HIDDEN IN THE FLESH:

DISCLOTHING THE BODY IN THREE JEAN RHYS NOVELS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Jean Rhys and her heroines exist in a world governed by patriarchal structure where disclosure of the body is read negatively. In a subversive gesture, Rhys both attracts and detracts attention to and from the body by pointing to surface as a means of writing herself into the world. Through the fictive narrative of confession, Rhys connects clothing and text as structures of self-fashioning. Clothing becomes the way the body enters the shape of her text. One question I pose within my thesis is: does language erase the body in the same manner that clothing offers an alternative to skin as surface? Jean Rhys substitutes clothing for skin in a gesture of erasure while simultaneously calling attention to that which is hidden. Language and clothing both erase and reconstitute the body as corporeal signifier. Examining body image through clothing as disguise, display, and performance, I read three of Jean Rhys's novels; Voyage in the Dark, Good Morning, Midnight, and Wide Sargasso Sea in terms of construction of the female body by the confessing subject. By placing the body on the pivotal point of binaries, the body is rescued from the passive position which the dominant structure attempts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Thank you" and "I love you" are two phrases which are as completely unoriginal as they are necessary. Of course we try and try to write them differently, to have them mean again, and on some level we have to succeed or language would be useless. This is my preamble, my apology ahead of time, for possibly never being able to thank the following people for making my life worthwhile.

Marilyn and John Dudek who first taught me about love and family. Olga Kormilo, the matriarch of my family, who shows me, by example, what strength is. Dawn Dudek who mingles dreams with life. Ross Dudek who was born with a mouth full of language. Nicole Markotic, Méira Cook, and Susan Holloway (the Mandarins) who refuse to lose faith in me. Lynda Tjaden who always likes my stories. Tricia Best who always has the answers. Michèle Manaigre-Sims who was the first person to call me a writer. David Arnason who believes in the possibility of fairy tales. Dawne McCance who teaches me to write and read and rewrite and reread and write all over again. Robert Kroetsch who believes I have a prose style, who allows me to try almost anything at least once, and who always asks the best questions. And Oz Filippin the man who sent me up to my computer every day for the past several months with the question, "And how many pages did you do today?" (Kroetsch owes you a beer for being the reason this thesis is finished).

"She read and read and read, until the texts she read read into her and for her, her own horrifying story."

Aritha van Herk In Visible Ink

PART I. INTRODUCTION: PEN ON PAPER

It is about writing away the sadness. It starts with a memory, transforms into story. And the story is both me and outside me. Me watching me. "Prescribe a setting, an occasion, a slyly perfect moment when the writer might examine herself in relation to text. It begins with confession: the writer *reads* as one who writes, who writes words with a pen on paper" (van Herk 139-40).

I want to write about the undeniable sadness in Jean Rhys's writing. A sadness which translates into the narratives of women caught in a world where survival depends upon finding enough money to buy food and a new dress. Jeremy Tambling speaks of writing the self being a form of self-fashioning. That is, a writing which gives a "series of temporary, transient identities which proclaim their non-identity with each other" (164). Rhys's proclamations announce themselves through confessional narratives. I will consider the transient identities of Rhys and her heroines as they constitute their body image through clothing. I will attempt to illustrate how the body confesses using clothing as disguise, display, and performance as Jean Rhys fashions herself into each of her heroines and each heroine in turn fashions herself into one or two or numerous other

selves. The purpose of my text is to examine how Jean Rhys uses surface--text and clothing--as a method of confession and a tactic for subverting the patriarchal power structure which insists upon reducing the female body to the passive position in configurations of the mind/body binary.

One day, Jean Rhys moved into an apartment which saddened her immensely. There was an old table by the window which looked drab and forlorn. Seeking to put some light and happiness into her room, Jean Rhys went out shopping for flowers and a vase and came back to her room with several exercise books and brightly coloured pens. She placed them on the table and smiled at how they transformed her space. Later, after supper, it happened. Her fingers and the palms of her hands started tingling. She pulled a chair up to the table and wrote "This is my diary." But it wasn't. She wrote down everything she remembered of the relationship she had in the past year. Everything she felt, everything he said. She wrote she remembers it all (Smile, 128-9). This diary became the notes for her novel, Voyage in the Dark.

Rhys's claim that she "remembers it all" brings into question the notion of truth and memory and how the combination of the two culminates in autobiography. Philippe

Lejeune ponders the evolution of autobiography and its implications in his text On Autobiography. The word was imported from England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Larousse in 1866 defined autobiography as the "life of an individual written by himself." Larousse names autobiography as a kind of confession or any text in which the author seems to express his life or his feelings. Vapereau's, Universal Dictionary of Literature, written in 1876, explained his own insights: "Autobiography...literary work, novel, poem, philosophical treatise, etc., whose author intended, secretly or admittedly, to recount his life, to expose his thoughts or to describe his feelings." This meaning implies both a new way of writing as well as a new way of reading, for the reader is implicated in hearing the whispered secrets of the author and translating them into a narrative of truth. (123)

For Jean Rhys this definition is specifically interesting, for her exercise books remained hidden in the bottom of her suitcase for several years before she showed them to a reader other than herself. Besides writing novels, such as Voyage in the Dark and Good Morning, Midnight, which are based on memory, Rhys wrote an unfinished autobiography in an attempt to write remembered fragments of her life as a manual of

truth. Here the reader accesses the "actual" life of Rhys instead of the composed life within her other texts.

Yet the reader is still the reader and Rhys still the writer and the text is still written as a text. Where do I attempt to assign truth? Impossible. She edits as she writes, so the reader is always already reading a composed version of the truth--only the details which Rhys wants us to have. In writing she is still safe. Writing brings Jean Rhys to the centre of herself. Gives her voice. Writing becomes a moment of transgression taking her beyond the patriarchal order which she struggles against. Yet "all this writing is in place of a spoken word that you will never say" (Lejeune 237). The act of writing is therefore still a form of the unspoken simultaneously revealing as it perpetuates layers of silence and secrets.

"Oh, the relief of words. Always like a constant aching, no, an irritation, harsh, gritty, this feeling about England and the English. Disppointed love, of course" (Rhys, Smile 165).

Rhys constructs herself as the disappointed lover. She borrows from her lived experience to give breath to her heroines. In her novels, she uses letters, textual references, song lyrics, and the French language to provide texture to her words. Her unfinished autobiography is formed by fragments of her memory and remainders of notes stitched together. Jean Rhys's will expressed the wish that no biography of her life be written unless personally authorised. The result of her wish became a collection of her letters published in place of a biography. Even in death, her life is a borrowing of already written texts. Veronica Marie Gregg recognizes this Rhysian style of writing as a combination of parody and pastiche. She quotes Robert Burden's definition from The Contemporary English Novel:

> Parody is distinguished as a mode of imitation in a subversive form. This distinguishes it from pastiche, which implies a non-subversive form of imitation, which depends on systems of borrowing...Pastiche may be the result of the conscious recognition of influence and of the fact that the condition of writing is in fact a condition of re-writing. ("Rhys on Herself" 134-5).

"I can't make things up, I can't invent...I just write what happened. Not that my books are entirely my life--but almost....Though I guess the invention is in the writing" (Plante, Difficult 52).

Rhys's writing and rewriting take two forms: she rewrites heroines from already written literary texts (Bronte's Bertha and Zola's Nana) and she rewrites what she has already written (her novels from her diaries and memory). Rhys's writing is based upon events and places in her life. While this does not classify her novels as purely autobiographical, the psychological profile of Rhys's heroines matches that of Jean Rhys. Autobiography has come under incredible scrutiny, metamorphizing into another definition with every writer. The "auto" assumes a unified self instead of questioning and deconstructing the idea of self. The ambiguous genre of biography implies the "narrative of someone who existed, composed by a narrator who passes himself off as a historian. We suspect biography of error, of partiality, of deformation; never do we suspect the very form of its narrative...to be...an interpretation" (Lejeune 71).

Helen Buss in "Bios in Women's Autobiography" examines the etymology of autobiography, focusing on the central "bios" locating the "self as an essential, separate, metaphysical self which makes its own life and recounts it in the written version" (4). While bios still refers to autos, the shift allows for a refocusing from the life to the self. Two features which Buss considers significant for female bios are: the lived reality of the body and the lived reality of multiple and conflicting life scripts (7). I would like to concentrate on the fictionality of self(life)writing. This does not mean discarding her definition, but rather magnifying the notion of *making* ones own life. Buss does touch upon this notion in her essay when she stresses the importance of the "imaginary" body in selfconstruction, but I believe Jeremy Tambling's study in Confession: sexuality, sin, the subject will be most useful in formulating the theoretical aspect of fictionalising the self.

I will discuss Tambling's notion of confession as it relates to the self-fashioned subject. His study usefully problematizes the implication of truth in the discourse of confession, while directing the reader to the body for an imaging of the self. To expand on the idea of body image as a way of defining the self, I will incorporate Elizabeth Grosz's theory from her text, Volatile Bodies. Her study will focus attention on the body as a culturally specific material entity as well as a socio-historical construction positioned on the pivotal point of binaries. Her examination, combined with Tambling's study of confession, insist upon problematizing the private/public binary which Jean Rhys writes over.

****

February 19th, 1994

Dear Paul:

I have been reading Jean Rhys's letters and feel I want to write to you. You do remember me telling you about Jean Rhys the other night in the cafe, don't you? She seems quite the marvelous woman although incredibly forlorn at times. A lot of the time, actually. Quite often she speaks of her homeland in the West Indies where the colours of the purple sea and the flowering hibiscus plant are such a drastic contrast to the cold damp weather of England. These letters have been collected from various people, mostly women, with the exception of Francis Wyndham, who was helping Rhys with her book (as I write this I note his name could be a woman's also). The letters are in lieu of a biography, as Rhys asked in her will that no biography be written unless authorised in her lifetime. Naturally, she never authorised anything. Mostly, she detests inaccuracies and would balk should anyone write falsities regarding her life. Often, she writes letters to her daughter, Maryvonne, which are tender and caring, although she can never resist writing

the truth of how sad she is at times. She believes Maryvonne to be a much happier person than she herself and writes this great line when she fears Maryvonne is letting the hardships of life bring her grief: "darling, please don't say you've lost your illusions because, after all, life is dull without them and who's to know what is illusion and what truth" (Letters 50)?

