Introduction

I

On March 17, 1974, eight years after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), A. Alvarez in an article in *The New York Times Book Review* declared Jean Rhys to be “the best living English novelist” (6). “Although her [Rhys’s] range is narrow”, Alvarez wrote in that article, “sometimes to the point of obsession, there is no one else now writing who combines such emotional penetration and formal artistry or approaches her unemphatic, unblinking truthfulness” (6-7). The publication and subsequent success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* undoubtedly brought Rhys (whose life was otherwise burdened with poverty, struggle and depression) considerable recognition, as the novel led her to win the Royal Society of Literature Award and W.H. Smith Award in 1966. She was, in fact, made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in the same year and a CBE one year before her death.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is certainly the work upon which rests the current reputation of Jean Rhys. Even in India, most of the English departments in universities across the country have included this novel in their syllabi. Unfortunately, the academia tends to overlook Rhys’s mastery over the genre of short story and does not even bother much to look back beyond the last World War for a period in Rhys’s life that saw the production of not only a collection of short stories (introduced and patronized by Ford Madox Ford), *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), but also four extremely well-written novels in the modernist tradition: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). In fact, with the beginning of the World War II in 1939 Rhys literally vanished from the literary scene: all her books went out of print. At that time, she, indeed,
disappeared from the literary scene in such a way that many thought Rhys had died sometime during the war. After a gap of twenty-seven years, in 1966, Rhys came back with *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It was after the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that all her inter-war novels were re-published by *Andre Deutsch* and people started taking some interest in them.

Rhys started, as already hinted at, getting critical attention since the 1970s. An overview of the critical works on Rhys in the following section will show that a significant number of these works have tried to show Rhys as an autobiographical writer. Critics really seem to have been influenced by one of Rhys’s own remarks that she wrote “about what happened”, that her books though are not “entirely her life—but almost” (qtd. in Plante 52). Undue emphasis on such stray remarks of Rhys—the authenticity of most of which cannot be verified—has led to the creation of a myopic view on Rhys: instead of reading Rhys from multiple perspectives, critics, it seems, have remained busy in trying to find Rhys out in her fiction. This dissertation seeks to examine the validity of such a claim that Rhys could be traced in her works. For doing so, this dissertation will be particularly interested in Rhys’s first novel *Quartet*, as this work happened to be the cause of the appearance of three other works that dealt with the story of *Quartet* from three different perspectives. *Quartet* tells the story of a tangled love-affair between four real-life characters one of whom, critics believe, is Rhys herself. After the publication of *Quartet*, the three others who were involved in the affair, also decided to follow Rhys and wrote back to the novel by giving their versions of the affair in their respective works. Among these other three who wrote back to *Quartet* was Ford Madox Ford who received a harsh treatment from Rhys in *Quartet*. As Ford was one of the most important literary figures of Modernism, Ford’s representation in Rhys’s novel immediately drew attention of the contemporary literary circle to *Quartet* and Rhys got
known to all eventually. Ford could not digest what Rhys wrote about him in *Quartet* and retaliated by writing a novel *When the Wicked Man* (1932) where he made a caricature of Rhys in the character of Lola Porter. Ford’s common-law-wife, Stella Bowen, another of those real-life persons who were involved in the love-quartet, wrote about the affair in her memoir *Drawn from Life* (1941). Jean Lenglet, a half French and a half Dutch writer, who was Rhys’s husband at the time of the *Quartet* affair, gave his version of the affair in his French novel *Sous les Verrous* (1933), which was then translated into English as *Barred* (1932)² by none other than Rhys herself. Ford’s biographer Arthur Mizener, Rhys’s biographer Carole Angier, Bowen’s biographer Drusilla Modjeska—all commented on the affair as well as on the four characters (Ford, Rhys, Bowen and Lenglet) involved in the affair and it is interesting to note that the comments of these biographers often contradict each other. That is why while trying to find out how much of Rhys herself of the 1920s (that was the period of the *Quartet* affair) is present in her works, the dissertation will also try to understand how much of Rhys is present in the other literary works that portrayed Rhys of the 1920s as well. In short, the dissertation will try to examine whether the construction Rhys of the *Quartet* phase—or, for that matter, whether the construction of any historical persona—out of the fictional and non-fictional works including biographies and autobiographies is at all possible. In order to know whether anything has been done on what this dissertation aims at doing, a brief look at the existing body of Rhys-criticism is needed. The following section, therefore, will try to give a brief overview of the critical writings on Rhys.

