Chapter V

In Search of Rhys: Representations of Rhys of the Quartet Phase in the Writings of Others

This chapter seeks to present the literary representations of Jean Rhys of the Quartet phase in the writings of others. It will principally take up the representations of Rhys in Ford’s When the Wicked Man (1932), a countertext to Quartet, Lenglet’s Sous les Verrous, (1933), a roman-a-clef made in the cast of Quartet initially, Stella Bowen’s memoir Drawn from Life (1941), Arthur Mizener’s biography of Ford, The Saddest Story (1971) and Drusilla Modjeska’s biography of Stella, Stravinsky’s Lunch (1999). A close scrutiny of these literary works reveals not only the quarrel between the real-life personages, but also a conflict between these texts in representing ‘life’ or ‘persona’, a conflict, that certainly results from the methodological limitations of life-writing.

In When the Wicked Man, critics generally believe, Ford represents Rhys in the character of Lola Porter. As he himself was the principal target of Rhys’s aggression in Quartet, Ford in When the Wicked Man holds no bar in attacking Rhys: “Lola Porter, the Creole journalist-widow of a young writer and the most extreme departure from The Good Soldier, is Ford’s revenge on Jean Rhys for putting him in her 1928 novel Postures” (Moser 258-59). A minute examination of Ford’s portrayal of Lola’s character unquestionably reveals the spite. As a piece of literary work, however, When the Wicked Man is never rated among Ford’s better ones. The story of the novel revolves around its central character Joseph Notterdam, an expatriate British, who has established himself in America as a successful, respectable
publisher. He owns the publishing house in partnership with his long-time pal Kratch. The narrative goes back and forth in time presenting Notterdam’s acumen through his early-life struggle and present-day manipulations and maneuvers in the publishing industry. But the elaborate details of Notterdam’s business activities serve only as the backdrop for a mesh of relationships between five principal characters of the novel—Joseph Notterdam, Bill Kratch, Henrietta Felise, Elspeth Notterdam and Lola Porter. In the opening of the novel, Notterdam is married to Elspeth whom Notterdam wins in a battle of courtship with Kratch. Kratch is presently attached to his mistress Henrietta Felise, who happens to be his secretary as well. In a spat with Kratch due to some financial-policy-related issues Kratch hurls personal abuses at Notterdam and Notterdam hits Kratch. Kratch leaves the house and goes away from America, apparently to Mesopotamia. Notterdam swoops on the opportunity to take over Henrietta Felise as his mistress. Meanwhile, a publication-contract with Edward Porter, a compatriot of Notterdam, and an under-rated writer is ditched by Notterdam. The act of betrayal is done to please the absent Kratch at the behest of Felise. But the betrayal leads the down on luck Edward Porter to commit suicide. The cause of the suicide is, however, known only to two persons, Henrietta Felise and Notterdam. In remorse and also in trying to cover up his instigation behind Porter’s suicide, Notterdam renews the contract with Lola Porter, the wife Edward Porter is survived by. Notterdam also gives Lola shelter in his house in assistance. But Lola, who is Creole and—as if, as a result of this—savage, unruly and hysterical, torments Notterdam to desperation. Notterdam’s desires are directed at Felise who suddenly falls sick and has to retire for a while from work to rest and recuperate. Notterdam is contemplating divorce with Elspeth when Elspeth divulges that she has a lover and gives her willingness to divorce. This revelation comes as a shock Notterdam. Notterdam gets a call from Kratch’s attendant that the latter is very sick and badly needs money in Paris. Notterdam wants to go to Paris with Felise, but, instead, forced by Lola’s blackmail, takes Lola with
him. On reaching Paris, Notterdam learns to his shock that Elspeth’s long-time lover is none other than his friend Kratch. A disturbed and bitter Notterdam provides Kratch with money and reaches England accompanied by Lola. In the country, in a freak shoot-out, Notterdam kills a former, roguish lover of Lola. Notterdam is booked by the British police, but is ultimately released. He now returns to America to a hero’s welcome for killing a criminal. The novel ends as the apparently defeated Notterdam salvages some of his respect.

In When the Wicked Man what concerns this thesis is Ford Madox Ford’s design in character-portrayal, especially his portrayal of Lola Porter’s character, because that is said to be based on Rhys. In portraying Lola, Ford, actually, launches a vindictive attack on Rhys, rendering the representation of the character of Rhys in Lola uniformly negative and hence unconvincing. The following excerpts from the text expose the prejudice in Ford’s art of characterization. What is especially notable is the way the character of Lola is racialized from the very beginning. Notterdam’s tendency to see Lola as a character of non-European descent is expressed time and again. Lola is ‘gypsy-ish’, a blackamoor and her unacceptable nature is the result of her non-European marginality:

The fellow [Mr Porter] had married a queer, very tall, thin, gypsy-ish creature. He never should have. She had an always hungry air and was alarmingly liable to get intoxicated. (48)

In the thoughts of Notterdam Lola is even demonized:

Perhaps both he and his thin, blackamoor wife were both starving. (emphasis mine 103)
Lola is made a woman with the legacy of the corruptive charm of primitive witchcraft:

They [Notterdam’s children] took, moreover, a great fancy to Mrs. Porter who told them fantastic and horrible details of obi and voodoo practices of the coloured people of her childhood’s home. (187)

However, the racial Other holds her own charm for Notterdam:

His bad wife was about four doors away. Notterdam was sure she was bad, but beautiful. Not pretty: beautiful. Black as night—and very likely hot as hell and sweet as sin in certain circumstances… She was thin, with a thin delicate nose; full enough, scarlet lips. … Probably Porter would not sell her. … (78)

And the charm seems to grow with time:

Mrs. Porter with each successive glance seemed more and more desirable. She talked with animation and occasionally a slow, queer smile went over her clear features. Occasionally it was a quick much more quick one. (78)

The voluptuous effect of Lola on Notterdam is also evident in the following lines:

He wondered with increasing curiosity what could be behind that smile… How could you find out? If it was a woman, no doubt by making love to her. (78)

In fact, the sensuality in Lola seems to have such a powerful appeal to Notterdam that it can disarm even the strongest of prejudices against her:

He had thought of sleeping with her that night at Dorking.