I imagine you would say something equally philosophical yet simple to your daughter even at the tender age of five. This notion of truth and illusion intrigues me. Especially in regards to writing. How is it one can say "this or that is the truth" or "this is my autobiography" when in fact writing is remembering and memory is always an illusion at best. Certainly unreliable and selective. By the time one is ready to write herself a life it is already a rewriting of the already lived therein, becoming a self-fashioning of how she has perceived herself in retrospect. That is, having already lived that story one now begins to edit the remembered parts in order to give shape and fluidity to an otherwise halted existence. Could you imagine faithfully documenting each thought emotion movement? Impossible. Kroetsch says in The Lovely Treachery of Words: "a reading of the world is at best a misreading of the world" (69). Seems to me a remembering is always a dissembling. And subsequently with writing, we reassemble the fragments which seems a violence of sorts. This is perhaps one of my biggest fears in trying to write about Jean Rhys--I do not want to inflict further violence and grief upon her by re-writing or re-assembling fragments of her life which are her texts. Does this seem paranoid to you? Likely not.

Please write back and let me know how you see the world in terms of truth and illusion and writing memory. In the meantime, I enclose some of the theory I have been reading which relates to that which I have just written you.

At times I feel my memory of you is pure illusion and willful construction.

Sincerely,

Debra

****

"They *always* believe a lie. They *never* believe the truth--Never! I carry round letters to prove everything I say now. They bulge out of my bag and are a great nuisance, but I find it better just to plonk the evidence down and say nothing" (Rhys, Letters 82).

PART II. THE DIVIDED SELF IN THE DISCOURSE OF CONFESSION

1. EMOTIONAL AMPUTATION: WRITING OUT THE PAIN

Jean Rhys's insistence on truth in her writing translates into a necessity for accuracy and true writing. That is, she knows how memory exaggerates and acknowledges that what starts with life gains shape through writing. The writing must be true, not the life. I would like to return here to Jeremy Tambling's exploration of the discourse of confession. Tambling's study is useful for examining Jean Rhys's texts as he formulates the construction of the subject through a method called self-fashioning. This method gives agency to the subject while simultaneously questioning the relation between truth and writing in the discourse of confession. He posits the confessing self as the subject in need of reparation. In addition, Tambling believes confession to be the way in which the body is written upon. This notion of corporeal inscription is an important topic to which I will repeatedly return throughout this text, for I believe the construction of body image to be crucial in Rhys' writing. Tambling is also useful here for the attention he gives to the confessing subject as a necessarily sexual being. While positioning confession as a technique to encourage memory, Tamling also believes confession is a way of asserting present over past.

Tambling begins his study with reference to Foucault's The history of sexuality wherein Foucault posits the ritual of confession as a transformation of every desire into a discourse of truth (Foucault 58). In the confession, "truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret" (Foucault 61). Tambling expands on this notion claiming that in confession the sins of women are always highlighted. Confession becomes a discourse for women wherein they must name and misname themselves (2). "I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder--calling myself Sasha" (Rhys, GMM 11)? The misnaming happens double in Good Morning, Midnight as Sophia renames herself Sasha who is in turn part of Jean Rhys. Many critics agree that Rhys's novel heroines (with the exception of Antoinette) are manifestations of the same psychological type. Each of these heroines becomes part of Jean Rhys's confessing body image. The body is cited as the locus of unconscious experience, with confession being the way in which the body is written upon (29). By reading confessional discourse, the reader becomes engaged in a process of reading the body and the events of the lived life inscribed upon the flesh. The reader becomes confessant, that is, one who listens to the confessor, or in this instance, the one who reads the writing which is confession.

2. FICTIONAL CONFESSION

Tambling uses confession considering the following:

1) The relationship between confession and the subject
2) The production of sexuality as a topic of confessional discourse and the reasons for foregrounding the sexual.
3) How the incitement to discourse is related to narrative production. (3)

The basis of the following theoretical exploration of confession will take into consideration the fictional aspect of self-fashioning and the necessity of such a creation. Tambling defines the creation of the confessing personality as the "production of the reactive spirit: focused on guilt, weakness, and on the need for reparation" (6). In his introduction, Tambling questions the relationship between autobiography and confession, asking whether autobiography exists outside confession or whether it is a form of confessional writing. Both are a form of truth-telling, yet autobiography seems to deny its confessional nature. Tambling goes on to say: "if the unity of the self is a fiction and the self writing about itself inevitably constructs a subject divided and different from the writing self, autobiography too must be fictional". (9)

He cites the difference as autobiography being aware of its fictional self-fashioning. By the end of his text, Tambling names autobiography as confession's repressed form (200).

It seems to me that the difference between the two is located on the body. That is, confession belongs to a discourse of the body, whereas autobiography is a structured writing of the self. I recognize the danger of this simplification, and clarify by saying that in speaking of the body I imply the self as a sexual being, whereas with autobiography the notion of sexuality may be ignored or erased.

Tambling problematizes the term "confession" and states the previously mentioned three issues to guide consideration of the material. I would like to focus upon confession as a necessarily fictional discourse and address the issue of written confession versus verbal confession, where verbal confession takes place before an assumed confessor who hears the confessant and therefore retains the power position within the relationship. Written confession discards this notion, as the speaker and the listener merge into one person at the outset: the writer. True, this is oversimplifying the problem of where the reader enters the equation, but I will begin simplistically and then problematize once the basics have been defined.

3. REPARATION THROUGH AMPUTATION

In direct contrast to Elizabeth Grosz, Tambling believes the body to be the locus of unconscious experience, in terms of a discourse of the sexual, and objectified in a

Cartesian manner. That is, the body and mind are separate entities unaware of the reactions of one to the other. Grosz disagrees with this stance, stating that the mind and the body necessarily intermingle where the ego becomes a map for the flesh. I shall explore Grosz's theories in a later chapter.

Tambling, however, posits the creation of the confessing self as a derivative from a reactive spirit in need of reparation. The use of the metaphor of reparation immediately alerts the reader to the body, for it follows that healing needs to occur externally as well as internally, at the centre, and the margins--the psyche, and the flesh.

Tambling emphasizes his use of literary texts which occupy the margins, but reminds the reader that the

> marginal space, the underground, is itself formed by prior confession, a prior creation of the subject: resistance cannot exist outside the terms of reference given from the centre. Marginal texts may fight the relegation they have received, accept it, or subvert it: all texts will suggest inherently the presence of fissures within the dominant ideology emanating from the centre (a text's confessional nature may be its display of such contradictions within the dominant discourse) (7).

The implication that confessional texts transgress the binaries of centre/margin, private/public discourse will be of particular importance when discussing Jean Rhys, as she wrote from the margins of a distinct centre. Twice removed she was not a man, nor did she belong to the circle of wealthy, influential women living on the Left Bank of Paris

in the early twentieth century. Instead, she was poor and struggled to define herself through her writing in a culture which loved wealth. By writing of her self, she became both subject and object, confessant and confessor.

4. IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE FORGOTTEN MEMORY

Tambling speaks of the way in which "confession always folds back onto the confessant an assurance of self, which is thus validated in the light of the other" (12). By creating a discourse of confession, the writer obtains access to the interior of the mind and the exterior of the body by creating both mind and body. This action of creation relies on the notion of memory which is in itself a fiction dependent on the concept of forgetfulness. Memory and forgetfulness circle around each other where the very presence of forgetfulness in memory negates its being. For Tambling, confession is a technique to encourage memory. Rewriting life becomes a way of providing a resting place for memory which has nowhere to go but the page.

> Confession works by its ability to divide up the self's experiences into those of a past 'I' whose existence may be completed, destroyed, as the death of the author fiction would suggest (killed by the activity of confession) and the present self (20).

Referring to Foucault's theory of genealogy, Tambling believes confession to be the way in which the body is written upon. For Foucault, the body is inscribed through historical

events, where genealogy is not history but rather an "analysis of descent...situated within the articulation of the body and history" (Foucault,"Nietzsche" 148).

Within the genealogy of confessional practices, whereby confessions were obtained through methods of torture, the body becomes the surface of inscription. Herein, confession becomes linked to the act of bearing witness. "Confession is refused when there is an engagement with three stress-points which produce the confessing subject: history, remembrance, and the impossibility of forgetting. These three all connect to the need to refuse naming and identity" (Tambling 202). Through writing, the confessant both creates and buries a life in its very telling. I am not interested in the function of the body in relation to a quest for truth as it was used in the inquisition through torture, but rather the way in which the body is inscribed with markings of the flesh, such as scars, and the manner in which the body responds when the mind refuses itself. That is, I believe mind and body to be connected and not composed as a dualism, so that when the mind refuses to acknowledge stimulation, the body displays what the mind ignores. Physical illness due to mental stress is an example of such a display. Alternately, I believe it is just as important to acknowledge the importance of a body wiped clean of inscription, erased free of the markings of lived experience.

5. THEORY OF THE LIE

Thus far, we have discussed confession as verbal and written form, shifting it from the inquisition, to its origin in the church, to its impact on the page. I would like to concentrate now on confession as a mode of writing. We should not overlook the

confession in terms of how it is used in the justice system to ensure discipline, but similarly, for my purpose here, let us turn to self-imposed confession. The implication of a person writing her own confession places her in a position in the text where she both names and misnames herself, giving power to both the author and the confessor who is the reader. For Tambling, confession is a theory of the lie which illustrates the fictive nature of all discourse (57).

Confession as fictive discourse creates the subject and binds her to experience where she writes the subject as both self and other. From this discourse the subject insists upon effecting a valid experience, sifting through textual sources, to an existence which is authentic. In this case misnaming does not seem to matter, "for the power of the interpretative ability is always to elide differences, not to deconstruct the text but to accept its authority" (Tambling 94). Misnaming becomes a form of self-fashioning related to misrepresentation.

> Perhaps it is not so much self-fashioning that is needed in the attempt to escape the control of past over present or the present's attempt to control the past, but a sense that both past and present are framed within interpretations which are themselves the problem....Yet self-fashioning writing attempts to free the self from those misrepresentation/ interpretations at work within the symbolic order (Tambling 204).

Where the symbolic order insists upon the power structure of dualism, self-fashioners, such as Jean Rhys, masquerade as truth-tellers while understanding the importance of style and shape both textually and corporeally. Incorporating gesture and

costume, the self constructs and is constructed through the body to both conform and subvert patriarchal socio-cultural power structures. This notion becomes especially important in terms of clothing and make-up, where the subject insists on a certain fashion in her creation of self. Writing the self-fashioned subject provides the illusion of temporary, transient identities disconnected from each other, and subsequently provides a false sense of security necessary for the survival of the self. "My dream is to finish my book, get a face lift, and a bright red wig. Also a lovely fur coat. Underneath I will wear a purple dress and ropes of pearls" (Rhys, Letters 198). This creation of self implies the importance of dream and reality, surface and depth, and the way it all meets on the body.