James’s *Jean Rhys* offers a reading of Rhys’s fiction focussing on her Caribbean identity. Staley’s *Jean Rhys* sees in the novels of Rhys an internal chronology of events that describes, as if, the development of a single female-heroine. Wolfe’s treatment, although offers a wholesome view on Rhys’s fiction, includes an erroneous reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as Wolfe fumbles with many a detail of this novel. Nebeker studies sexuality and psychology in Rhys while keeping her focus on Rhys’s use of myth. Her study depends considerably on Freudian theories of psychoanalysis. Harrison’s *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women’s Text* is a feminist examination of Rhys’s craft as a novelist, where Harrison begins by holding that “women’s novels in this century seemed to be more directly autobiographical than are men’s
Harrison reads Rhys to find out whether “a woman’s writing” is “different from a man’s” (xv). While examining this issue, Harrison offers “not only an interpretation of Jean Rhys’s work but also a description of what she does when she writes” (xv). Sue Thomas’s *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* locates Rhys by focussing on “Rhys’s Worlding as a Dominican” (3). In her study, Thomas explores the issues of place and race in Rhys, as she “examine[s] Rhys’s negotiations of Dominican autoethnographic expression in finding a female white Creole speaking/writing position in her stories” (4). Veronica Marie Gregg in her *Jean Rhys’s Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* criticizes the notion of a “composite heroine referred to as the Jean Rhys woman” (3), an approach the employment of which has suggested that Jean Rhys was engaged in prostitution, was paranoid, and even was the cause of the death of her infant son who died because of the lack of proper maternal care (3). *Disintegrating Psyche* by Huma Javed Subzposh tries to probe into the psychology of Rhys’s characters to explore the dilemmas and traumas of the female-protagonists of Rhys.

Though there are not many full-length books on Rhys, there are innumerable numbers of essays written on Rhys. For having a brief overview of these essays, this dissertation will divide them into four sections. The first section will comprise essays on Rhys’s short stories. In the second section will fall criticism of Rhys’s inter-war novels other than *Quartet*, i.e., *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*—novels which are dominated by protagonists whom Francis Wyndham calls Rhys’s “composite heroines” (qtd. in Owen v). All these heroines have similar traits like alcohol dependence, destitution, parasitic dependence, fatalism and lack of will; they also are the denizens of a dark world where women are always hunter and hunted simultaneously and are ill at ease
with their tragi-comic plight. The third section will consist of criticism on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys’s *magnum opus*. Critical writings on *Wide Sargasso Sea* show how critics have attempted to address the post-colonial, racial and feminist issues along with the more subtle nuances of centre-margin, power-subject, and male-female relations embedded in the novel. The fourth section of this overview of Rhys-criticism will focus on critical writings on *Quartet*, which demands this extra emphasis as this dissertation seeks to examine the literary representations of Jean Rhys of the *Quartet* phase.

Although Rhys was a master of short story writing, her short stories have remained the least-discussed among her works. Rhys’s short stories have been mainly discussed in books dealing with larger issues or groups of writers. For example, Savoury’s *Jean Rhys* devotes an entire chapter on Rhys’s short stories, titled “Brief Encounters: Rhys and the Craft of the Short Story”, and *A Reader’s Companion to the Short Story in English* edited by Erin Fallon *et al* includes a chapter on Rhys written by Paul Kotrodimos. These chapters and essays on Rhys’s short stories mainly examine Rhys’s presentation of “the chaotic, terrifying, psychologically debilitating nature of the female postcolonial and expatriate” (Kotrodimos 358) and also address the autobiographical nature of her stories.