She was exceedingly desirable when you looked at her with that idea – and ignored of course the blood. (340)
It seems that for Notterdam, the incomprehensibility of Lola’s charm actually increases her charm:

…but her presence, even standing under a shaded lamp in the hall, affected him queerly, so that it was not easy to find words. There was a flame in her black eyes, a moving quality about her dark shoulders. … (194)

The strength of the charm is worth noting:

Her voice was extraordinarily soft and stealthy. Notterdam felt himself unable to speak. The smell of gin, tobacco and gas made him almost retch. (166)

Sometimes Lola’s charm seems to be ‘disturbing’ to Notterdam; she, as if, makes him dumbfounded:

And he found Lola Porter too disturbing to himself, so that he wanted her gone.

Exactly what she did to him he did not know except that she made him tongue-tied, like a schoolboy. (201)

Her effect seems to be not that of a magician’s, but of a demon’s, a vampire’s:

Mrs. Porter was watching him and her husband with hungry eyes. … Wolfish. … A vampire Carmen. … (83)

The adopted children of Notterdam seem to be the next casualty, as Lola’s arrival in the Notterdam’s household as a destitude brings the children close to Lola. They seem to be drawn to Lola by her demoniac charm:
They [the children] took, moreover, a great fancy to Mrs. Porter who told them fantastic and horrible details of obi and the voodoo practices of the coloured people of her childhood’s home. (187)

Notterdam seems to disapprove of the children’s proximity to Lola:

From what Notterdam overheard he was inclined to think that this information would not do the children much good… (187)

But the charm of Lola continues to exert its influence on the children:

… the children were always hanging about Lola Porter’s skirts or in her room, …

(187)

If for men and children Lola generates a mesmerizing awe, hatred is the automatic response in women and the issue of race is again involved. This is how Felise talks about Lola to Notterdam:

No doubt the shock will have had an effect. … When she isn’t – oh, under the weather – she is quite a nice person. But these Creoles … I don’t mean of coloured origin. … The real Creoles of French descent. … From Martinique and such places. They say she has even gipsy blood, I don’t know how … (183)

Notterdam assumes that Elspeth’s attitude to Lola should hardly be different from that of Henrietta Felise, although Lola has behaved well before Elspeth so far:

That Mrs. Notterdam detested Mrs. Porter he was sufficiently assured of because of ejaculations she would begin to make and check when occasionally the woman’s name came up in talk. But he considered that Mrs. Porter had behaved so really well during her stay in the house that Elspeth must largely have tempered her dislike. (192)
The authenticity of Notterdam’s assumption—that Elspeth detests Lola—may be questioned, as Notterdam is very clearly prejudiced against Lola; but soon, an outburst of Elspeth on Lola, stands in support of Notterdam’s assumption:

She exclaimed:

“You can’t. You shan’t. I won’t have you talking to that woman. Not under my roof. I’m through!”

The reason behind Elspeth’s angry outburst at Lola is, as usual, found to be rooted in Lola’s Creole origin:

And it was really extraordinary how little Lola Porter counted in the house considering her fiery Creole ancestry and upbringing. No doubt her husband’s death had stunned her. During the first three or four days she kept to her bedroom or on sunny days—April was that year unusually sunny on the Sound—lay in a chaise longue in the sun.

...

Creoles are as noted for their indolence as for their passion. On that basis, she became entirely comprehensible. After their return from week-ending, when she appeared at dinner she was always as limp as if her limbs were of India-rubber. Immediately after she had eaten she would retire to her room for the night. Of how long she intended to stay in the house or where she would go when she left he had not the slightest idea, but the arrangement seemed to be working very well...
Everything about Lola, even her mood-swing, is attributed to her Creole root:

She was in one of her halting, india-rubber Creole moods. As if her hips were limp.
There were dark rims around her eyes. … She had been feeling lonely, and wretched
about her husband’d death. (234)

Lola’s composure too is seen with scepticism:

Lola Porter was looking at him with dark eyes that she made infinitely sad. He
did not know why she should want to look sad. An implication, perhaps, that she
reproached him for refusing her his love! (252)

Interestingly, the relation between Elspeth and Lola resembles the relation between Marya
and Lois in Quartet, as in both the novels the relationship between two women (one of them a
rightful claimant of the central male figure; the other a lover of him) are defined initially by
an elaborate affair of formalities, conjecturing toward an undercurrent of mutual hatred and
apathy. The commentary on the relationship between Lola and Elspeth, however, is
something new in When the Wicked Man:

That the two women did not like each other he was inclined to take for
granted. They exhibited rather elaborate politeness. When they were near each other,
they moved elegantly, much as he had seen waterspouts do in the Caribbean Sea.
They talked in extremely distinct tones – about banana or alligator pear plantations;
about rum-manufacturing in Martinique where the one had been born and the other
had visited for long enough to exhibit an intelligent interest. They talked about
Scotland, both being of Scottish descent and after each of them had made a statement
the other would say: “Indeed?” or: “I want to know!” (193)
It is significant to note that Rhys—although not Scottish—was Welsh in origin. Ford adds to this account of animosity between the two women, the man’s point of view to the predicament. In fact, this ‘man’s point of view’ marks—for *When the Wicked Man*—a departure from *Quartet* and this point of view, be it Notterdam’s or Ford’s, also shows the uniqueness of that. The atmosphere of the battle between two women, rivals in love, is filled with a tension that only the man, caught up in the battle, can sense:

...when she and Elspeth were together the atmosphere was so charged with electricity that he expected his knuckles to discharge sparks when they came near a bell-pull. They were too polite; they clipped their words too much; they exhibited, each, too much alacrity in helping the other with hooks and eyes or passing the salt.