6. SAFETY OF SURFACE

Tambling posits a psychic mechanism at work in writing which prevents guilt from surfacing, but which in turn suggests a displaced shame which should be given a smooth appearance. A double process ensues where there is not only guilt but also an element of striptease. Reading becomes confessional and masturbatory, with writing being the substitution for contact. The confessional mode surely exists with the desire for secrecy, but in the very act of writing exists also the possibility of discovery. There is an intermingling between internalization and the wish to be intact and the desire to be touched and thereby inscribed.

> The demand to write and to confess produces a discourse heavily imbricated with the sexualising of all experience. Confession at all times, far from freeing the subject from the sexual ties sexuality to its

> discourse....[I]n discursive terms, sex must be presented confessionally, in whatever situation it is thought about (Tambling 100).

The implication that sex can only be thought of in terms of a discourse of secrecy makes it appear that the sexual instinct is a deeply flawed tendency in the self, especially for women. This is a fiction which needs to be rewritten so that the sexual becomes the way in which the text is transgressive. According to Tambling, writing and confession are marks of transgression which define the confessant's private nature, while at the same time condemning her to an alienation from her own feelings.

The decision of a writer to choose confession, or autobiography, as her genre, implies the necessity the writer feels to tell a version of the truth. The reader is invited to listen and then judge the authenticity of the text without any sense, beyond what is on the page, of how the author would wish it to be read. Consequently, the reader should be aware of the aporias and supplements the writer imposes on the shape of the text to provide flow and perhaps eliminate pain where contemplation of the same would be overwhelming. "A novel has to have shape and life doesn't have any" (Rhys, Smile 10). "Author is also the confessant, accused and appealing to have his discourse validated by the reader who has been interpellated into the textual unconscious of the confession through the lure of...narrative" (Tambling, 105).

In turn, the decision to read a text as autobiographical is a readerly one and should be taken with caution. I am reading Rhys as confessional due to her self-proclaimed autobiography and to the contents of her letters. At the same time, however, I hesitate, recognizing the inability to write "truth" and also acknowledging Jean Rhys's desire to

shape her texts. Textualising "the self not only introduces the necessity of supplementing the gaps of the narrative, but demonstrates the specious nature of memory" (Tambling, 106).

Memory and ultimate forgetting are not possible because our mind and memory are imprinted by secret traces of circumstance which at any moment may be stimulated by an incident which will unveil the previously unremembered. Alternately, ultimate remembering is not possible because the retelling of circumstance depends upon the position of the subject in a specific place, time, moment. The self constructs and reconstructs so often that what is named memory can only be a fictionalized narrative account. Tambling posits the surface nature of confession, stating the fact that intoxication brings into relief the unknown self. Disguises worn while sober are shed in intoxication so that confession and drunkenness are related in that they both probe the self and the mind as palimpsests. "The overall writing out of the self's former existence is an act of resistance, a refusal to be named, simply; the other is the action of confessing into the silence, in the desire to be loved" (Tambling, 143).

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September 11, 1994

Dear Paul:

You refuse to answer my letters or even my smile when I pass you on the street. Is there a reason you are so cold to me when once you were so warm? Have you forgotten the warmth? Or is it my memory which fails me? Perhaps I am the one who has written the story wrong. The one man Jean Rhys remembers in London is a man with red hair. She

passed him on the street feeling excited and shy because she found him so beautiful. Is it your hair which blinds me then? I see you on the same side of the street as me and prepare myself to give you that detached nod which you insist upon for me. Instead, my body betrays me in its pull toward you and my smile is much too large. I do not even see your teeth. You hardly meet my eyes. I am certain you would have walked right by me on this empty street. Why do you refuse to give me a chance? Yet even as I write this I am tempted to suck back my words, crumple this paper, for you grow defensive, fold back inside yourself. I ask for three minutes of your time--you give me two and talk nonsense for five. You say you are a friend. HA! Do friends not smile talk glance at each other? Instead your brother replaces the politeness but it is not his arms I long for. No, only yours. My arms are only as long as the space between us. Answer me. I am not desperate. Only longing.

Debra

P.S. I am not following you if you wonder why I am often in your neighbourhood. Rather I have gotten the job as a bookseller I was hoping for. Do you recall me telling you of this desire? I am fascinated by a history book I have been reading called Women of the Left Bank. There was a group of writers--men and women--living in Paris at the start of the twentieth century. The group basically founded what is now called Modernism. They were mostly expatriates and centered around the writing of Ezra Pound. What has primarily come down to us is the mens' writing but there were dozens of women who were booksellers, publishers, patrons of the men. That is, the women supported the men and yet the womens' writings were mostly ignored. Gertrude Stein was one of these women. Jean Rhys was another. Even here, however, Jean Rhys was an

outsider. She lived on the margins, wrote about the bleak side of this era. While many of the women, such as Edith Wharton, were wealthy, Rhys lived basically in poverty, never knowing how she would get the money to pay her rent. While I do not know poverty, I often feel like an outsider who belongs neither in the writing community, nor outside it. While I know many writers and wish to be a writer, I have many doubts about my discipline and desire. I am a Gemini--a twin as you are--and I feel split between longing to succeed and fear of failure. I yearn to follow the passions of my body, which always seem to elude me. Jean Rhys was always happier with a new dress or a new hairstyle. I try not to think of these things that would not be looked upon kindly by some feminists, although Elizabeth Grosz disagrees with the harsh judgment of those feminists. She believes that men as much as women are subject to modes of selfrepresentation and self-observation. The difference occurs because patriarchal power structures function to exalt men in whatever shape they take while expecting women, through socio-cultural norms, to always portray themselves as naturally beautiful. The concept of natural beauty is a joke in itself, for the body is informed by the society which surrounds it. Jean Rhys is much braver than I. I struggle to determine my position on feminism, try to love my body and wear it comfortably upon my gawky frame. You said you loved what you knew of my body, yet the first question I always wonder at is whether you still find me at all attractive. Why do I need your eyes to tell me I am beautiful? I want to be my own mirror but am enchanted by your gaze. I have the words but not the courage to speak them. But now I falter and wonder even about the words...

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7. TEXTUAL CLOTHING

> I don't believe in the individual writer so much as in the writing. It uses you and throws you away when you are not useful any longer. But it does not do this until you are useless and quite useless too. Meanwhile there is nothing to do but plod along line upon line. Then there's drink of course which is awfully handy. Or drinks (Rhys, Letters, 103).

Rereading Jean Rhys's letters and autobiography, I am overwhelmed by her honesty and insight into the brashness and often futile position of the self in the world. She is very much divided between being driven by a force outside herself and taking control of her existence through writing and fashion and diet. When she talks of writing she speaks of it as her "safety valve," as a method she uses for healing. Then, in the next moment, she ponders being used by the writing as though she were at the mercy of the word rather than in control of it.

Tambling speaks of the confesssing personality as the subject in need of reparation. In her letters Rhys often speaks of her need for healing, ending one of her letters "so till we meet (when I'll be so repaired you won't know me)" (239). She is the divided self, constructing herself as both subject with agency and passive object. She fashions herself as writer stating:

> I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure. It is that already to other people. But it could be an abject failure to myself (Rhys, Smile 163).

The above statement is an illustration of the way in which she acknowledges society as other, yet transgresses judgement by creating herself as knowing subject. Rhys says she knows that to write well is her truth and why she was born and when the desire to write had left her she felt it was a bit like "losing one's arms or even eyes" (Letters, 55). She places writing next to the body, stating that when the desire to write is gone so part of the body is missing. This focusing on the body through writing is of significance in Rhys's writing, although the look seems almost a sideways glance whereby the body is displaced beneath clothing or blurred through drink. Tambling cites a double process at work which combines guilt with strip-tease. The subject's desire for the undressed body is repressed due to the misrepresentations and interpretations working within the symbolic order. The intentionally revealed female body translates the subject into a promiscuous undesirable (yet desired) object. In Voyage in the Dark, Anna notes that Mr. Jeffries "didn't look at my breasts or my legs as they usually do" (12). Does she desire this look and repress the desire due to the implication that the sexual instinct in a woman is a flawed tendency? By focusing on clothing and surface, is the body brought forward by virtue of its absence? As Voyage in the Dark opens, Anna is reading Zola's Nana. This intertextual pocket and the notion of the absent body as desirable are points to which I will return.

8. THE COMPANION NAMED SADNESS

"All books and plays are written some time, some place, by some person affected by that time, that place, the clothes he sees and wears, other books, the air and the room

and every damned thing" (Rhys, Letters 101). Rhys acknowledges the influence her society and culture has on her writing, fluctuating between creating herself as writer and reader, confessor and confessant. If, as Tambling states, confession is a way of validating the self in light of the other, Rhys confessed and heard her own confession in a desire to find validation in her self rather than seeking it in the other, which is the society which repressed her. "Sometimes I long for an entirely new way of writing. New words, new everything--sometimes I am almost there. But no--it slides away" (Rhys, Letters 160).

There is the sense in Jean Rhys's letters that she longs to create a language that speaks from the body of pain and loneliness and need. Sadness and dreams intermingle on her body. "And then it became part of me, so I knew I would have missed it if it had gone. I am talking about sadness" (Rhys, Smile 120). She says she can abstract herself from her body, yet there remains the sense that nothing is separate from her body. Certainly there are moments when the body is forsaken and in those moments the interior of the body serves to function when the surface is being violated or erased.

Combining surface with depth, she writes from the life she knows and calls upon imagination to give her writing shape and texture. In her confessional writing she accesses the body through memory. Whereas Tambling says confession accesses the interior of the mind and the exterior of the body, I believe Rhys's writing reaches the interior and exterior of the body where mind is not separate from body. As memory and forgetfulness cannot exist without each other, or rather are part of the same function, so the body and mind function one through the other. In the way Jean Rhys blends dream and reality where writing and living are the dream, so there is the blurring of mind and

body, conscious and unconscious, inside and outside. The binaries blend without negation on the space which is the body. "My dream must stand for it is the only thing I'm sure of" (Rhys, Letters 161).