Essays on Rhys’s inter-war novels, in a similar way, attempt to dissect Rhys’s composite heroines from psychological, socio-economic and feminist perspectives. These attempts in essence are based on the conviction that “[a]lthough each novel centres upon one woman, the four individuals [the protagonists of Rhys’s four inter-war novels] are manifestations of the same psychological type…” (Mellown 104). Critics, who have read Rhys in this light, have
attempted to explore and explain ‘this psychological type’ by employing several psychoanalytical theories of the present era, with this deep-rooted belief that a successful analysis of the complicated psychology will provide the vital clue to explain the reasons of the incomprehensible suffering that the heroines of Rhys undergo. Addictions, psychological derangements like schizophrenia, fragmentation caused by the socio-political milieu are seen as some of the reasons behind the odd mental make up of the Rhys protagonist. Such criticism addresses the issues of alcoholism in Rhys’s inter-war novels and, as stated, offers valuable insights into her heroines’ psychology. In one such article “‘As Soon as I Sober Up I Start Again’: Alcohol and the Will in Jean Rhys’s inter-War Novels” (2006), Jane Nardin holds that “these novels suggest that women drinkers might choose addiction and refuse a recovery that would only return them to the predicament against which they were protesting in the first place” (46). Nardin suggests that “she [the heroine of Rhys] probably suffered from two mental disorders, depression and Borderline Personality Disorders, that are associated with alcohol dependency” (46). George Wedge in his article, “Alcohol as Symptom: The Life and Work of Jean Rhys”, () observes that forty-two percent of pages from Rhys’s early novels contain at least one reference to alcohol (qtd. in Nardin 46). In “‘New Words, New Everything’”: Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys” (2005), Maren Linett focuses on “Rhys’s characters’ powerlessness as a function of trauma” and observes that “with their polyvocal, nonlinear narration, often presented through interior monologues, novels such as Voyage in the Dark and Good Morning, Midnight exemplify modernist fragmentation while intimating a deeper sense of pain and loss than most accounts of such fragmentation acknowledge” (437+). In “Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys” (1979), Elizabeth Abel makes a similar effort to understand the heroines of Rhys with the help of psychoanalysis. According to her “in addition to her [Rhys-heroine’s] obvious passivity, she manifests several specific symptoms of schizophrenia: impoverished affect,
apathy, obsessive thought and behavior coupled with the inability to take real initiative, a sense of the unreality of both the world and self, and a feeling of detachment from the body” (156). Abel says that although the heroines of Rhys “experience the world as a hostile environment and lead lives of isolation, detached from family and friends, unable to establish real contact with others”, they are not insane and “they fall rather into the category sometimes referred to as ambulatory schizophrenia and sometimes as the schizoid state” (156). John J. Su in his review of Anne B. Simpson’s book Territories of Psyche: The Fiction of Jean Rhys (2005) brings to the fore the primary argument of Simpson’s book: the futility of judging Rhys’s fiction with the help of Freudian psychoanalytical theories, because the Freudian conceptions are “notoriously based on male models” (Su 208). Simpson in her book Territories of Psyche: The Fiction of Jean Rhys (2007), in fact, begins with an expression of Sympson’s conviction that “psychoanalysis as a body of thought still offers the most powerful theoretical paradigm to date for exploring the complexities of emotional life as these are expressed in literature as well as life” (12). Simpson, however, holds that the Freudian conceptions of psychology being heavily based on male-models, fall inadequate in explaining Rhys, who “in contrast, demonstrated a consistent preoccupation with mother-daughter dynamics from her first novel, Quartet (1928), to her fifth and last, Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)”. Sympson, therefore, thinks that in order to “appreciate the complexities of emotional experience that Rhys conveys, one needs to draw on “alternative traditions of psychoanalysis that are not exclusively Freudian” (Su 208). Simpson, like Abel, emphasizes the role of psychologists like Melanie Klein, Joan Riviera, and D.W. Winnicott in providing the conceptual resources needed to understand the obsession of Rhys’s female protagonists with their mothers (Su 208). Simpson, in explaining Rhys, uses terms like good/ bad breasts, masquerade and transitional objects. Significantly, Simpson’s work tries to establish a stronger tie between Rhys’s inter-war novels and Wide Sargasso Sea by addressing the
“thematic concern with abandonment” (Su 209). Simpson holds that “Rhys’s last novel is linked to her earlier work in its interest in maternal figures and the ways in which anxieties of abandonment continue to haunt individuals into adulthood” (Su 210).

In “‘Doesn’t that Make you Laugh?’: Modernist Comedy in Jean Rhys’s After Leaving Mr Mackenzie and Good Morning, Midnight” (2009), Laura Wainright points out that “Rhys explores and experiments with the very notion of comedy itself in a way that challenges both social and literary conventions” (48+). Wainright quotes Katherine Streip who thinks that ‘women can provide models for comedy, but … cannot themselves produce comedy. A funny woman can only exist as the object of humour, not its subject” (48+). To substantiate her point, Wainright also quotes Frances Gray, who suggests that “comedy positions the woman not simply as the object of the male gaze but of the male laugh—not just to-be-looked-at but to-be-laughed-at-doubly removed from creativity’” (48+). Wainright’s article is actually based on Gray’s assumption that “to define a joke, to be the class [or group] that decides what is funny, is to make a massive assumption of power” (qtd. in Wainright, 48+).