(201)

In fact, the ‘Lola-Elspeth’ relationship is not the only thing that hints at a connection between *Quartet*, *When the Wicked Man* and Bowen’s *Drawn from Life*, the plight of Lola’s clothes was also similar to the one of Rhys’s in Stella’s version of the affair. In Ford’s novel “she [Lola] had next to no clothes...for her day-time clothes were mere rags” (194). In Bowen’s account too, the hint at the destitute state of Rhys cannot be missed:

When we met her [Rhys] she possessed nothing but a cardboard suit-case and the astonishing manuscript. She was down to her last three francs and she was sick....

...Ford gave her invaluable help with her writing, and I tried to help her with her clothes. (166)

Rhys’s portrait in Ford’s writing is rarely different. It is, as we see, uniformly negative. The novel creates some moments when Lola is allowed to have some worth and self-respect in her abilities, but those moments are punctured immediately:
Mrs. Porter made a good deal from time to time. ... She is quite a star journalist, but she can't hold down jobs because of drink. I don’t mean that she is sodden but when she does drink she is terrible. ... Abandoned, you know. And with such ... oh, toughs. You see, her first husband died in jail. And his associates. ... Well, she rather keeps in with them. And poor Mr. Porter. ... (182)

The above quoted speech by Felise, part of a lengthy conversation between her and Notterdam, shows how unwillingly and how scantily Felise allows Lola some respect. The description of Lola’s acumen does not even run to the second sentence, and soon is undercut by hard hitting abuses delivered in a hesitant tone by Felise apparently to show an unwillingness in criticizing Lola. The following is another passage marked by same sort of abuses poured on Lola under the veil of compliments:

She put the cob at one or two minor obstacles in the woodland tracks through which they went – a drain or so and a wooden fence. She was extraordinarily the lady, slim in her bottle-green habit and with her top hat. She reminded Notterdam of portraits of the Empress of Austria who used to lead hounds in England years ago, so that her picture, taking leaps, had been extraordinarily familiar to Notterdam in his youth. The riding soothed her, whereas the longing for it, the evening before, had rather ominously let the tiger peep out from beneath her rather Creole nonchalance. (Emphasis mine 197)

In Quartet Rhys had Heidler begging for Marya’s love. Here, as if, Ford has his retaliation. He makes Lola beg more abjectly before Notterdam. This is how Heidler asks for Marya’s love:

I’m dying with love for you, burnt up with it, tortured with it. (Quartet 56)

Then again:
‘I love you,’ said Heidler. ‘I love you, my dear, I love you. And I wish I were dead.

For God’s sake, be a little kind to me. …’ (Quartet 60)

When Ford’s turn comes, he makes Lola cling like a helpless creature to Notterdam without human dignity and makes her beg before Notterdam so that Notterdam agrees to describe her husband’s death as an accident and not as suicide:

She clung to Notterdam’s arm and looked up in his face. … She begged him to say that he did not think that Porter had committed suicide … (169)

The degree to which Lola’s helplessness is exaggerated crosses the limit of probability and renders the character of Lola unconvincing. The following portion proves our argument:

Notterdam suddenly felt warm sympathy for this appealing woman. She was clinging to him and begging and begging him to tell the doctor that he was sure it could not be a case of felo de se. (170)

Lola’s tendency to cling on to Notterdam goes on for umpteenth times:

It was cold. She clung to him. (170)

As said before, the nature of Lola’s persuasion is not only melodramatic, but also unconvincing to the level of being ludicrous. Lola kisses Notterdam to persuade him of something even long before they are adequately acquainted with each other:

… whilst Mrs. Wagner and Mrs. Porter had persuaded Notterdam to something. Mrs. Porter had kissed him on the lips—in persuasion. (84)

Lola begs for so many times in the course of the novel that the reader is certain to lose track of the count:
She was going on with the story which she begged him not to contradict. (170)

At her persuasion, she seems, sometimes, an animal, a pet perhaps:

She went on kissing his hand and twining herself against him. (171)

Lola’s degeneration knows no bound, as in Notterdam’s eyes, from a pet she turns into a slave in her attempts of persuasion:

In the cold of the open space she had clung to him. She begged and begged in her soft, stealthy voice that he would corroborate; … She caught one of his hands and leaning on his breast kissed it continuously as if she had been a slave imploring a boon of a sultan. (171)

Lola, in her abjectness, incarnates her last avatar, which is that of a pauper:

He had come round table with the intention of telling her that he would pay her passage. She fell on her knees before him and caught his hand.