Tambling explores the way confession divides the subject into a past and present self. In the foreward to Jean Rhys's autobiography, Smile Please, Diana Athill speaks of the way Jean Rhys was able to write out the sad parts of her life and start again from the beginning. All her writing started from something that had happened in her life, the details of which she tried to get down as accurately as possible until she needed to add shape where life had none. The gesture of naming and misnaming, beginning and ending and beginning again, occurred in the life of Jean Rhys as well as in the life of her heroines. Born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams she changed her name to Jean Rhys in order to give herself a new start. In her letters she names herself Jean, Ella, Mother, Grandmother. This process of being named, renamed, and misnamed is used again and again in her fiction as Sasha renames herself after being dragged out of the river in a symbolic rebirth (Good Morning, Midnight), while in Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette Cosway is renamed Bertha by Rochester in a devastating display of obeah, magic, and oppression. "I have called myself so many different names" (Rhys, Smile 121). History, remembrance, and the impossibility of forgetting combine to form the confessing subject interested in both creating one life and leaving another behind.

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January 27, 1995

Dear Paul:

Months have passed since we met on the street. I have seen you once in the pub, but, of course, you turned your face as I walked by. I have chosen to forget you, have decided you are not worth any extra effort on my part to attract your attention. "I will not grimace and posture before these people any longer," Sasha says in Good Morning, Midnight. Yet in the very act of my writing this letter, I place you back into my discourse, away from the realm of forgetfulness, just as you placed yourself back into my life.

Quite suddenly, you appeared in the bookstore where I work. I looked up from behind the counter and there you were standing with a smile for me. Nonchalantly, I waved at you and turned back to my work, quite pleased with myself for being so casual while being nauseated at my body for causing my face to blush such a brilliant shade of red. Seemingly in control, I worked away while you decided to start up a conversation. How dare you! Pleasant small talk about Christmas and my family, what nonsense! And how quickly I fell back into the trap that is your gaze. You required my assistance, I helped you as I would any other customer and calmly walked away. More questions and smiles from you and the next thing I know, my body is responding with smiles and giggles. I find myself watching you, offering to find some books for you if you return this evening. You leave with a smile and a promise that you will be back before I leave and I wait and wait, muttering to myself for having believed you once again.

Why is it that you insist upon making me believe in you only to be disappointed again? I am disappointed and ashamed of myself for being sexually attracted to you despite all the past deceptions. Roland Barthes says, "Like desire, the love letter waits for an answer."

It is true I desire an answer and perhaps this is why I write to you once again. I want to repair myself, find closure in this gap you have opened.

If you fail to respond to me, I am hoping that just by writing this letter I will begin to heal. As Jean Rhys says, "One does not get used to feeling forsaken." Once again, sincerely,

Debra

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PART III. POSITIONING THE BODY IN SPACE

1. THE (UN)DIVIDED SELF

"Given the coupling of mind with maleness and the body with femaleness and given philosophy's own self-understanding as a conceptual enterprise, it follows that women and femininity are problematized as knowing philosophical subjects and as knowable epistemic objects" (Grosz 4). Grosz questions the way in which philosophical discourses of the body rely on the Cartesian mind/body binary. This Cartesian binary provides the base for many of the philosophical theories governing the way the body is read today. Part of the problem with this dualism is that it places body in the passive position of the binary so that body is not able to rescue itself from this secondary position. While Grosz indeed brings attention to the problems of the male-centered discourses which align female with body and male with mind and states that we need to find a new way in which to read and write the body, she refuses the task of creating a new female theory of the body. Instead she provides spaces in the male governing texts and asks the reader to fill the gaps.

I believe Elizabeth Grosz's exploration is important to the study of Jean Rhys's writing because Grosz's attempts to realign the body to an active rather than passive position is a movement which Rhys also attempts. When I speak of the body I mean not only a sexually racially culturally specific material body, but also body as socio-historical construction. The production of the cultural body is mobile and changeable so that one material body functions in many different ways.

Grosz speaks of this body flux in terms of body image while Tambling defines it as self-fashioning. The subject constructing a body in a constant state of change is a function which Jean Rhys frequently incorporates into her writing. By changing hair colour and clothing, by drinking too much or eating too little, she molds her body into several different images in the space of one text, one day, one lifetime. It is useful to consider the body in terms of function and construction, especially when the body needs to be rescued from its passive position in the mind/body binary.

For the body to be situated on the pivotal point of binaries, we need to consider the body as function and construction, especially where the mind/body binary occurs. That is, the body in the mind/body binary necessarily must be a material body defined in the negative as not mind, but corporeal material presence. The body positioned on the pivotal point of this binary, however, operates as the function and space between two opposing entities. Body image needs to be considered in terms of the subject but also by the space (culture, society, history, other bodies) which surrounds the subject.

The methods of investigation of the body which stem from Cartesianism indicate the type of conceptions which feminist theory needs to move beyond: body as an object for the natural sciences; metaphoric body where the body becomes machine, tool, instrument, vessel occupied by an animating subjectivity; signifying medium which renders public what is considered private. Grosz states that if feminist theory takes over these assumptions without question, it participates in the "social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women" (10).

Grosz believes that feminists need to rescue the body from the biological and pseudo-naturalist appropriations from which it has historically suffered (20). She also recognizes the restructuring which must occur if we are to read beyond the Cartesian privileging of mind over body.

> The body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the ouside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition (Grosz 21).

Grosz outlines six concepts which need to be considered in order to govern a feminist theoretical approach to the body which emphasizes the body as cultural product:

1) avoid division of subject into mind/body dualism and rather develop an embodied subjectivity of psychical corporeality which interacts animate materiality with the materiality of language;
2) dissociate corporeality from sex or race;
3) refuse models of singularity which situate one type of body as the norm by which all others are judged;
4) avoid dualism as well as biologistic or essentialist representations of the body;
5) include posture, gesture, movement in psychical depiction of the subject's lived body;
6) position body on pivotal point of binary pairs.

Tambling and Grosz elide together when considering the way in which confession as a transgressive discourse exists beyond the private/public binary. That is, by writing confession the binary combines into a form which moves between public and private, mind and body. If confession is the way in which the body is written upon, then we can no longer consider the binary which privileges the private mind over public body. What Tambling calls "self-fashioning," Grosz names body image; both of these concepts attempt to reconstruct the binary by constituting a self which exists equally within the life of the body and the mind.

2. EGO MAP

Grosz looks at Freud's texts to explore the way in which the subject's psyche composes the body's form. Citing Freud's The Ego and the Id, she examines the notion that through language the mind becomes accessible to the body. That is, when thought processes become available to the conscious, the internal is externalized. Similarly, the surface of the body exists as a conversion place where inside and outside meet. Through cuts, orifices, erotogenic rims, the skin creates a landscape capable of signification. This notion of body landscaping will become important when looking at Jean Rhys's texts, as she is very concerned with body surface: she substitutes clothing for skin in a gesture of erasure while simultaneously calling attention to that which is hidden.

Grosz continues to turn the inside out by examining the way in which Freud theorizes the emergence of the ego from the id as a process of differentiation initiated by the confrontation with reality. Furthermore, the ego is a representation of libidinal

investment in parts of the body and the body as a whole. This notion of the totality of the body is dependent upon the recognition of the body of the other. "The ego is thus both a map of the body's surface and a reflection of the image of the other's body" (Grosz 38).

> The once clear boundary between mind and body, nature and culture, becomes increasingly eroded. The very organ whose function is to distinguish biological or id impulses from sociocultural pressures, the ego, is always already the intermingling of both insofar as it is the consequence of the cultural, that is, significatory effects of the body, the meaning and love of the body as the subject lives it (Grosz 39).

The premise behind the subject's recognition of her body and the body of the other stems from a focal point which occurs at the mirror stage. Both Lacan and Kristeva read Freud's mirror stage as the moment in a child's formation when she recognizes herself symbolically as other in the mirror. This moment of recognition is the moment when language begins. It is the moment on the pivotal point of the binary, the instance of non-language and language, semiotic and symbolic. This recognition is simultaneously a misrecognition insofar as the child sees herself as a unified whole without understanding the aggressive disintegration in the fragmented body.

I would like to return to this moment of the mirror stage when discussing Rhys, for she often gazes at herself in the glass, ponders herself as other. If we mirror ourselves through writing then Rhys mirrors herself twice. In a sense, she watches herself watching herself. There is the constant restructuring of the idealized self as she reconstitutes the mirror stage over and over. Recognizing and misrecognizing, she alters her body image

in an attempt to fashion the ideal other for her self: the impossible attempt at unification which can never occur.

> In other words, the stability of the unified body image, even in the so-called normal subject, is always precarious. It cannot be simply taken for granted as an accomplished fact, for it must be continually renewed, not through the subject's conscious efforts but through its ability to conceive of itself as a subject and to separate itself from its objects and others to be able to undertake willful action (Grosz 43-44).

3. SPACIAL BORDERS

From Freud, Grosz turns to Caillois and his paper "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in order to contemplate his work on the position of the subject in space. That is, in order for a subject to situate herself she must contemplate her relation to others. One's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another. Relating this to the above discussion of the mirror stage, one could position oneself as subject in front of a mirror so that the gaze of the subject would be directed towards the object which is also the self. There is the replacement of the other with the self in an attempt to unify subject with object, self with other, inside with outside.

> What psychoanalytic theory makes clear is that the body is literally written on, inscribed, by desire and signification, at the anatomical, physiological, and neurological levels. The body is in no sense naturally or innately psychical, sexual, or sexed. It is indeterminate and indeterminable outside

> its social constitution as a body of a particular type. This implies that the body which it presumes and helps to explain is an openended, pliable set of significations, capable of being rewritten, reconstituted, in quite other terms than those which mark it, and consequently capable of reinscribing the forms of sexed identity and psychical subjectivity at work today. (Grosz 60-1)

Grosz goes on to say that we must rewrite the female body as a positivity rather than a lack by reorganizing the terms by which the body has been socially represented and questioning the discourses which define the body scientifically. One of the ways to reorganize the discourse of the body is to read the body beyond anatomy where the body image also functions psychologically and sociohistorically. The borders of the body image extend beyond the skin and into the surrounding space. Clothing, jewellery, hair colour, posture, gesture--all these incorporate the social extensions of the body which contribute to the body image. "Human subjects never simply have a body; rather, the body is always necessarily the object and subject of attitudes and judgments" (Grosz 81).