If, Nardin’s and Wedge’s articles focus on the effects of addiction on the psychology of the Rhys-heroines, Linett’s and Abel’s essays apply psychoanalytical theories to the Rhys-heroine to seek explanation behind the suffering of the heroine. Su’s review also adds to the psychoanalytical school of criticism that tries hard to solve the riddle of gloom that shrouds the protagonist of Rhys. Wainright’s article, however, does not try to see the reason of suffering as innate in the Rhys-heroine; it rather sees the formation of her character as a result of the complex power-play in society, or as a result of some of its discursive practices. Rhys-
criticism—it must be said—has included considerable methodological variety in bringing out the challenging thematic and stylistic ingredients of Rhys’s novels. Rishona Zimring in her essay “The Make-up of Jean Rhys’s Fiction” (2000), for instance, has explored the use of make-up in the early fiction of Rhys. She finds “two cosmetic tendencies” in Rhys’s fiction of the 1920s and 1930s: one is “an aesthetic flaunting of make-up surfaces” and the other is “a melancholic repetition of make-up rituals that attempt and fail to offer real consolation for the strains of modern urban life” (215). Zimring analyses Rhys’s fiction to show that in Rhys “the cosmetic mask is a means” used “to display, exaggerate, and distort the construction of modern femininity” (Su 220). However, despite the high quality and quantity of the essays written on Rhys’s inter-war novels, the fact remains that Rhys’s inter-war novels are the less popular works of Rhys, and are still read by not many because of the refinement that they demand on the readers’ part.

What emerges out of the entire discussion we made so far on the critical writings on Rhys’s inter-war novels is the fact that Rhys’s heroines are often seen as a single psychological type and—as it is commonly believed that Rhys’s novels are based on Rhys’s own life—her heroines are also considered to be based on Rhys herself. The following remark by Katie Owen in her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Quartet, perhaps best reveals an uncritical reception of the simplistic belief that before Wide Sargasso Sea whatever Rhys wrote was nothing other than a fictionalization of her life itself:

All Rhys’s material for fiction, until Wide Sargasso Sea, her inspired prequel to Jane Eyre which gained her belated commercial success in 1968, was her own life, up to and including the period which she wrote about in Quartet. Rhys often said that nearly everything she wrote was, to an extent, autobiographical. (v)
The tendency of reading Rhys as an autobiographical writer is also present in the writings on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This novel, of all the five novels of Rhys, however, has received maximum critical attention and as a result of this, perhaps, critical writings on *Wide Sargasso Sea* show a significant variety and richness.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is different from the other four novels of Rhys in several aspects. The two major concerns of this novel—imperialism/colonialism and raciality—for instance, are significantly less visible issues in Rhys’s pre-war novels. Besides, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has an intensity hardly ever found in its preceding works. Early critical writings on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, instead of engaging with these issues were mainly focused on exploring the intertextual relation of the text with—to use Gerard Genette’s term—its ‘hypotext’, *Jane Eyre* (Hawthorn, 182). Michael Thorpe is one of the earliest critics to take this issue up. In “‘The Other Side’: *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*,” (1977) Thorpe exposes the inadequacies in Bronte’s text, especially, highlighting the coarse, racially tinted assumptions on madness (173-174). Kenneth Ramchand, on the other hand, in his “The Place of Jean Rhys and *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (1999) has discussed the placiality of the novel. He deals with the essential question of what makes a novel a West Indian novel and what makes a novelist a West Indian novelist. To prove that *Wide Sargasso Sea* should be Ramchand a West Indian novel quotes a West Indian commentator, Wally Look Lai, who considers *Wide Sargasso Sea* considered a West Indian novel as in it the West Indian setting is not simply a backdrop to but also an integral part of the novel: “It is not that it provides a mere background to the theme of rejected womanhood, but rather that the theme of rejected womanhood is utilized symbolically in order to make an artistic statement about West Indian society, and about an aspect of the West Indian experience” (qtd. in Ramchand182). It is not only the landscape,
according to Ramchand, that is typically West Indian, but the language in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also “has an authentic ring to the West Indian’s ear” (184). In fact, the tension in the narrative, according to Ramchand, is produced by the inability of Antoinette’s English husband to accept the White West Indian woman’s “attachment to the landscape of her birth” (184).