“Say that you’re going to do it. …” She kissed his hand again and again, whispering the most fantastic offers of herself. (291)

Notterdam gives the impression that Lola’s utter abjectness, conveyed through her appearance as a pet, a slave or a pauper, is part of her attraction. According to Notterdam it is the helplessness of a beauty like Lola that creates a strong impression on him:

The idea that this beautiful, flashing, lithe creature was actually starving remained almost his strongest and most shuddering impression of that night. (172)

But the other side of Lola, certainly, does not produce sympathy in Notterdam. Her drunken outbursts incite nothing but loathing:
“I’m Lola. … And if you think that any mean, dirty, flat-breasted Feeleyes is going to. … God, what a fool I was. … You and your highland mare, telling me Feeleyes is cut out for the job. … Just God! Getting me into your house with your rotten morts. Thinking to hoodwink me with a miserable four grand. …” cascades of obscenities, of sheer, filthy, old-fashioned English schoolboy words that his mind would not hold on to. At school in England he had never paid attention to what his fellows called smut. But the effect was terrible and dislocating. (222)

Lola’s tendency to make a scene when drunk is really not rare in the novel. Here is another example:

Lola Porter had made him the most violent of her scenes. When she had drunk from two to three cocktails she became almost madly obscene and furious;

(265)

Even Lola’s drunkenness has its own oddity:

… but when she had taken a few more she might become either lachrymose or singularly reasonable. (265)

Softness and indolence are, as if, the regular aftereffects of the drunken rowdy outbursts of Lola:

She lay all day long and all night in his saloon. She took it into her head, at any moment, to push his door open and lachrymosely, indignantly and always limply subside onto his couch. And he asked himself again and again why destiny had been sufficiently unjust to inflict this woman on him. (299-300)
It seems that Ford does not consider all these sufficient for executing his revenge on Rhys. That is why he makes Lola a character subject to lechery and criminality. Lola is shown to have gangsters as her paramours. This is what has been reported by a fellow to Notterdam on Lola’s connection with the underworld:

Mrs. Porter had insisted on dancing half nude with a very formidable racketeer in a regular tohuwabohu of negroes, mulatresses and gangsters. Porter, the fellow alleged, had remonstrated in vain and had then gone home and killed himself. .. He had been miserably in love with that harlot. (267)

In fact, Lola’s criminal background has been given such an emphasis in the novel that when her husband commits suicide, Elspeth thinks it to be a murder. Her shocked reaction to the early morning phone-call from Lola lays it bare:

“… Has she murdered her husband for you? … She says he appears to be dead. … Locked in the bathroom. … It’s Lola Porter. … You can’t have been monkeying with that. …” (151)

On most of the occasions, Lola’s criminality is made a butt of ridicule, though. The meek Italian chauffeur of Notterdam is obedient to her, because from her he wants to have protection from imaginary enemies:

And Giovanni had achieved a sort of fantastic devotion for Mrs. Porter. She had promised to buy from Italian gangsters of her remote acquaintance protection from the Fascisti of his nightmares. He cooked for her, he washed for her, he dusted her rooms and drove her about the city in a beatific contentment. (282-83)

Above all these, however, stands the projection of Lola as the Caribbean savage with all its primitiveness about her:
An extraordinary woman. You never knew what she really felt. It was eternal histrionics! You would say she was a simple, primitive being. Not she. She had the appetites of a Caribbean savage. But when she suffered from one appetite she superimposed over it the pretence of another. Even with liquor taken ... that by nature she was as obscene as she pretended to be when she was drunk. At ordinary times she was rather delicate, and languidly fastidious about her body. ... But there was no knowing. (287)

In fact, the portrayal of Felise, the desired mistress of Notterdam, stands in sharp contrast to Lola’s portrait. After the mad, bad, hysteric, drunkard that Lola Porter appears to be, Felise looks all softness, beauty and innocence incarnated:

Henrietta Felise was looking down at him. He wondered what in her face indicated passion and pride. ... her nose was a nose. ... Her hair. ... Brown, probably. Even now when he was looking at her his mind would not take note of the colour of her eyes. ... But they were luminous and startled. Or puzzled! And as she had a way of. ... Oh, tucking her chin in ... into her neck. That was why he loved. ... For that and her infinitely tiny bones. ... Her wrists and forearms had the delicate quality of a gazelle’s fetlocks. ... A funny thing to think. (218)

If the characterization of Lola marks one extreme of Ford’s lopsided artistry, the portrayal of Felise, drawn on all soft and delicate, topples over the limit of reality or plausibility to Ford’s disadvantage. It should be noted here that Thomas C. Moser in his *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford* (1980) has tried to find real-life persons in almost all the principal characters of the novel. According to him, “Henrietta Felise surely masks the unyielding Mrs. Wright [Rene Wright]” (258). Important also is the way Elspeth is described, because “...Elspeth’s “equable temperament” (61), her brother’s name, and the housing arrangements
suggest Stella” (Moser 258). Now, in Notterdam’s eyes, ‘loyalty’ is Elspeth’s strongest characteristic. No doubt, in her loyalty Elspeth reminds of Stella Bowen, who despite her position amidst people of very different nature hardly ever created a single scandal or gave opportunity for gossip about her. Her memoir narrates an extraordinary tale of strength and courage. Even Rhys could bring very little accusation against Stella except Stella’s class-identity which put her in a driving position in the game of adultery they were involved in.

