Conclusion

As this dissertation has so far shown, critical writings on Rhys’s fiction have a heavy bias towards considering Rhys’s fiction as autobiographical in nature. Critics, in most of the cases, it seems, have undermined the fact that there is not enough factual material available on Rhys’s life to support the autobiographical method of criticism. It has also to be noted that possibly as a reflection of the scarcity of materials on Rhys’s life there are not too many full-length biographies of Rhys as well. Striking also is the fact that the two well-known biographies of Rhys, Angier’s Jean Rhys: Life and Work (1990) and Lilian Pizzichini’s The Blue Hour (2009), appeared with a gap of nearly twenty years, and even then the latter one does not fulfil its promise of filling up the gaps left by Angier in her work. Pizzichini’s The Blue Hour—as shown in Chapter I—is, indeed, found short in originality and has been considered as indebted to Angier’s work. Autobiographical criticism on Rhys, as already shown, actually does three things: it a) finds echoes from Rhys’s life (principally from Angier’s account of Rhys’s life) in Rhys’s fiction, b) identifies characters from Rhys’s fiction as real characters of Rhys’s life and, most importantly, c) finds almost all of Rhys’s protagonists in her fiction to be literary representations of Rhys herself. These tendencies in critics are exemplarily amplified while evaluating Quartet, because it is a self-proclaimed roman-a-clef on the Ford/Rhys affair. The four principal characters of this novel (the four who constitute the ‘quartet’)—Marya, Heidler, Lois and Stephan—are readily identified as Rhys, Ford, Bowen and Lenglet without an adequate examination of the authenticity of Rhys’s representation. In fact, it seems that to some critics Quartet even becomes more a factual record of the Ford/Rhys affair (an affair which hardly has enough historical evidence for a detailed appraisal of the events associated with it) than a fiction. That is why perhaps Angier freely draws from the novel to fill the gaps in her narrative on Rhys’s life, and, as a
result, Angier’s biographical representation of the affair (from where again critics draw; a vicious cycle really!) becomes as much fictitious as *Quartet* as a work of fiction itself is.

Critics, indeed, remain undeterred in delineating Rhys’s character from *Quartet*. The simplistic method that critics use in finding Rhys and her life out in her fiction and in her biography seems lacking in the methodological complexities of life-writing, which—as we have seen earlier—is a discipline that accommodates, among many other things, the study of autobiographical fiction of the type Rhys writes. The dissertation, that is why, in Chapter II took up the task of elaborating upon the history and critical theories of life-writing for assessing and interrogating the existing criticism on Rhys’s writing (autobiographical criticism of Rhys, to be specific) from a proper perspective. Chapter III of the dissertation has examined in detail Rhys’s scattered comments on the autobiographical nature of her fiction and has exposed the gaps and contradictions in those comments just to make us suspect the so-called ‘autobiographical’ nature of Rhys’s fiction. In the same chapter it has also been shown that some of Rhys’s own comments have been contradicted by Rhys herself: especially in one of her personal essays “Making Brick without Straw”, Rhys seriously questions the authenticity of some of her own interviews taken by others, putting in doubt the contextuality as well as the veracity of some of the crucial and oft-quoted remarks made by Rhys in such interviews on the autobiographical nature of her fiction.

It has also been shown that the female protagonists of Rhys, even if accepted as true representations of Rhys, appear to be too soft and too vulnerable in comparison to the other characters of her fiction. It also seems that the reasons for their misfortune and suffering are
almost always projected onto others. A close examination of Rhys’s character portrayal brings out another aspect of Rhy’s characterization. She seems to be abnormally harsh to the characters other than her heroines, characters who are usually seen by critics as literary representations of real-life characters. In fact, even if we accept Rhys’s fiction to be autobiographical, the heavily prejudiced mode of representation employed by Rhys to represent the ‘self’ and the ‘others’ in her fiction makes us again suspect the critics’ claim about the exactitude in the self-representation of Rhys in her fiction. Rhys’s consistent effort at shielding her female protagonist from bearing any responsibility for her failure in coming to terms with her life and her (Rhys’s) strategy of shifting the blame onto ‘others’ who are presented as either roguish or hard-hearted or cunning in nature confirm the doubt the literary representations of different real-life characters in Rhys may not be as authentic as many consider them to be. It has been, for example, shown in Chapter IV that the character of Marya in Quartet stands always in contrast to the two main adversaries of hers in the novel—Heidler and his wife, Lois. Marya is always sad, soft, devoid of the least amount of cunning essential for survival; whereas, Heidler and Lois are strong, hard, clever persons and are even hypocritical. In contrast to Marya, they are armed with all the faculties needed for survival. In the context of Rhys’s representation of the Quartet phase, this double standard applied by Rhys in characterization not only makes us suspect the authenticity of her representations of the other characters involved in the affair, but also propels us to examine how Rhys and the ‘other characters’ are represented by the so-called others themselves in their works.