The body image is in constant flux by virtue of daily psychical and physiological changes the body incorporates. The psychic investment in the body is determined both by its own functions and the interaction with other bodies. There is a moment in Wide Sargasso Sea when Antoinette wonders whether her red dress makes her look intemperate and unchaste because a man had told her so. "I held the dress in my hand wondering if they had done the last and worst thing. If they had *changed* it when I wasn't looking. If they had changed it and it wasn't my dress at all--but how could they get the scent" (152)?

Antoinette/ Bertha has had her name taken away and now fears that more of her self is being threatened by the switching of the red dress by which she defines herself. Only through the scent of her own body is she reassured that the dress is indeed hers.

While others misname her intemperate unchaste Bertha, she is able to reconstruct her self through the material of the dress. The body image functions as a sociocultural construct determined by self and the position of self in relation to others where each physiological and psychological change to the body directly affects the body image.

> Even when the subject's body image is an effect in part of its relations to others, the effects others have on the body image is more far-reaching: appersonization involves the transfer of the meaning which other people's body parts have for them onto the subject's own body image, resulting in the treatment of one's own body as an outside object (Grosz 84).

The way a subject constructs herself has so much to do with the bodies which surround her that at times it seems as though the body image is pure simulacrum, a corporeal signifier which attempts to erase the self in order to become other. Jean Rhys says, "My great distraction is planning a new dress" (Letters 21). For Rhys, a new dress translates as the possibility of a new self which may be read and/or misread by the other of society. The body image exists as a "postural schema" of the body as constituted by the surrounding space.

> The body image does not map a biological body onto a psychosocial domain, providing a kind of translation of material into conceptual terms;

> rather, it attests to the necessary interconstituency of each for the other, the radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements (Grosz 85).

One of the ideas to which I shall return questions the relation between writing and the construction of one's body image, especially in terms of confession. Does language erase the body in the same manner that clothing offers an alternative to skin as surface?

4. SURFACE EXTENSIONS

Grosz discusses Alphonso Lingis's notion of the primitive body by looking at physical flesh markings such as welts, scars, cuts, and tattoos as methods of extending the body's erotogenic sensitivity. These markings literally increase the surface space of the body, creating not a map of the body but the body as map. In Rhys, the body not only resists this type of inscription but also erases the scars of birth. Rather, her body extends with clothing as a corporeal signifier. "Inscriptions on the subject's body coagulate corporeal signifiers into signs, producing all the effects of meaning, representation, depth, within or subtending our social order. The intensity and flux of the sensations traversing the body become fixed into consumable, gratifiable needs and desires" (Grosz 141).

The civilized body has different forms of scarification than the savage body where the body is marked more subtley but no less permanently. The violence of social institutions, such as hospitals and prisons, inscribes the body through methods of confinement and constrainment, supervision and regimentation. Antoinette's physical image, in Wide Sargasso Sea, alters drastically due to the confinement her husband subjects her to. Only through her red dress is she able to maintain her identity as a

corporeal subject. Beside the social institutions lies the inscriptions of cultural and personal values and norms. The body is involuntarily marked through the "voluntary" procedures of clothing, makeup, hair styles, gait, grooming, posture, and gesture. The use of these voluntary body inscriptions regulates many of Jean Rhys's heroines and is something which I will explore in more detail later.

In addition to the way in which the body is externally marked, what the body takes into itself, including food and drink, affects the surface inscription of the body. Clothing, makeup, hairstlyes, diet, and gesture all mark the body as appropriate or inappropriate to the other which is society. Grosz makes the statement that "the more or less permanent etching of even the civilized body by discursive systems is perhaps easier to read if the civilized body is decontextualized, stripped of clothing and adornment, behaviorally displayed in its nakedness" (142). But even naked, the body is marked by habits of movement and gesture and is still culturally formed by history and the specificity of its existence.

> The practices of femininity can readily function, in certain contexts that are difficult to ascertain in advance, as modes of guerrilla subversion of patriarchal codes...[M]en as much as women, are caught up in modes of self-production and selfobservation; these modes may entwine us in various networks of power, but never do they render us merely passive and compliant. They are constitutive of both bodies and subjects (Grosz 144).

Various theorists in Grosz's study have been employed in order to illustrate that the body, as well as the psyche or the subject, is constituted as a historical and cultural

product. She reads these theorists with the understanding that they are formulated as discourses for and about men which have failed to recognize the necessity of sexually specific discourses for understanding women's selfrepresentation. After positing these short-comings, Grosz refuses to take her examination one step further and propose a theory which resists dualism and monism and recognizes the importance of sexual specificity. Instead, she leaves the space open for feminists to cultivate from male-centered biologism a theory which is useful for each individual. Although I appreciate the space which Grosz has cleared for us, I also feel vaguely frustrated by her hesistancy to put forth her own theory. But even as I say this I falter, for perhaps in the absence of theory, Grosz has left a strong base from which to step and build with the pieces she has excavated. I will consider the traces she has left for me as I approach the bodies present in Jean Rhys's texts.

PART IV. BODY AS NARRATIVE SIGNIFIER

1. EROTIC ABSENCE

Peter Brooks in his text, Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative, investigates the relation between narrative and the body in modern literature. He situates the term "modern" as beginning in the eighteenth century, stating that in this period "narratives appear to produce a semioticization of the body which is matched by a somatization of story" (xii). By overlaying Tambling's notion of confession, as the way in which the body is written upon, and Grosz's theory of body image, as a way of positioning the body on the pivotal point of binaries, upon Brooks' exploration of the body as a narrative strategy, we are able to see how in Jean Rhys's texts clothing becomes the primary signifier in terms of construction of the self.

Peter Brooks defines the body similarly to Elizabeth Grosz wherein he sees the body as a biological entity, a psycho-sexual construction, and a cultural product. He looks at the body as a prime vehicle of narrative signification where the inscription of the body marks its passage into writing; its formation as a narrative body which produces story. He is specifically looking at the erotic body as that which "conceives and becomes significant as an object of desire" (Body Work 5). Where this erotic body becomes important for Rhys is in its representation in signs. Brooks states that the body is present always within the context of its absence. If we consider clothing as a linguistic sign implicating the absence of the thing it stands for--the body--then Jean Rhys attempts to present the body as a primary method of female representation.

Roland Barthes' study of fashion outlines an intricate semiotics of clothing as a written system. While I am not interested in pursuing his linguistic studies in this thesis, I am intrigued by his notion of fashion as an image-system constituted with desire as its goal. He posits fashion as a way of highlighting immediacy and therein eliminating past and future, stating that "fashion is never anything but an amnesiac substitution of the present for the past" (Fashion 289). This statement recalls Tambling's theory of confession as a way of overcoming the past through the construction of a present self. With clothing, the body confesses in an act of public display of the private self. This display may be read and misread, may be constituted as disguise or performance, may be a statement of declaration or a motion towards secrecy. Inevitably in Jean Rhys's texts, the erotic body is constructed in an attempt to acquire the attentions of a beloved while constituting the self as desirable for both self and other.

"The object of attention and desire...is not detailed in its nakedness but rather approached by way of its phenomenal presence in the world, which means by way of the clothing and accessories that adorn and mask the body" (Brooks, Body Work 19). Rhys constructs her heroines as both subject and object of attention and desire. She is both self and other, watcher and watched, disappointed lover and beloved. She simultaneously displays and masks her body in its adornment. Brooks states that the covered, secret body in its absence becomes more intensely the object of curiousity and that in patriarchal culture, the uncovering of this secret woman's body is a gesture of revealing an ultimate mystery. I do not want to participate in this patriarchal undressing of the body, but rather

investigate whether, in keeping the body covered, Jean Rhys attempts to subvert the patriachal structure while still having the body signify.

> What presides at the inscription and imprinting of bodies is...a set of desires: a desire that the body not be lost to meaning that it be brought into the realm of the semiotic and the significant--and, underneath this, a desire for the body itself, an erotic longing to have or to be in the body (Brooks, Body Work 22).

2. CLOTHING AS DISGUISE IN VOYAGE IN THE DARK

"It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again" (Rhys, VID 7). So begins Jean Rhys's Voyage in the Dark. Colours, smells, feelings, temperature-everything is different for Anna. Sometimes England is real and West Indies a dream, sometimes it is the other way. Never can she fit the two together. Frangipanni, lime juice, cinnamon, cloves, sweets made of ginger and syrup, the smell of the sea-breeze, the smell of the land-breeze--beside this England is dark and cold and dreary and everything looks the same. She is a chorus girl on tour in small towns, living pay cheque to pay cheque, unless, of course, she meets a man who will provide her with some money.

Voyage in the Dark contains the narrative of Anna Morgan at age nineteen having arrived in the cold of England from the West Indies. The reader follows Anna through her attempts to reconstruct herself in a new place where the only familiarity is her own body, and even that is being affected by the "cold nights; and the way my collar-bones

stick out in my first-act dress. There's something you can buy that makes your neck fat" (Rhys, VID 15). The reader sees Anna watching herself as she stumbles through disappointed love and struggles to create herself as a subject who belongs. All her creations of self are versions of disguise: how she wants to make her neck fatter because curves are fascinating, how she rejects her pregnant body, and clothes her naked body. Through clothing she becomes other, heals her illness, finds temporary happiness. I will explore only a few examples of the many in the text in order to illustrate the way Anna uses clothing as disguise in a gesture to construct herself as a unified subject.

A. Anna and Nana

At the beginning of Voyage in the Dark the reader finds Anna reading a copy of Zola's Nana. This skewed reference should not be overlooked. Peter Brooks in his article "Storied Bodies, or Nana at Last Unveil'd," addresses the problematics surrounding the female body, specifically Nana's, as subject to the gaze of male spectators. He states that one major preoccupation in Zola's novel is the undressing of Nana. He places the novel beside several pictoral representations of Venus (who Nana portrays in a play in the novel) painted at approximately the same time as Nana was written.

Brooks claims that Nana portraying Venus is a "representation *of* a representation, a consciously created and self-creating sex object" (Storied 8). If we consider Grosz's theory of the construction of the subject's body image in relation to other bodies as pure simulacrum, Nana attempts to image herself as both Venus and whore. Indeed, Nana herself is reading a novel about a whore and censures it by displaying "an indignant

repugnance for this kind of filthy literature....Nana...wanted works that were tender and noble" (Zola 339). Rhys had obviously read Zola's text and is doing a triple mirroring where Anna is reading Nana who herself is reading the novel of a whore. Yet where Nana prides herself in her own creation as a sex object, Anna hides inside her body. It is rather Maudie, Anna's roommate, who says about Nana, "I know; it's about a tart. I think it's disgusting. I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that-just somebody stuffing you up" (9). Jean Rhys responds to this statement by writing Anna a life based not on lies, but shaping life from truth.