Wilson Harris has produced an interesting study on the mythological motifs in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. His essay “Carnival of Psyche: Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (1999) takes its cues from the tribal mythologies of the strife between the Caribs and the Arawaks and adds a whole new dimension to the already richly symbolic texture of the novel. He reminds the readers that the “food-bearing tree of the world, in Arawak and Macusi legends, reaches to heaven across forgotten ages”, but in those legends ultimately “the tree is fired by the Caribs at a time of war when the Arwaks seek refuge in its branches”. As a result of this, the Arawaks are burnt and “converted into sparks which continue to rise into the sky to become the Pleiades” (189). Harris points out that the “fire-motif” persistently “runs through the entire fabric of the novel” and that there is “the re-dress of mad Bertha into new burning constellation of Antoinette in the sky of fiction” (189). “There”, Harris writes, “Antoinette turns round and sees ‘the sky – the tree of life in flames’. ‘It was red and all my life was in it’” (189).

Sandra Drake in her article, “Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematics of Liberation in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (1999) reads *Wide Sargasso Sea* from the perspective of raciality/Caribbean identity pointing out the fact that *Wide Sargasso Sea* “is also a historical
novel, whose central issue is textualized in the portrait of Antoinette Cosway” (194). The central issue of the novel, Drake thinks, “is the abolition of European plantation slavery and the transition—or failed transition—to some other set of social relations that would constitute a viable Caribbean identity” (194). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Wide Sargasso Sea and a Critique of Imperialism” (1999), approaches one of the most intriguing aspects of the novel—the dislocation of Antoinette and reads it as “an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer” (243).

_Quartet_, on which falls the primary emphasis of this dissertation, in comparison to the other three inter-war novels of Rhys, seems to have received significant critical attention. In fact, Thomas F. Staley in his essay, “Style in _Quartet_” (1978), considers Quartet to be “an initiator of “most of the major themes that preoccupy Rhys’s later fiction” (205). In Staley’s assessment of the novel both the strength and weaknesses of the novel are significant from the point of view of Rhys’s development as a novelist. According to Staley, _Quartet_ “reveals not only the discovery and tone which was to characterize and define her fiction throughout the 1930s; it also records the beginning of what was to become that distinctive style” (“Style in _Quartet_” 205). He also concurs with the critical commonplace that _Quartet_ creates “the paradigmatic Rhys heroine, who with only slight transmutation will appear in all her fiction of the 1930s” (“Style in _Quartet_” 205). Staley, however, alerts the readers of _Quartet_ about its deceptive “economy of language and directness of style” which along with the apparently constricted world of the heroine “can lead us to underestimate the range, depth, and quality of feeling in her work”, obstructing from our view “her narrative focus and technique” that
“offers a dramatic, human portrait of the female consciousness in the modern world” (“Style in Quartet” 224).