Here, Notterdam expresses his amazement in Elspeth’s loyalty:

His wife, Elspeth herself, was to him a curious anomaly, of a loyalty extraordinary for her age and place, but with reserves of sardonic reticences towards himself that Notterdam found unintelligible. (86)

A loss of womanly softness, in her case, does not make Elspeth harsh to Notterdam; rather it makes her strong and gutsy:

When he had married her she had seemed to him little and delicate. Now she seemed tall, rawboned, with handsome graying hair that waved away from her bronzed forehead, keen slate-grey eyes and a high complexion coarsened a little by the weather. … All winter she hunted with the local packs of hounds; all spring and summer she golfed; all late summer and fall she took the children out camping or ranching in the more or less unmapped West beyond the Yellostone. She presided over several clubs, played a little auction bridge and seldom got drunk except on such occasions as New Year balls at Country Clubs. (Ford, When the Wicked Man 86)

In fact, Moser’s book, Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford, as its title suggests, devotes itself in finding out extensive echoes from real-life episodes of Ford’s life. This is what
Moser has to say about the real-life dimension of the Kratch-Notterdam relationship in *When the Wicked Man*:

Like *The Good Soldier*, *When the Wicked Man* deals principally with two close friends, and three women. As usual, the resemblances to earlier Fordian fiction are themselves but distorted images of only too familiar happenings from Ford’s long, tormented past. Notterdam and Kratch variously recall Ford and Conrad, Ford and Marwood; the women, Ford’s women. The length of the friendship, its ups and downs, the habit of talking “like books,” these are surely fantasies on the Ford-Conrad relationship. But the joint publishing efforts, Notterdam’s steadiness, based on Clifton training, and Kratch’s changeableness must mirror the Marwood-Ford friendship. However when he calls Notterdam a “wife-starver,” Kratch is playing Marwood. (258)

No doubt that Ford’s *When the Wicked Man* was an angry write-back to *Quartet*. If we keep this in mind, Ford’s representation of Rhys as a savage, lusty, vampire-like Creole does not surprise us at all.

Ford, however, was not the only angry man of the quartet who wrote back to *Quartet*. Jean Lenglet, the cuckolded husband of Jean Rhys and the third member of this love-quartet, also wrote back to *Quartet*. Lenglet, “who wrote under the pen name of Edouard (Edward) de Neve” (Hollander, “Gloomy Child” 43), fictionalized the quartet affair in his *Sous les Verrous* (1933), a novel which was first translated by Rhys into English as *Barred* (1932) and then by Lenglet himself into Dutch as *In de Strik* (1932). Debates on the quartet phase, however, usually ignore Lenglet’s book. Hollander writes: “Critical discussions of this
debate, however, have tended to concentrate on the points of view of three members of the quartet only. The voice of Edward de Neve is rarely heard, no doubt due to the difficulty in obtaining one of the few extant copies of *Barred*, or its Dutch and French versions, *In de Strik* and *Sous le Verrous*” (“Gloomy Child” 43). Lenglet’s work, indeed, offers an indispensable third point of view on the whole affair as well as another literary representation of Rhys. Now, as the above remark by Hollander suggests, a central problem in including Lenglet in any critical discussion on the quartet phase of Rhys’s life arises out of the fact that Lenglet’s representation of Rhys in the character of Stania has three versions: the French, the English and the Dutch. The problem is really complex because Lenglet translated his own work not from its French original but from Rhys’s translation which had crucial departures from the French original. Hollander shows in a comparative study of the three versions that “Rhys [while translating the French original into the English version, *Barred*] scrapped between six-and-a half and seven thousand words from her husband’s narrative; about twenty-five pages of text, or one tenth of the entire manuscript…The result is a text that strikes us as more economical and consistent than its rather ponderous and over-explicit predecessor. Lenglet must have recognized in Rhys *il miglior fabbro*, for with few exceptions he translated the Dutch version of his novel straight from the English, rather than from the original French manuscript” (“Gloomy Child” 45). Actually, “a comparison of the original text with Rhys’ adaptation reveals that she not only translated but also rewrote her husband’s novel, and that the picture of Stania in *Barred*, harsh though it may be, is a watered-down version of an even more merciless portrait in *Sous les Verous*” (“Gloomy Child” 44). This is how Hollander describes the projection of Rhys as Stania in *Barred*:

Jan pictures his wife as weak and selfish, and without proper regard for him, and he minimizes his own share in the muddle she gets herself into. He blames her for more than indolence. Where Marya Zelli only reluctantly accepts the Heidlers’ offer to
stay with them, partly to keep Stephan from worrying about her, Jan van Leewen [Lenglet’s character in *Sous les Verrous*] presents Stania as disregarding his warning not to get mixed up with Hubner, her Fordian protector. Furthermore, he hints that if it wasn’t Hubner it would have been someone else; “so many dogs after an easy prey”. He even charges her with having been too lazy to fetch some papers from his office which he needed to plead extenuating circumstances. And he suggests that after his discharge from prison Stania pressures him to rejoin the Foreign Legion, in order to have free play with her lover. When he refuses, she betrays him to the Foreign Police and he is expelled from France without a passport. Though at the end of his story Jan van Leeuwen is still obsessed by his wife, the moral of *Barred* is clear: Stania is a bad lot. (“Gloomy Child” 44)