Voyage in the Dark originated from Jean Rhys's own diaries, implying that the gaze is not a male glance but a woman's watching. Perhaps the most obvious example of the male gaze in Zola's text is the passage where Nana undresses in front of the mirror while Muffat watches her. As Muffat finally sees Nana unclothed he details her body in a series of allegories which ultimately redress or veil the erotic female body. The position of the mirror, however, only implicates Nana: there is no reflection of Muffat in the mirror, only the reader sees Muffat watching Nana contemplate herself. There is an endless displacement of seeing here, and if we add Rhys's text to this mise-en-abyme, I watch Anna watch Nana, who is watched by Muffat, watch herself. Anna's naked body is only imagined as a reflected reflection of Nana. Brooks states that Muffat is excluded in Nana's mirror so as not to implicate the reader as viewer, therein revealing the arousal which is both Muffat's and ours. Rhys refuses to exclude the reader in her mirror. By constructing an intimate text where the reader is positioned as listener in this confessional

discourse, the text as mirror reflects back at us insisting that our gaze be with hers. "I walked up to the lookingglass and put the lights on over it and stared at myself. It was as if I were looking at somebody else" (VID 20-1).

When we as readers watch Anna choose her next dress or hairstyle, we recognize clothing as disguise while also reading clothing as a realistic referent for the hidden body. While Nana is veiled in her nakedness, Anna's body is present and material in its cover. Brooks is interested in male narratives of the female body and the way in which these narratives must eventually reach the problem of unveiling the female sex which they deem unrepresentable in its revealing. In Anna, Rhys reinvents Nana without the male gaze undressing the female body. She averts the gaze, substituting her own for that of the male, therein subverting the patriarchal structure which seeks to possess what it cannot represent. Perhaps I have strayed too far from Rhys's text here, but I do not believe Nana surfaces in Voyage in the Dark unintentionally. As Rhys rewrites a life for Bronte's Bertha in Wide Sargasso Sea, Anna may indeed be a reinvention of Nana where Nana is again adorned. In this gesture of disguise, Rhys, through Anna, gives Nana her body back.

B. The Healing Power of Clothing

> About clothes, it's awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. Jaw, jaw, jaw....As if it isn't enough that you want to be beautiful, that you want to have pretty clothes, that you want it like hell. As if that isn't enough. But no, it's jaw, jaw and sneer, sneer all the time....And then you look at the skirt of your

> costume, all crumpled at the back. And your hideous underclothes. You look at your hideous underclothes and you think, 'All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything-anything for clothes' (Rhys, VID 22).

By the fourth page of Voyage in the Dark we meet Walter Jeffries who follows Anna down the street and then goes with her to buy two pairs of stockings. They exchange addresses and inevitably a note arrives with five fivepound notes with which to buy stockings. "All the time I was dressing I was thinking about what clothes I would buy. I didn't think of anything else at all, and I forgot about feeling ill" (Rhys, VID 24). For Anna, clothing hides illness and sadness, providing instead a confident carefree attitude. She picks out a dark blue dress which shows the shape of her thighs when she moves and a matching blue coat. "This is a beginning. Out of this warm room that smells of fur I'll go to all the lovely places I've ever dreamt of" (Rhys, VID 25). Across the street she buys shoes, underclothes, and silk stockings. Clothed in this new blue dress and coat, Anna disguises herself in an image of well-being. She says, "The streets looked different that day, just as a reflection in the looking-glass is different from the real thing" (Rhys, VID 25).

When she has only seven pounds left, she begins to feel ill again. Here is the body in constant flux. Depressed and unclothed, clothed and happy, then ill again. Anna disguises herself, momentarily finding comfort beneath new clothing. This assurance of self quickly dissipates into illusion when the self realizes the transience of identity, especially as it is defined by the patriarchal other. Anna understands the problematics between imaging herself as she desires, and finding this possible only with the assistance

of a male other. She repeatedly searches for self with fleeting glances at her reflection, struggling to have her body defined by her own gaze. The impossibility of this reveals itself in her body as she finds herself ill and depressed once again.

Joanne Finkelstein in her text, The Fashioned Self, states:

> The dynamic of fashion rests upon the individual's sense of absence in...herself of some desired commodity or capacity which needs to be obtained and satisfied....[T]he nature of fashion, most particularly its constant flux, means that when the individual does attain the desired state of being, a sense of satisfaction does not remain for long.... [I]nevitably, all desires are in a state of melting away and being reformulated as ever new, but ever the same (149).

Finkelstein's notion of fashion corresponds with Grosz's inclusion of clothing as necessary to one's body image. With both fashion and body in constant flux, the alignment of self becomes an exhausting procedure. However, constructing a costume is a necessary means of survival for Anna in a society where others constantly watch and appraise.

"She [the landlady] stayed there staring at me, so I went outside and finished putting on my gloves standing on the doorstep. (A lady always puts on her gloves before going into the street" (Rhys, VID 30). There exists a specific code of etiquette which Anna strives to follow. This code has been implemented both by English society and the culture of her childhood in the West Indies. She lives a curious mixture of the two

places, defining herself both by her new life and through her passionate loyalty to her past.

> I thought about home...dressing to go to church, and putting on a woollen vest which had shrunk in the wash and was too small, because wool next the skin is healthy. And white drawers tight at the knee and a white petticoat and a white embroidered dress-everything starched and prickly. And black ribbed-wool stockings with black shoes....And brown kid gloves straight from England, one size too small. 'Oh, you naughty girl, you're trying to split those gloves; you're trying to split those gloves on purpose.'
>
> (While you are carefully putting on your gloves you begin to perspire and you feel the perspiration trickling down under your arms. The thought of having a wet patch underneath your arms--a disgusting and a disgraceful thing to happen to a lady--makes you very miserable) (Rhys, VID 36).

Yet beyond these two positions, Anna struggles to construct herself as a unified subject. She acknowledges self and other, past and present, the way clothing disguises the disgraceful perspiring body while being read and misread. She is English and West Indian, tart and lady, woman and child. Maudie, who previously labelled Nana as tart, now looks at Anna's dresses saying, "Very lady-like. I call that one very lady-like indeed. And you've got a fur coat. Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat she has something, there's no getting away from that" (Rhys, VID 39). Clothing is a way of being

someone. In self-fashioning Anna seeks to destroy these binaries, tries to write herself as a unified subject supposed to know.

The lengthy passage above connects to the previous image of Anna putting on her gloves on the doorstep while demonstrating the way she constructs her body image as self and other. She begins the passage by thinking about home and dressing for church. About why wool is worn next to the skin and how the body suffers beneath starch and prickles for the sake of proper appearance. Yet when England is mentioned, the gloves are not a proper fit and she is addressed by another as you. The bracket paragraph is the "I" speaking of herself as "you". She watches herself as other, how the threat of her body betraying her makes her very miserable. She seeks to assert control over her body by dressing it, hiding it, layering it, disguising it. There are no limits to the layers of her body, no limits to the parts it can be divided into. Dress, gloves, stockings, vest, underclothes, coat, hat. Nothing is left uncovered, although with movement, her navy blue dress does show the outline of her thigh. There is not complete erasure, simply the suggestion of such.

C. Not for sale

Anna fears erasure and worthlessness, turning to clothing as corporeal signifiers to place the self in the world. Maudie tells Anna the story of a man who asked her whether she ever considered that a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them. "You can get a very nice girl for five pounds...you can even get a very nice girl for nothing if you know how to go about it. But you can't get a very nice costume for her for five pounds. To say

nothing of underclothes, shoes, etcetera and so on" (Rhys, VID 40). Anna silences Maudie. Tells her she is getting on her nerves. Literally she is saying that what Maudie has said affects the interior of Anna's body. Anna is disgusted that a man can put monetary value on a woman, that he values her as a commodity to be bartered for, purchased, yet she also understands the market, plays by these rules because there is no other way to place herself in the world. No other way to construct herself as woman while protecting her body. By using clothing as costume, Anna is able to inscribe her body as society instructs while transforming the self in a gesture of disclosure.

If clothing is a form of public display of the private self, then the very nature of fashion as a transient image illustrates the body in a constant state of disclosure and disguise. The transitory nature of clothing as a form of body image resists the patriarchal structure which seeks to purchase the female body. The investment is an illusion willfully constructed by the woman.

> It was the woman who had the room on the floor above. She was short and fat. She was wearing a white silk blouse and a dark skirt with stains on it and black stockings and patent-leather shoes and a dirty chemise which showed above her blouse. She had a long face and a long body and short legs, like they say the female should have. (And if she has hell to her because she's a female, and if she hasn't hell to her too, because she's probably not.) She had deep rings under her eyes and her hair looked dusty. She was about forty, but she moved about in a very spry way. She looked just like most other people, which is a big advantage. An ant, just

> like all the other ants; not the sort of ant that has too long a head or a deformed body or anything like that. She was like all women whom you look at and don't notice except that she had such short legs and that her hair was so dusty (Rhys, VID 91).

Anna is a careful precise observer when she first meets Ethel Matthews, the woman from the room upstairs. Anna looks at Ethel and other women as she looks at herself. She understands the codes of society, noting that Ethel has a long body and short legs as they say a woman should have. There is safety in invisiblity, in sameness. One ant like all other ants. Anna reads Ethel's body inscribed with dust and dirt and rings under her eyes; she sees her as society would see her yet understands at the same time the impossibility of ever succeeding in the construction of self to satisfy a socio-cultural other. Yet, Ethel sees Anna only by virtue of Anna's coat. "My God, that's a lovely fur coat you have there...She was staring at my coat all the time...that's a wonderful coat...She felt my coat...I bet if you took that coat to Attenborough's they's give you a twenty-five quid on it....And that means its worth.....I can't think of why you stay in a room in Camden Town when you've got a coat like that" (Rhys, VID 92-6).

Ethel completely misreads Anna placing the fur coat as a signifier of wealth and erasing her as any structure of self. The narrative Ethel does not see is the story of the man who bought the dress for Anna so she would not shiver so much. The story of Anna wearing the coat as a reminder of disappointed love. Anna's body is layered with stories in a palimpsest of erasure and rewriting, where love and sadness inscribe themselves layer by layer upon her body.