As Quartet is (or is labelled as) a roman-a-clef, a significant number of critics have written on the autobiographical nature of this work—on Rhys’s representation of herself as well as of several of her contemporaries. Most of these writings, however, seem to have failed to do justice to the uniqueness of Rhys’s so-called representations of real life personages. Staley, just a year after producing the essay we discussed above, came up with a book Jean Rhys: A Critical Study that we have already discussed briefly. This book has a chapter on Quartet, but in that chapter also we notice hardly any effort aimed at seeing through the representations of the real life characters the novel made. He seems to follow the common critical method of character analysis and for him “Stephan is the embodiment of male weakness and self-pity”, whereas, “Heidler is a kind of incubus projection of the male species in his dominance and abuse of the female” (Jean Rhys 54). Heidler is the enforcer of the code or rules of the game which Marya refuses to play in the end. “Lois”, in the eyes of Staley, is someone who “accepts the world of artificial rather than natural feelings” to play and remain within the masculine code of the game, and as a result becomes almost “a dehumanized accessory, who must play the servant’s role at best, and at worst, the pimp” (Jean Rhys 54). Lois is made, in Staley’s assessment, “an aggressor toward her own sex” (Jean Rhys 54). Even when the characters’ relation to life is established, the pattern found and highlighted by critics seems all but facile. Elaine Savoury, one of the very known critics on Rhys, describes “[t]he four actual people fictionalized as the novel’s “quartet”’’ as “all creative people” among whom Ford was “the major-domo of Anglophone writers in Paris in the early twenties”. The impact of this pattern, in Savoury’s terms, is that it heightens “the
reader’s attention to the artistry of the novel, since its story is about the interaction of people who practice, appreciate or sell art” (Jean Rhys 34). Katie Owen, in her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *Quartet*, as already hinted at, restricts herself to the task of just pointing out the connection between the fictional characters and people who are supposed to be their real life counterparts. “For Heidler”, she writes, “read Hueffer, Ford’s name until he changed it in 1918”, and “[t]he other members of the quartet, Marya, Stephan and Lois, are fictional re-inventions of Rhys, of jean Lenglet, her first husband, and Stella Bowen, Ford’s common-law-wife” (vi). Owen clearly chooses not to delve deep into the politics of representation as she keeps her trust in only one account of the affair and even seems not to bother to critically examine the other representations of the affair and takes them at their face value. For instance, Owen considers Bowen’s description of Rhys in her [Bowen’s] memoir to be fair enough: “Bowen’s description of Rhys’s character seems fair, given what we know of Rhys’s life” (xi). In fact, given the very little we know about the life of Rhys, Owen should have done better than taking Bowen’s account at face value. Owen no doubt represents that school of criticism which encourages and fosters the stereotypical representations of Rhys. It has to be admitted here that there have been—though not many, yet some—critical works which have tried to unearth the layers of complexities embedded in the Ford/Rhys affair. Paul Delany, Martien Kappers den Hollander, Thomas C. Moser and, more recently, some others like Annette Gilson, Sue Thomas and Sheila Kineke have approached the issue from different perspectives. But even then, a survey of the works of these critics shows that the critical attention paid to the *Quartet* phase of Rhys’s life is, as said earlier, incommensurate with the magnitude of its literary and critical significance and, hence, calls for more research.
In one of the earliest attempts of solving the mystery of the Ford/Rhys affair, Paul Delany examined the issue of factuality in the literary representations of the affair in the *Quartet*-texts. In his important essay “Jean Rhys and Ford Madox Ford: What ‘Really’ Happened?” (1983) Delany admits how the “scarcity of direct evidence” makes his task really challenging: “Historical evidence of the connection between two writers is very skimpy; literary evidence is plentiful, but the very multiplicity of texts bearing on the affair makes the ‘truth’ of it more elusive” (15). Delany makes a choice of six texts to “demonstrate the extreme and inescapable textuality of the Ford/Rhys affair” (16). These six texts are Bowen’s *Drawn from Life*, Rhys’s *Quartet*, Lenglet’s *Sous les Verrous*, Rhys’s translation of it as *Barred*, Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915—a novel some think to be the original on which *Quartet* is based) and *When the Wicked Man*. But like several of the other commentators on this episode, Delany too betrays a bias towards Bowen’s work, because he thinks that “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). Delany’s logic behind putting Bowen above others is anything but literary—“Ford was a near-pathological liar, Lenglet had a criminal record to conceal from the French authorities and Rhys’s work suggests that lies are, for women, a justified means of defense against male oppression” (17). However, Delany’s bias towards Bowen’s memoir does not lead him to profess absolute trust in any of these texts. Rather the productions of these texts are seen by him as an “endless struggle for personal and collective justification” where “text contends with text”, as “it takes one nail, always, to drive out another” (23). Delany concludes with a call for “our most careful, serious attention” to the “making and reconciling of stories”, and this specific example of the Ford/Rhys affair, to him, “suggests that we should examine more closely the foundations of those truths that we daily take for granted” (23).
Delany's call for minute observation of these texts—narrating in one way or the other the same doomed love-affair—is justified. In fact, the maze of inter-textual relationship that invests the literary side of the Ford/Rhys affair with extraordinary complexity has been coming before the critical eye ever since the publication of Delany's article. Martien Kapper den Hollander has worked extensively on this affair. Her essay “A Gloomy Child and its Devoted Godmother: Jean Rhys, Barred, Sous les Verrous and In de Strik” (1984) draws attention to the complexity of the three versions of Lenglet's story of the affair. Lenglet wrote his version of the affair in French as Sous les Verrous which was translated into English by Rhys herself. Later, Lenglet chose to translate his story into Dutch; but strangely enough, not from his French original, but from Rhys's translation, Barred. den Hollander shows in her analysis how in translation the point-of-view changes and along with it change the representations of the characters. den Hollander, in fact, has written another essay on the affair, “Jean Rhys and the Dutch Connection” (1984), where she has further probed into the literary tangle—it is more a tangle than a collaboration really, because much of it is unrecognized, refuted or denied by either of the participants—between Rhys and her first husband Lenglet to highlight how inseparably the literatures of these two are attached. den Hollander’s access to all the three languages Rhys and Lenglet spoke and wrote in, indeed, gives her a unique position to offer commentaries on the subject.