The difference in the representation of Rhys’ character between the one in *Quartet* and the one in *Barred*—the “watered-down version of an even more merciless portrait in *Sous les Verrous*” (“Gloomy Child” 44)—is easy to notice. But probably more important becomes the strange cases of translation that afflict Lenglet’s *Sous les Verrous*. Lenglet produces a write-back to make his version of the affair heard against the already on air version of Rhys. But after Rhys re-writes it in her translation and cuts down the aggression directed at herself in the narrative, strangely, Lenglet accepts it, owns it and while presenting the Dutch version adapts chiefly the heavily toned down and edited version in English made by none other than the person the work has been directed at. The issues of point-of-view and representation surely take a hit by that, because in the Dutch version, *In de Strik*, as in *Barred*, the point-of-view is not expressly that of Lenglet’s. In another influential essay “Jean Rhys and the Dutch Connection”, Hollander brings to our attention a sensational article published in *De Haagse Post* in 1977 which claimed that Edward de Neve wrote part of Jean Rhys’s work and
published many of her stories under his own name. The last claim proves to be true. Hollander has shown it to have really happened in the case of a collection of short-stories called *Aan den Loopenden Band* published in 1934. Several stories of Rhys including some episodes from *Quartet* appeared in this collection with different names. Although Lenglet’s second wife, Henrietta van Eyk, co-authored *Aan den Loopenden Band*, not a word was spent on the collection’s connection with Rhys, though van Eyk had a considerable literary relation with Rhys. Rhys, when enquired much later, denied having given any permission for using her works in *Aan den Loopenden Band*. But a statement issued by Jean’s daughter, Marryvonne Moerman, two years after the death of Rhys, gives a plausible explanation to the confusion, opening up a new horizon for interpretation:

That fragments and episodes should be verbally almost identical is not astonishing. After the Ford episode their [Rhys and Lenglet’s] literary collaboration was considerable...The financial situation of both was quite miserable. Jean Rhys was very generous and more than once wrote short pieces that Ed. de Neve would then publish under his own name. On the other hand, Ed. de Neve supplied her with themes during the “Hudnut” period. (qtd. in Hollander, “Dutch Connection” 166)

The statement, if received at its face value, offers implication that may easily confuse the issues of writing back between Rhys and Lenglet, as they seem to have frequently collaborated in writing. Hollander counters Rhys’s character-representations by questioning her representation of Lenglet in *Quartet*. She offers adequate information on the war-time exploits of Lenglet to reverse the image thrust upon him in his literary representation as Stephan, who served prison terms for ‘theft’ in *Quartet*:

Moreover, whatever the truth of these charges [that sent him to the French prison] may have been, they fade in comparison with the unanimous praise accorded to
Lenglet for his anti-Fascist stand in the thirties and forties. Untiringly, courageously, and at great personal cost he traveled and worked, as a journalist, a secret agent, a resistance worker, in Civil War Spain, in pre-war Germany, and in the occupied Netherlands, until he was arrested in 1941 and spent four years in German concentration camps. (“Dutch Connection” 162)

All these evidences and arguments, when taken into account, lead us to a state of uncertainty, asking us not to trust even what is usually considered to be a trusting a literary representation. It may be safely said that the fictional representations—whatever the message their writers intend to embed in them—are more matters of perspective than of truth or reality. The question that seems to be important in such a context is whether it is the very form of fiction that leads to the failure in representing a real-life character in literature. We can have the answer to this question if we examine other literary works on the Quartet phase which are, however, non-fictions—life-writing texts, to be specific.

Novel might have allowed Rhys, Ford and Lenglet the free space the arena of fiction is accustomed to offer. But as it appears from the earlier discussions, freedom—instead of opening up possibilities—has rather led to grossness and crudity. Stella Bowen was luckier, in this respect, not to have fiction in her inventory. Being a painter, she relies on memoir to offer her side of the affair. It is probably the restraining properties of non-fiction that make Stella Bowen’s account much more sophisticated and subtle in execution. This is how Stella recounts the backdrop of the affair in her Drawn from Life:

Four years before this, Ford had fallen in love with a very pretty and gifted young woman. He had got over it in due course, but the affair had taught me many new
things. It cut the fundamental tie between himself and me, and it showed me a side of
life of which I had had no previous knowledge. (166)

Stella is so subtle that she does not even name Rhys in her account of the affair. This is how
Stella presents the character of Rhys:

The girl was a really tragic person. She had written an unpublishably sordid novel
of great sensitiveness and persuasiveness, but her gift for prose and her personal
attractiveness were not enough to ensure her any reasonable life, for on the other side
of the balance were bad health, destitution, shattered nerves, an undesirable husband,
lack of nationality, and a complete absence of any desire for independence...She had
a needle-quick intelligence and a good sort of emotional honesty, but she was a
doomed soul, violent and demoralized. She had neither the wish nor the capacity to
tackle practical difficulties. She nearly sank our ship! (166)

Unlike Ford in When the Wicked Man, Stella does not attack Rhys racially; rather she subtly
makes her the class-Other of the bourgeoisie:

She took the lid off the world that she knew, and showed us an underworld of
darkness and disorder, where officialdom, the bourgeoisie and the police were the
eternal enemies and the fugitive the only hero...She regarded the law as the as the
instrument of the “haves” against the “have nots” and was well acquainted with
every rung of that long and dismal ladder by which the respectable citizen descends
towards degradation. (166-67)

Textually, Stella’s account of setting Rhys on her feet shows resemblance to Elspeth’s
description of Lola’s poverty already mentioned above:
When we met her she possessed nothing but a cardboard suit-case and the astonishing manuscript. She was down to her last three francs and she was sick.

...She lived with us for many weeks whilst we tried to set her on her feet. Ford gave her invaluable help with her writing, and I tried to help her with her clothes. (166)

However the reciprocity of emotion between Rhys and Ford, quite contrary to the fictitious account of Notterdam, is unambiguously acknowledged:

I was singularly slow in discovering that she and Ford were in love. (166)

It has to be pointed out here that mostly due to the shortage of other empirical evidences like letters etc., critics and biographers show an over-dependence on Stella Bowen’s account for having a factual history of the Quartet-phase as Bowen’s work is the only so called non-fictional account of the Quartet affair. The theoretical misstep in assuming Bowen’s account as final for being a memoir, however, needs to be discussed in more detail and will be taken up later on.