That is why Ford’s When the Wicked Man, Bowen’s Drawn from Life and Lenglet’s three versions of the affair, Sous les Verrous, Barred, In de Strik, have been examined minutely in Chapter V. This examination has really turned out to be another revelation for us.
as it shows that the representations of Rhys by others are equally unreliable for different reasons. Ford, for instance, very much like Rhys, tries to protect his own ‘self’ by showing others responsible for what happened in that scandalous affair. Lola Porter (who is supposed to be Rhys in Ford’s *When the Wicked Man*), that is why, turns out to be a caricature, an unconvincingly negative character all the way. Similarly, Lenglet’s representation of Rhys cannot be relied upon as it goes on changing from text to text. The representation of Rhys in *Sous les Verrous*, for instance, gets challenged by the representation of Rhys in *Barred*. Stella’s memoir *Drawn from Life* too has even been questioned by her biographer, Modjeska, for its strange silence about some of the important issues of the *Quartet* phase. Rhys also expresses her reservations against the way Stella, by leaving some crucial information out of her account of the affair, misrepresents what actually happened. Rhys’s reservation, in fact, is another way of expressing her strong disapproval of Bowen’s representation of her (Rhys’s) ‘self’ in *Drawn from Life*.

Thus, a detailed examination of the representation of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase in her own fiction and in the writings of others leads us to a point where i) Rhys’s avowal of the autobiographical nature of her own fiction appears to be in a state of uncertainty, ii) the representation of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase in her own fiction cannot be trusted for the bias that Rhys has shown towards her heroine in *Quartet*, and iii) the representations of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase in the writings of others involved in the *Quartet* affair seem equally untrustworthy for their mis/incomplete representation of Rhys. The incomplete nature of Rhys’s biographies in this regard has already been pointed out. All the sources, which are supposed to offer an idea of the coherent ‘self’ of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase, having thus
been discarded, the possibility of tracing the coherent ‘self’ of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase in literary works undoubtedly gets nullified.

Given the concerns of the contemporary theorists on life-writing (which we have discussed in Chapter II), the elusiveness of the coherent ‘self’ of Rhys is, however, neither unexpected nor extraordinary, as theorists have, time and again, seen the autobiographical project of representing the ‘self’ as destined to meet failure. We should not forget how Shari Benstock was sceptical about the success of autobiographical writing in negotiating with selfhood. “If the autobiographical moment”, writes Benstock in her essay “Authorizing the Autobiographical”, “prepares for a meeting of ‘writing’ and ‘selfhood’, a coming together of method and subject matter, this destiny—like the retrospective glance that presumably initiates autobiography—is always deferred” (11). In fact, the attempt of achieving the self-knowledge autobiography or autobiographical writing aims at achieving ultimately “ends in the creation of a fiction” (Benstock 11). Paul de Man in his essay “Autobiography as De-Facement” has similarly pointed out the elusiveness of the self in autobiographical writing by arguing that the autobiographical self is a linguistic construct, and hence, by the interplay of tropes is linguistically displaced, turning thereby the autobiographical writing into an epitaph, because “[d]eath is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament” (de Man 930). In fact, we should not forget that the very notion of the existence of a coherent ‘self’ has been contested by the poststructuralist thinkers. Lacan, for instance, holds that the ‘self’ one thinks to have is nothing other than the subject’s fantasy created out of the cohesiveness of a reflection in a mirror. In fact, along with Lacan, many others—such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida—“in different ways undermined the assumptions of humanism and posited instead a
divided subject, debarred from self-knowledge by the unconscious or by language”

(Anderson 17).

The most significant work on the literary representations of Rhys of the Quartet phase, Paul Delany’s essay “Jean Rhys and Ford Madox Ford: What ‘Really’ Happened”, talked about the multiple representations of the Quartet affair from different—and even contradictory—perspectives. Delany, however, did not all together dismiss the possibility of a recovery of the past. This dissertation has unquestionably made us realize that what ‘really’ happened in the Quartet affair is actually beyond recovery. What has been imagined to be the coherent ‘self’ of Rhys is fictitious, if not nonexistent.
Works Cited


