection of Antoinette at the site of the Coulibri fire is transformed now, here, into an invitation to jump. Tia mocks Antoinette: *You frightened?* Her old friend calling to her, her friend she hoped to live with and never have to leave—what can she do but jump? Long ago they jumped into the river together, and now here she is, again.

She jumps and wakes, startling Grace Poole awake. We are brought back with Antoinette to darkness and silence in the cold attic room, a moment of pause. But

finally, she has remembered: “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage” (WSS 112). She is here in England to do just this, to finish her ghostly business of dragging the past into the light.

To live in the world with ghosts is to commune with them. They are ultimately of our world, *this* world, the parts we would rather push into shadow. Antoinette will not be so easily pushed away, “banished to the periphery” as Gordon suggests. This is the work of the ghost. When Antoinette starts the fire at Thornfield she brings with her, within it, the violence and color and pain of her life before now. With the fire she brings the legacy of colonialism and she also brings the grandfather clock, her doll house, the orchids. *It was red and all my life was in it*. It is hers and it is more than hers, this past, this fire.

When this ghost speaks, she speaks in fire: the first Mrs. Rochester will be seen and heard this way, without language—or at least beyond any discourse familiar to us. The fire is the message to those who would bear witness to it. In seeing her life in the fire, as Antoinette does, she asks us that we might see ours there alongside it, implicated in it. She asks us not to look away.

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