Arthur Mizener’s biography of Ford Madox Ford, The Saddest Story (published during Rhys’s life-time in 1971), does commit the same mistake of assuming Bowen as absolutely correct and factual. Mizener tries to give an explanation for Ford’s adulterous affairs in the following terms:

...he [Ford] found the sympathy of an attractive woman necessary to the dramatization of himself as the unjustly suffering man.
...his need for a sympathetic feminine audience, and the unique intimacy the sex act creates worked together to involve him sexually with many women. (177)

And Mizener considers Rhys to be one in this long tradition of Ford’s women. In Mizener’s version, hers was only a minor relation though, among others of such type:

These impulses can be seen during the development of his most serious relations with women, with Elsie Martindale, with Violet Hunt, with Stella Bowen, with Janice Biala. They are equally evident in his less serious relations, with Mary Martindale and Jean Rhys. (178-79)

Although, apparently, Mizener seems not to be ready to attach much significance to the Ford/Rhys affair, or for that matter to Rhys even, Sheila Kineke has pointed out an interesting contradiction in Arthur Mizener’s work. Ironically, the paperback edition of Mizener’s biography uses Rhys’s name on the back cover as marketing strategy:

“Mizener skillfully dissects the many messy affairs with women like Jean Rhys.”

Although, as the copy hints, Rhys was but one of a dozen women Ford carried on affairs with and although some of those women (including Violet Hunt) were at least at one time as well known as Rhys, in something of a reverse of prefatorial politics, hers is the name that marks his book as worthy-to-be-read. (298)

Interestingly, Mizener offers very little authentic research on the affair and mostly describes it by quoting either from Drawn from Life or from Quartet. He locates the affair in about 1924, a period when Ford’s Transatlantic Review finally collapsed: “At the same time, he got himself involved in an unfortunate affair with Jean Rhys” (345). He endorses Rhys’s portrayal of Ford as Heidler in Quartet and Stella’s description of Rhys in Drawn from Life. About Ford he says, “As a wooer, Heidler sounds very like what we know of Ford ...” (346).
This tendency of Mizener to describe the Ford/Rhys affair by picking up similar incidents from either Quartet or Drawn from Life clearly shows that Mizener did not have enough historical evidence to narrate the affair. Although the biography is extensively researched otherwise and includes formation based on evidence, when it comes to describing the Ford/Rhys affair, Mizener’s work turns as blind as most other life-writing works on this phase are. This accounts for Mizener’s unexplainable faith in Quartet and Drawn from Life in narrating the roles and characters of Ford and Rhys respectively. Rhys strongly reacted to the accounts of the affair given by Mizener. But as is usual with Rhys, the expression of anger was private and literary, and in no way public. Her reactions were noted in her Green Exercise book. This is how she records her experience when she read Mizener’s book for the first time:

[I] shut the book flung it to the end of the bed determined to take it back to the library. I put the light out but I couldn’t sleep… I got the book again looked at the index read about my fictitious daughter my attacks on Ford the ‘allowance’ paid by Ford and Stella (Stella I suppose)... I got up still in a furious rage. When I thought here is no one to say these are obvious lies and tears came into my eyes. (Rhys qtd. in Kineke 282)

As has often happened with Rhys, writing a traumatic feeling down probably lessened the grief in Rhys, and so she wrote her reaction to Mizener’s ‘lies’ down in her Green Exercise Book, without bothering to publish it in any form. Writing it down had done its therapeutic job probably.
Bowen’s biography, *Stravinsky’s Lunch*, however, puts more importance on the Ford/Rhys affair:

In the autumn of 1924 a young woman called Ella Lenglet had turned up at the review with an interesting manuscript. Since leaving Dominica at sixteen, she had worked in various desultory jobs, including as a chorus-girl. Unhappily married, she’d lost two children; her son had died in infancy and her daughter had been taken into care. She was thirty-four when she arrived in Paris (three years older than Stella) and, judging from photographs, rather alluring in a vulnerable, needy kind of way. (83)

Significantly Modjeska shows distrust in Rhys’s account of the affair in *Quartet* and at the same time finds Bowen’s account in her memoir handicapped by insufficient details:

It is not entirely clear when the affair began. Jean Rhys has left a melodramatic and unreliable account of it in *Quartet*; Stella gave few details, and her dates in *Drawn from Life* don’t always match other parts of the record. (83)

Modjeska questions the self-portrayal of Rhys in *Quartet* in a more violent way:

*Quartet*, on the other hand, is a novel of revenge. If Stella was reticent about the details, Jean Rhys had no such scruples. She shafts Stella in an unflattering portrait of the self-satisfied bourgeois wife, ‘just sitting tight and smiling’. Ford is presented as an ageing seducer who isn’t even a good lover. But these unpleasant portrayals are overshadowed by the casting of herself as victim, ‘huddled … as if there were a spring broken somewhere’. As Marya, she says she hates men for the way they reduce women to ‘sob stuff, sex stuff’ with their ‘hard greedy eyes’. And yet she claims to be in love with a man before whom – in her own imagery she abases herself as a dog before its master. (85)
Modjeska, however, does not find contradiction in Bowen’s self-portrayal in *Drawn from Life*, but significantly she highlights the most vital aspect of Bowen’s memoir, her relative silence on Rhys/Ford affair:

She wrote a memoir of such skill that it takes several readings to realize that on crucial points—and this [Rhys-Ford affair] is one of them—she was saying very little. (85)

In fact, Modjeska’s suspicion is not unfounded at all. Sue Thomas points out that Rhys’s unpublished manuscript, titled “L’Affaire Ford”—a reaction to Mizener’s biography—resented that “Bowen’s omissions distorted the truth of her account” (Thomas, “Adulterous” n.pag).