attempts to “point out that to a limited extent it is possible to read the male characters in Rhys’s modernist novels serially as well” (633). By tracing a continuation in the male-characters of Rhys, Gilson actually wants to draw our attention to an obsessive tendency in Rhys to attack her previous mentor, Ford constantly. The presence of this “continued resentment and hostility toward her former mentor” makes it possible for Gilson to employ “D.W. Winnicot’s psychoanalytic theory of transitional objects” (633) in reading Rhys’s fiction. Transitional objects—in Winnicot’s theory—are a part of the mechanism that helps the self “to develop a real relationship with people and objects outside herself” and “to experience him or herself as authentic” by learning “to see her environment as something external to her” (634). Transitional objects “are neither outside the individual, nor a part of her; rather they exist as subjective objects, essentially extensions of the individual that exist in her imaginative world”. In fact, “in order to enter the real world, where other beings are as real as the self”, writes Gilson, “the individual must fantasize the destruction of the transitional objects” (634). According to Winnicot, Gilson further writes, “this fantasized destruction exists in a place he terms potential space, a kind of third realm that is located neither within the child (or her subjective identity), nor in the external, “real” world” (634). Gilson thinks that “for a writer the novel functions as a site of this third or transitional realm” and that “Ford himself functioned as a transitional object for Rhys” (633). Gilson’s article thus makes a vital contribution to Rhys-criticism in terms of understanding the psychological motivation behind the literary representations of real life persons in Rhys’s fiction. But, certainly, it does not examine the authenticity of these literary representations, as studying the motive behind them has been the task it assigned for itself.
Sue Thomas in her essay “Adulterous Liaisons: Jean Rhys, Stella Bowen and Feminist Reading” (2001) has also written on the Ford/Rhys affair questioning its literary representations as well as critical reception. This essay counters Modjeska’s “bestselling and multi-award-winning brand of contemporary Australian feminism” which offers an uncritical valorization of Bowen’s racialized and classed othering of Rhys in *Drawn from Life* (n.pag.). She doubts the way “*Drawn from Life* has been granted extraordinary credibility by biographers of Ford and by Carole Angier, Rhys’s award-winning biographer” (n.pag.). Thomas pertinently points out that “Bowen’s racial and class othering of Rhys remains unread or underread in biographies that draw heavily on it as a source” (n.pag.). Carole Angier, Rhys’s biographer, in fact, mentions Thomas C. Moser’s *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford* (1980) as the first work to have dealt with “this tangled affair” (*Jean Rhys*139). Moser offers an analysis of *When the Wicked Man* and traces possible literary representations of Ford-Conrad and Ford-Marwood affairs in the novel. In the women characters of the novel he deciphers the presence of Stella Bowen, Rene Wright and Jean Rhys. But Moser uses hardly any factual evidence in support of his assumptions.