Later, Ethel uses different signifiers to read Laurie. "Now that's the sort of girl I should want if I were a man....Look at the way she walks. Look at the way she wears her clothes. My God, that's what I call smart" (Rhys, VID 121). Ethel does not emphasize the type of clothing Laurie wears, but rather the way in which she wears it. Posture, movement, gesture are all facets of the way body image functions to define the self. Ethel translates these extended borders of Laurie's body as an indication of Laurie's intelligence. If the body is cleverly displayed then certainly the mind must be clever. There is no division of mind and body here, rather one is directly connected to the other.

D. Doubly dressed

When Anna meets Laurie, a woman she used to perform with, Laurie is constructed as another part of Anna's image. Recall here how Grosz speaks of the way a subject constructs herself by virtue of the bodies which surround her. Certainly Laurie's presence becomes part of Anna's body image. Laurie invites Anna to dinner with herself and two men. "I can't come in this dress," she says. "It's torn under the arm and awfully creased. Haven't you noticed? That's why I keep my coat on" (Rhys, VID 100). Layers upon layers upon the body. The coat hides the slit black velvet dress in a further posture of disguise.

The final gesture of costuming takes place as Laurie lends Anna a dress. There is appeasement for Anna with the anticipation of becoming an other for a while, "like when you've had a toothache and it stops for a bit, and you know quite well it's going to start again but just for a bit it's stopped" (Rhys, VID 101). Construction and reconstruction is a

method of survival for Anna. In flux she finds moments of escape--it is when the body is stagnant that she begins to unravel. "One suspects that she wants to trick herself into being alive" (Borinsky 230). Yet when the disguise is obvious--the putting on of another's clothing--the deception is not as successful. The two men immediately detect that Anna is not wearing her own dress and when Laurie admits this to Carl he says, "Ah...that's another story then" (Rhys, VID 102). Indeed it is another storied body for Anna who constructs the narrative of self and other in constant reinscription upon her body.

A similar incident takes place in Wide Sargasso Sea when Antoinette has her dress stolen by Tia and is forced to wear Tia's dress home. "Throw that thing away. Burn it" (Rhys, WSS 22), says Christophine. An old muslin dress is found which Antoinette tears while forcing it on. There is the sense that damaged clothing is better than donning another's costume, for in the disguise is the threat of losing part of oneself. Changing names and wearing another's clothing constitute gestures of erasure where misnaming becomes a form of self-fashioning related to misrepresentation and construction of other.

> There was a black velvet dress in a shopwindow, with the skirt slit up so that you could see the light stocking. A girl could look lovely in that, like a doll or a flower....The clothes of most of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future. 'If I could buy this, then of course I'd be quite different' (Rhys, VID 111).

This black velvet dress in the window echoes Anna's torn dress from the night before, but the slit is in the proper place on this dress. Eyes fixed on the future, Anna constructs herself as a confessing subject through the way she inscribes her body with clothing. Tambling's notion of confession being the way the body is written upon is useful when considering Anna's desire to have clothing act as a corporeal referent for the body which she disguises.

The ultimate confession of Anna's body is her pregnancy. Pregnant, baby--these words are not spoken or written, but the body vomits, gets nauseous. The final way of erasing this inscription of her body is in the act of abortion. Placed beside this rewriting of her body, Anna remembers the Masquerade on her island. The celebration when everyone wore masks and danced and put their tongues out at you. And then she begins to think "about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again" (Rhys, VID 159)...And about the necessity of disguise.

3. CLOTHING AS DISPLAY IN GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT

Jean Rhys writes of the illusion of movement, the simultaneous motion of disguise and display. In Good Morning, Midnight, Sasha Jansen returns to Paris to celebrate her new beginning. Elgin Mellown writes that Sasha is the final manifestation of the woman who began as Anna in Voyage in the Dark and progressed through Quartet and After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie.

> The story in the four novels is that of the spiritual progress of a woman from the joy of childhood into the ordeal of adolescent love and sexual

> experience, through a resulting bitterness, grief, and selfish isolation, toward a position which will allow her to develop a compassionate understanding of the human situation. (106)

While I do not agree with the emotional progress Mellown charts for the Rhysian woman, I do believe it is important to understand that her psychological development and growth expands through four novels and beyond.

Mellown begins the Rhysian woman in a joyous childhood which I do not read in Rhys's works, nor do I see the selfish isolation which he posits. Rather, I read isolation as necessary to her reparation process. Also, I see Rhys showing compassion for the human condition throughout all her writing. Her sadness begins within her body and affects her interaction with others, but she is a precise reader of people, displaying bitterness primarily when she is acted upon. She always believes in dreams and in the possibility of new beginnings. Clothing, hair colour, drink, and other forms of adornment, are Sasha's defense as she displays herself to the Paris of her past in a posture of reparation.

Sasha's return to Paris displays strength and hope for the construction of her present self. She has changed her name, been rescued from the river, and is trying to reconstruct new memories in a place full of her past.

> When I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane...I realize how lucky I am. Saved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set (Rhys, GMM 10).

Sasha's wanderings through Paris--down streets, into shops, purchasing hats, dyeing her hair, in cafes--all speak to her occupation of reconstructing herself by displaying her

present, ornamented body while attempting to disguise her damaged self. I will present some specifics of Sasha's self-fashioning to illustrate several postures she assumes within the text.

A. Erasure of the body

Sasha's gesture of display through adornment suggests erasure of her body, while simultaneously drawing the gaze toward her flesh. Her reconstruction through fashion offers clothing as a signifier for surface in an attempt to forsake her scarred body. With this reconstruction comes the remembering of a pain and emptiness her body refuses to forget.

> When she takes them [the bandages] off there is not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.
>
> And five weeks afterwards 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 (Rhys, GMM 52)...

She has given birth and her baby has died. But, look, the nurse has made her body just like what she was before..."no trace, no mark, nothing" (Rhys, GMM 51). And indeed, there is no birth mark, no inscription upon her body saying that she has born and lost a child. But her breasts and mouth dry up, she dyes her hair blond cendre, buys a new hat today and a dress tomorrow. "I must get on with the transformation act" (Rhys, GMM

53). There are other ways of inscribing this body which the nurse has erased. Other ways of making her body signify again.

"My dress extinguishes me. And then this damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else--the last idiocy, the last incongruity" (Rhys, GMM 14). When starting over in the restructuring of self through body image, clothing, to Sasha, is of utmost importance. If she displays herself well to Paris, her harsh other, then her day will be a success. "The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance--no gaps....Paris is looking very nice tonight....You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be" (Rhys, GMM 14-15)! She walks around Paris remembering other times spent here-other jobs, restaurants, people. While reconstructing her past life through memory, she lives her present life therein writing two lives at once--the one she walks and the one she remembers.

> In this fitting-room there is a dress...which has been worn by a lot of mannequins and is going to be sold off for four hundred francs....It is a black dress with wide sleeves embroidered in vivid colours--red, green, blue, purple. It is my dress. If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid....Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged...So you have the right to pay me...to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily...We can't all be

> happy...rich...lucky...There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours (Rhys, GMM 25-26).

This black dress with red green blue purple performs the illusion of transforming Sasha into a productive member of Society where Society is governed by people like Mr. Blank. Because she does not have the opportunity to purchase this dress, Sasha metamorphosizes into the black background which illuminates the bright others. She exists at the margins of Society despising those at the centre who label her a misfit. The struggle Sasha fights is to fashion herself into a functioning being who lives as a socio-cultural body while transgressing the patriarchal power structure. By creating her body image through clothing as display, she is able to write herself into society while tricking those who attempt to read her.

"It isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily" (Rhys, GMM 38)? The image of Sasha's face as a mask removable from the rest of her body speaks to the notion of body image as a socio-cultural construct which extends beyond the borders of flesh. Here Sasha creates her face to suit her psychical motion for the day. The face is the primary signifier for self precisely because it is conceived as inseparable from the body. In a gesture of dismissal, Sasha tosses her face aside, or dresses it up for display on the streets. Susan Sontag in Against Interpretation says that the "manner of appearing is our manner of being. The mask is the face" (18). Read and misread me, taunts Sasha. For

what you see is illusion and willful construction: a mode of guerrilla subversion of patriarchal codes used to undermine the power of male observation.

> 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, and so on (Rhys, GMM 40).

Sasha's body image is in constant flux due to the impression cafes, streets, rooms, dresses, and lookingglasses make upon her body. Each moment throughout the day may change the psychic investment reconstructed each morning. Every interaction may serve to undermine the body image previously determined by the self. Sasha is aware of the possible bodily alterations which she may undergo at any given time. "Today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home" (Rhys, GMM 42). By displaying herself through clothing as dictated by the social norm, she averts the questioning gaze of society, which criticizes that which is different.

B. Hair colour as defense tactic

The other manner of display which is more permanent than clothing is through hair colour. Sasha deters unwanted bodily reactions by concentrating on how she shall fashion herself to resist the hard stare of society.

> My throat shuts up, my eyes sting. This is awful. Now I am going to cry. This is the worst...If i do that I shall really have to walk under a bus when I get outside.
>
> I try to decide what colour I shall have my hair dyed, and hang on to that thought as you hang on to something when you are drowning....
>
> red...black...blond cendre (Rhys, GMM 44).

When part of the body involuntarily begins to confess, Sasha begins to rebuild her image in order to rewrite her self. There is a constant struggle between self and other, private and public, past and present. By fashioning her body image to both observe and subvert the sociocultural norms, Sasha resists these binaries in mutual display and disguise. Her body exists as function and fluidity, undefinable, yet always defined. She exists on the cusp of the binaries, in the space between memory and forgetting.

> It's not that these things happen or even that one survives them, but what makes life strange is that they are forgotten. Even the one moment that you thought was your eternity fades out and is forgotten and dies....[E]very day is a new day, and there's hope for everybody (Rhys, GMM 118).

The motion of forgetting provides promise for the subject who trangresses the mind/body binary. By not privileging mind over body, astonishment is possible for the newly constructed self in constant flux. "'Voila,' he says...'a very good blond cendre. A success'" (Rhys, GMM 53). Today's transformation act is a success.