Though it seems that Modjeska has spared Stella of the charges of a faulty self-portrayal (like she does in case of Rhys), others have not. In the introduction to the immensely important book, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen* (1992), a collection of letters written between Ford and Stella, Sondra J. Stang, one of the editors of the book, highlights Bowen’s tendency to evoke self-pity, a tendency attributed generally to Rhys and Ford only:

Bowen’s *Drawn from Life* is as generous and fair an account of her life with Ford as it was possible to be. Even so, her interpretation of the failure of their marriage (she had certainly regarded their relationship as that) is contradicted in important ways in these letters. The almost daily record in March 1923, with Stella in Italy, provides a counterweight to Bowen’s claim that she was submerged in Ford’s career. The evidence that Ford repeatedly urged her to take the opportunity to stay on
in Italy with the Pounds and learn what he felt she needed to learn about early Italian painting (he had written three books on painters and painting) suggests that it was her habit of self-abnegation and her fundamental doubts about her powers as an artist that may have hampered her development rather than Ford’s needs. The letters provide plenty of evidence that Ford, understanding her want of confidence, tried to foster, rather than erode or exploit it. Her tendency to put herself second to Ford and her inevitable resentment may have contributed to their final separation as much as Ford’s interest in other women, which Bowen was willing to overlook. (xiii–xiv)

If Modjeska is lenient on recognizing the prejudices in Stella, Staley is more direct in observing that Stella’s “published reminiscences provide a one-sided and hostile but contemporary view of Jean at the time of her relationship with Ford” (Jean Rhys 11).

Although indulgent on the account of Bowen’s self-pity, Modjeska does not forget to mention one literary commonplace of the time: the practice of dragging real life characters of literary arena to fiction. Even Hemingway, another one to have Ford as mentor for a while—does the same in The Sun Also Rises (1927) by representing Ford and Stella in a way that hardly glorifies them. Hemingway’s representation of Stella is especially harsh, as he “took her as a model for a crass, loud-mouthed insensitive Canadian called Mrs. Braddocks” (Modjeska 85).

The revelation about Hemmingway’s dig at the Ford couple is extremely vital in this project, because the effect of the dig was—as acknowledged by Stella herself in a letter—similar to the one produced by Rhys:
I have read Hemingway’s book – It seems pretty good. I like that hard clean sort of effect – but I think it gives also the effect of brittleness – or is that all nonsense? It is also rather dazzling & tiring. He has touched me off rather nastily – rather on Jean’s lines – So I feel very discouraged! Even you don’t quite escape. Still it’s all of no consequence. (Stella, Correspondence 316)

Stella has been known for her restraint and her reaction to what one of Ford’s protégés has done proves only Stella’s celebrated sophistication, although the disappointment does not remain hidden in this quoted letter, and more importantly, Stella connects the impact of The Sun Also Rises to the effect of Rhys’s novel.

In fact, as a man of his time Ford drew literary attention quite frequently. Judith Kegan Gardiner in her essay “Rhys Recalls Ford: Quartet and The Good Soldier” (1982) writes: “Ford appeared as Merton Densher in James’ The Wings of the Dove and as The Bulpington of Bulp in Wells’ novel of the same name” (80). Stella’s remark made in the context of Hemingway’s work, however, holds the key in this context as it highlights the futility of literary representations without any doubt. Literary representations of historical personages may hurt those persons who are represented, but certainly, they could hardly be relied on in terms of truth or fact. Acceptability or consensus, as if, as an inevitability, eludes all endeavours that entail such hazards; and in cases of write-backs (like the ones we are dealing with in this dissertation) revenge emerges as one of the many motivations behind these works. No wonder that most of these novels bear the risk of becoming artistically failure. Quartet makes Rhys acknowledge that “it is angry and uneven” (Letters 171) and When the Wicked Man is just summarily discarded by critics as one of Ford’s most forgettable literary efforts. But what emerges from the analysis of Quartet in the previous chapter and When the
In this chapter is the discrepancy in the representation of the characters like Rhys and Ford in particular. Representation of Rhys in Rhys’s own writings is hugely different from Ford’s representation of Rhys as Lola Porter in *When the Wicked Man*. This creates a confusion in determining which literary representations are to be believed and which are to be discarded as unreliable.

The prospect of failure for any autobiography or autobiographical writing in coming to terms with truth or reality is, perhaps, rooted deep in its generic assumptions/structure. In its concluding part, this dissertation will, therefore, address this issue of the theoretical impossibility of reaching ‘truth’, ‘fact’ or ‘reality’ through life-writing. In so doing it will also try to examine the validity of the distinction ‘life-writing’ texts claim from its literary cousin, fiction.
Notes

1. Paul Delany in his article “Jean Rhys and Ford Madox Ford: What ‘Really’ Happened” looks at the Ford/Rhys affair “through the eyes of Stella Bowen because her text, Drawn from Life, is the only one that claims to give a strictly factual account of the relations between herself, Ford and Rhys”(17). Mizener also describes the Ford/Rhys affair chiefly by describing it from Stella’s memoir. Angier shows similar tendency of over-relying upon Bowen’s account too.
Works Cited


Thomas, Sue. “Adulterous Liaison: Jean Rhys, Stella Bowen and Feminist Reading”.