The search for literary representations of Rhys in her fiction as well as in the writings of others has also unearthed other possibilities. For example, Judith Kegan Gardiner’s 1982 essay “Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*”, institutes an intertextual connection between *Quartet* and Ford’s *The Good Soldier*. Gardiner considers that *Quartet* has “two main sources that are ironically juxtaposed” (67). The first of these two sources is Rhys’s own life and the “other source for *Quartet* is the world of Ford’s own fiction” (68). Gardiner considers *Quartet* as Rhys’s effort to make it “a countertext to Ford’s”, especially “his exemplary masterpiece about adultery, *The Good Soldier*” (69). The thematic similarity
lies in the point that “[i]n both books an impotent foreigner is cuckolded by his sluttish wife, who has an affair with an English ‘gentleman’” (69). In terms of character-representation, Gardiner thinks, “Heidler and Ashburnham are both patterned after Ford” and women of the two novels have several models: “Ford’s first three ‘wives’, Elsie Hueffer, Violet Hunt, and Stella Bowen, sat for Leonara and Florence of *The Good Soldier* and Lois of *Quartet*, while Rhys herself becomes Marya” (70). However, according to Gardiner, there has been significant departure in *Quartet* from Ford’s novel so far as issues of sexual politics are concerned as “*Quartet* attacks the double standard upon which *The Good Soldier* rests” (72). Most importantly, in Ford’s novel the narrator’s bias toward the adulterous male, Ashburnham, is subverted by making the nearly villainous adulterous wife “the centre of narrative consciousness” in her novel, (72) and thereby producing an intertextual rewriting of Ford’s novel.

III

The brief overview of the critical writings on Rhys attempted above makes it amply clear that the volume of critical works on Ford/Rhys affair and its literary representations is greatly insufficient. And even in the existing works hardly any attention has been paid to the politics of representation. Delany’s article perhaps is an initiating attempt at addressing the complexities of the *Quartet*-phase in Rhys’s life. But Delany is principally concerned with the factuality of the Ford/Rhys affair or with what he calls “What ‘Really’ Happened”. Delany, it seems, does not realize the full potential of the multiple literary representations that
results from the Ford/Rhys affair as his sole concern is in determining the 'truth' of the incidents and not in exploring their other implications. That is why possibly he restricted himself to writing an essay instead of producing a full-length work. A meticulous examination of the multiple representations of the Ford/Rhys affair, Delany even believes, might help recover the past:

This is not to say that the past is beyond recovery, that biography is not worth writing, or that the conduct of other people cannot be judged. (23)

It is, one may say, the misrepresentation or the lack of critically aware representation of this phase of Rhys's life that provokes to read the life and work of Jean Rhys interdependently with this conviction that the life in essence directs towards a 'self' that has a shape or form and thereby can be found/traced in the 'work' (implying writing), especially because that work is said to be based on that life or, in other words, is considered to be autobiographical. But whether it is at all possible to grasp a 'self' which has neither coherence nor a form, has not been properly explored in the context of Rhys's life and works. Contemporary studies on life-writing, however, by highlighting the elusiveness of the 'self', have addressed this issue in such a way that compels us to have a fresh look at the question of the creation of Rhys's 'self' not only out of her own but also of the works of others where Rhys is thought to be represented. This dissertation is a modest attempt at that. It will, in short, try to examine whether on the basis of a study of the literary representations of Rhys of the *Quartet* phase the recovery of the 'coherent self' of Rhys of the 1920s is indeed possible.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I offers the traditionally accepted version of Rhys's life with a special emphasis on the *Quartet* phase and also gives a brief summary of
her works which are usually related to her life. This is done deliberately only to examine later on the authenticity of that version which is usually accepted as the version of Rhys’s life. The second chapter of the dissertation historicizes ‘Life-Writing’ as a theoretical discipline as it, precisely, is the theoretical paradigm for this work. Chapter III, by drawing from several sources like memoirs, recounting conversations with Rhys, interviews given by Rhys, Rhys’s personal essays etc., examines the validity of Rhys’s own claim that her novels are almost her life. The fourth chapter of the dissertation examines the literary representations of Rhys in her own fiction with a special emphasis on the representation of the Quartet phase to see how much of Rhys is really present in her own writings. Chapter V of the dissertation examines the literary representations of Rhys and also of the Quartet phase primarily in the writings of Ford, Bowen and Lenglet, persons who wrote back to Quartet. The concluding chapter to the dissertation will examine whether the creation of the coherent ‘self’ of Rhys of the Quartet phase—or, for that matter, the creation of any coherent ‘self’—out of literary representations is at all possible.
Notes

1. Such comments by Rhys are sometimes contradicted by what Rhys herself said on other occasions. She was also not at all happy with the way sometimes her comments made in certain interviews were interpreted by critics. Chapter III will examine this issue in detail.

2. Rhys translated from the MS of Sous les Verrous. Incidentally Rhys’s translation of Lenglet’s novel came out in 1932, a year before Lenglet could publish his original, Sous les Verrous, in 1933.
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