C. The mad hatter: shopping as ritual of survival

"Or shall I place on it a tall hat...and walk about the dark streets so merrily" (Rhys, GMM 37-8)? Sasha decides that today her luck shall be decided by the purchase of a new hat. There are ten shops on the street, she goes to the second last on the left-hand side, and buys the third hat she tries on. "I feel saner and happier after this. I go to a restaurant near by...carefully watching the effect of the hat on the other people in the room...Nobody stares at me, which I think is a good sign" (Rhys, GMM 60). New hair and new hat, Sasha is approached by a man exhibiting himself because he mistakes her for a "wealthy dame trotting round Montparnasse" (Rhys, GMM 61). She recognizes him as a gigolo because she sees herself in him.

Grosz says that in positioning oneself in space as a subject, one's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another. With the gigolo, she becomes her own other. She watches him go through the gestures of display, wanting to shout that he is misreading and misjudging her. "You oughtn't to judge by my coat. You ought to judge by what I have on under my coat, by my handbag, by my expression, by anything you like. Not by this damned coat, which was a present" (Rhys, GMM 63). Her body is storied on several levels. She layers herself with fur coats and new hats and a lovely blond cendre hair colour, but beneath this the inscription is not so easily erased. The display works for she is read as she wishes to be and not as she is.

> And did I mind? Not at all, not at all. If you think I minded then you've never lived like that, plunged in a dream, when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets. Close-up of human nature (Rhys, GMM 75).

D. Display as safety of invisibility

Sasha constructs herself for the world as one more marionette, tugged along by the patriarchal power structure. One ant among many ants. The safety of invisibility. How body image is at times pure simulacrum, the attempt of self erasure in order to become other.

> I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. Every word I say has chains round its ankles (Rhys, GMM 88).

Even language is subject to the scrutiny of society. As is the body inscribed by the weight of words. Language and clothing both erase and reconstitute the body as corporeal signifier. Through confession disguised and displayed as fiction, Jean Rhys writes and rewrites herself a life as Anna, Sasha, Antoinette, Bertha, Jean, Gwendolyn. She is always the divided and dividing self finally joined as text in the act of writing. And there is always tomorrow.

> Tomorrow I'll go to the Galeries Lafayette, choose dress..buy gloves, buy scent, buy lipstick...buy anything cheap. Just the sensation of spending, that's the point. I'll look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue, necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette-cases, jewelled tortoises...And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow (Rhys, GMM 121).

4. CLOTHING AS PERFORMANCE IN WIDE SARGASSO SEA

If we consider performance in terms of accomplishment, fulfillment, motion, then clothing for Antoinette is all of these. The blending of yesterday, today, tomorrow occurs most dramatically in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea. While Antoinette Cosway began in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Antoinette is also very much part of Jean Rhys, especially in terms of childhood and place. The text is divided into three parts. Part One presents Antoinette's childhood spoken from her point of view. Part Two gives the reader Antoinette's husband's voice. Part Three takes place in the attic in England where Antoinette is named Bertha and Rhys's text crosses over into Bronte's. The passage of time is elemental, based in the body of Antoinette. "Only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning" (Rhys, WSS 151). Antoinette's construction of self performed through clothing begins when she is a child and culminates in a necessity for survival and unification of her adult self. I will return to Antoinette's red dress later.

Antoinette begins her childhood narrative by describing her solitary life on Coulibri Estate in Jamaica. She explains how the Jamaican ladies did not like her mother and how they stood around jeering at her, especially after her clothes grew shabby. She explains how once her mother's brushed hair was a soft black cloak which hid, covered, and protected her. Antoinette tells us of Tia, her mirror image, and how the motion of Tia stealing her starched, ironed, cleaned dress, was the first movement toward the

deterioration of their friendship. When Antoinette arrives home wearing Tia's dress, she finds beautifully dressed visitors talking with her mother. The next week, yards and yards of muslin are bought to buy Antoinette and her mother new dresses. Her childhood is defined through appearance and performance and how the motion of the well-dressed body signifies a healthy, unified self. When we hear Antoinette's husband's voice in Part Two, the fluidity of the body is defined metaphorically through the image of place, where clothing performs distraction.

A. Performance as distraction

Part Two of Wide Sargasso Sea transforms the "I" into the voice of Antoinette's husband. The dialogical nature of this narrative provides the reader with a text which displays Antoinette's other, while observing Antoinette's self. Rochester is other and observer-part of Antoinette as well as separate from her. If body image is dependent upon the other bodies which occupy the same spacial positioning, then Rochester becomes a corporeal presence in Antoinette's image. The reader, henceforth, is in the privileged position of seeing both Antoinette's body through Rochester's eyes, and also as a spacial referent, or landscape.

> It was a beautiful place--wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing--I want what it *hides*--that is not nothing' (Rhys, WSS 73).

Reading this passage where Antoinette's body is the beautiful place, clothing becomes an extremely important distraction. Rochester does not want the clothing, what he wants is the body hidden beneath the material. Later, when he sees her dress lying on the bedroom floor, he becomes breathless and savage with desire. It is not the nude body which he desires, but rather the body undressed. Here clothing is necessary in the subversion of the symbolic order. The woman's body covered becomes the object of curiousity which patriarchal culture desires to reveal (Brooks, Body Work 15). Clothing stands as a sign for the presence of the body. The male gaze reads clothing as a realistic referent for the female body which is available to be acted upon. When Rochester watches Antoinette's passive nude body he looks at her with analytical contempt.

> As I looked she moved and flung her arm out. I thought coldly, yes, very beautiful, the thin wrist, the sweet smell of the forearm, the rounded elbow, the curve of her shoulder into her upper arm. All present, all correct....I watched, hating (Rhys, WSS 114).

Antoinette's need for her red dress is understood more clearly when we see that her adornment is her identity and her safety. Rochester attempts to possess her by imprisoning her physical body in the attic. Costuming the self is a gesture of transgressive distraction. The body is not erased through dress, but rather performed as an affirmation of self.

B. Red dress performs escape

For Antoinette, her red dress is motion, is the passage of time, is freedom. The red dress becomes the promise of the future and memory of the past. Colour and scent, landscape and home, are all captured in the folds of her dress.

> I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers.... The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain (Rhys, WSS 151).

The red dress performs home for her in the bleak attic which is her prison. She is Antoinette in this dress and not Bertha. "If I had been wearing my dress Richard would have known me" (Rhys, WSS 153). She is without body without her red dress. Antoinette has imaged herself clothed in the red dress so that without vision, without a mirror to see herself, she digresses into formlessness. She insists on the red dress for her creation of self. There are no other referents to position herself beside. Locked away from everything she knows and understands, the red dress provides the only affirmation of self. The only promise linking memory and the already forgotten.

"I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do" (Rhys, WSS 153). If the body is constructed as function and motion, the space between mind and body, memory and forgetting, past and present, if the body exists on the pivotal point of binaries as Grosz suggests, then the body for Antoinette promises the ultimate joining of

self and other which she so desires. Wide Sargasso Sea differs from Jean Rhys's other texts in that the truth Rhys brings to Antoinette's story is the truth of place. The rest of the bones of narrative stem from Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. In Rhys's rewriting of Bronte's Bertha, Bertha is renamed Antoinette, in an attempt to free the self from the constraints of such an ordered existence. Antoinette achieves agency in Rhys's text. She is not the madwoman in the attic, but rather the shackled self who ultimately finds freedom and unity.

Veronica M. Gregg states that in the final dream sequence where Antoinette is beckoned by both her husband and Tia, Antoinette symbolically faces two versions of her other. One version is the creation of Bertha, the name she is being called now. The other manifestation is Tia, her mirror image. The fact that Antoinette invokes the vision of the pool at Coulibri further reinforces the Narcissus reference, the allegorical joining of self and other. "When Antoinette calls Tia by name and jumps, she is reconnecting with her own identity, her self. The fracture is healed. The scar which Tia's stone had left on Antoinette's face and on her life will now be removed" (Gregg, "Symbolic Imagery" 164).

Antoinette's final performance is her unification through fire instituted by the corporeal referent which is the red dress. When Antoinette stands on the battlements in her dream vision of the future, all images of red recall the fire dress spread across the floor and the sensations it created. Her posture is poised in a gesture of freedom and stability and assurance. She gazes upon herself and her life in reflections of red and is pleased with how she has imaged her self. Her body has no limits but rather extends beyond all borders into the space which is sky.

> I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it....I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw...the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns...and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall....And the sky so red (Rhys, WSS 155).

PART V. CONCLUSION: THE WHISPER WHICH IS BODY

I have attempted to illustrate how Jean Rhys, through the narrative of confession, writes several lives for her self as an act of reparation and a way of erasing and reconstituting the body as a corporeal signifier. Constructing a unified subject through a series of temporary transient identities, Jean Rhys uses confession as a way of fashioning herself many new beginnings based on her desire for love. Writing out sadness and pain, she emotionally amputates parts of her life, placing it upon the page. With memory and the forgotten meeting on the body, she connects writing and clothing as gestures of display, disguise, and performance. Naming and misnaming provides a method of both interpretation and misrepresentation, where the past and present self confesses in a motion towards freedom and safety. The body is layered in a palimpsest of stories constructed by text and clothing. Through surface, Rhys asks the reader to read and misread her body and her life. The body is not erased, but rather presented in a necessary act of elision: present in its absence. Through confessional writing, Rhys transgresses derivations of the mind/body binary including private/public, man/woman,

interior/exterior, surface/depth. There cannot exist a passive position in the binary, especially in terms of sexual specificity, when both positions are repeatedly overturned and skewed. Through clothing the body is read beyond anatomy, represented as a positivity rather than a lack. Clothing becomes a primary signifier for the construction of self. Exhibiting the nature of the patriarchal power structure which Jean Rhys writes from, she acknowledges her presence in the structure while transgressing the boundaries which it attempts.

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February 22, 1995

Dear Paul:

This is goodbye.

In a gesture of remembering and forgetting you, I write this letter which you may never receive.

It matters not--for you have become a part of my body image, which I am ready to have rest for now. I shall see red hair again and my body will react in a motion of memory, but I will have forgotten the breathless back alley kiss and the way you interpreted my resistance toward undressing as a sign of my lack of desire. How wrong you were.

You noticed the rip in the thigh of my jeans. I remember the pressure of your hand in mine and when that touch was enough for you. I remember how your fingers tasted of cigarettes and how that did not matter. You have misread and misunderstood me, and I,

in turn, have placed you within my concept of other. You are the image of what I desire but never want to attain. A lie. In your absence you will represent the untouchable body clothed in text. Here I caress you and you shall never and always know.

I write you a kiss now. Can you feel it on your skin?

Always,

Debra

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