Chapter I : Introduction
Chapter I

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation, as its title indicates, is to analyze the problematic nature of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness,’ and the cultural as well as the emotional dilemma of the women protagonists in the novels of Jean Rhys. Jean Rhys, whose life and writing career coursed through immensely complicated contours spanning several spatial locations and cultural spaces, was exposed more to the feeling of ‘homelessness’ than to the feeling of ‘belonging’ to a particular home/house, place or culture. She lived in different countries and continents for many years, went through diverse experiences that later appeared in camouflaged versions in her works. She grew up as a Creole in the midst of black people in the colonial environment of the Caribbean islands; later, after coming to Europe, she initially experienced a culturally rich but personally arduous and emotionally tumultuous life in France, followed by a dull and unsatisfying span in England. Rhys's experience was not that of a 'rooted' life, one that is safely ensconced in the norms of a stable social and cultural community; it was, on the contrary, an unstable life carried forward by the spirit of a renegade whose mental stability and sanity was often questioned. In discussing the literary contributions of an artist like Jean Rhys, it is most necessary to contextualise her works in the personal and the contemporary socio-cultural settings that might have
left their impact on her. It is also essential to probe into her associations with intellectuals, artists and novelists of the time who assembled in different cities of Europe, particularly Paris, which was then the hotbed of the new modernist spirit. Rhys’s unsuccessful attempts to ‘emplace’ herself in new cultural and emotional sites, to find stability in relationships and thereby to explore the chances of ‘home-making’ render the physical and the psychological problems of ‘homelessness’ particularly acute. This homelessness, Helen Carr suggests in her work *Jean Rhys* (1996), is the terrain in Jean Rhys’s fictional works which deal with persons belonging nowhere, and living between cultures and histories. Carr, however, does not probe into this particular aspect, as her main focus in the work is on the critical reception of Rhys. This dissertation is partly inspired by Carr’s observation. A survey of critical works on Rhys undertaken later in this chapter reveals that this area has not been adequately explored by critics. Hence, attempts have been made in this dissertation to investigate how Rhys treats the issue of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ in her novels.

In such a context, it is imperative to discuss the range of senses in which the terms 'home' and 'homelessness' are interpreted in the critical parlance. It is also obligatory to probe into the rites and rituals of securing 'homeliness' which are performed by the subjects and the psychological signs and gestures they demonstrate. Since this issue merits critical elaboration, an exclusive chapter entitled “Theorizing ‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’” (Chapter II) is developed after the ‘Introduction.’ Rhys’s own cultural-locational dilemma in the realization of ‘home’ and her ‘unhomely’ experience is explored in Section I of this chapter. Section II reviews the existing literature on Rhys’s works available to a research scholar located in a ‘third world’ country like India which has just started opening up to a 'globalised world' order. Section III of this chapter introduces the chapter plan of this dissertation. Each chapter
will focus on certain thematic aspects of ‘home’/‘homelessness.’ Although critics and researchers have touched upon, rather perfunctorily, some aspects of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ in Rhys’s works, on which this dissertation will concentrate, no one has dealt with it comprehensively, encompassing all the novels she wrote during her tempestuous lifetime.

I

The condition of ‘homelessness’ can result from voluntary forsaking of home as well as forced expulsion from a place of familiarity. During the period of high modernism, writers like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound had voluntarily renounced home. On the other hand, instances of forced dislocation occurred during World War II for people who sought political refuge and exile. This ‘exilic consciousness’ is fairly evident in the works of authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Vladimir Nabokov, Gabriel García Márquez and Ariel Dorfman. For Jean Rhys, the crisis of home was much complicated. A Creole by birth, Rhys lacked traditional ‘roots’ even in the Caribbean islands. Technically, Dominica, in the West Indies, was her ‘homeland’ but the Caribbean identity is, in itself, complex and heterogeneous. Plurality of cultures resulting from ethnic admixture in the islands gave rise to the dilemma of an individual as to how and where to situate his or her own self and those of the others. A brief glance at the history of the islands will reveal that the dilemma has its roots in colonialism and slavery. The British abolished slavery from their colony in the Caribbean islands in 1834 and the French followed suit in 1848 but the sense of the fractured identity continued to haunt the people of that country. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for instance, depicts such a situation in the 1830s of the post-
emancipated Jamaica and Dominica. Rhys, nourished in the Creole culture of the Caribbean islands, was also influenced by its diversity and fluidity. Edouard Glissant, a Martinican critic, focusing on the variegated cultural assimilation in the Caribbean islands, first theorized the concept of antillanité or ‘Caribbeaness’ in his book Le discours antillas (1981). It was based on a geo-political discursive approach and offered a contestation of the existing discursive practices in the French Caribbean islands to the question of the dependence of the island and the metropolitan domination therein. Murdoch explains Glissant’s theory in the following way:

By taking cognizance of the “multirelation” that undergrids the region, Glissant writes, a new creative and cultural framework for Caribbean identity can be effectively constructed. In coming to terms with “the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization” in the Caribbean...its intrinsic doubleness will reveal “not only distress and loss but also the opportunity to assert a considerable set of possibilities...no longer in absolute terms but as active agents of synthesis.... (252)

Glissant, thus, gave emphasis on the interactive and synthetic relationship between multiple cultural identities that have gone into the making of a cohesive Caribbean identity. The idea of créolité, on the other hand, was explained first by Jean Barnabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in their book Eloge de la créolité (1989). This theoretical idea quickly became a very prominent one in the Caribbean islands. As Murdoch points out, the book addressed itself to, and was also about, the Creoles, and it took the tone and voice of a political manifesto: “We cannot reach Caribbeanness without interior vision. The interior vision is nothing without the
unconditional acceptance of our creoleness. We declare ourselves Creoles. We declare that creoleness is the cement of our culture and that it ought to rule the foundations of our Caribbeanness” (qtd. in Murdoch 253). The book has been viewed by Murdoch as an “artistic framework that draws on linguistic, cultural and historical patterns of pluralism within the region to express the interconnected totality of the Caribbean experience” (Murdoch 253). As Michael Dash notes, “Créolité is essentially a strategic defence of the ideal of diversity in a world threatened by the disappearance of cultural difference” (qtd. in Murdoch 253; emphasis original). Although, the two theories go by different labels, the core focus is on the historical experience in the Caribbean islands, the multiplicity of the Caribbean culture and its interactive values.

Edward Braithwaite, the Barbadian poet and historian, in The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770 – 1820, opined that the cultural distinctness of the region should be discarded and the socio-cultural pluralism of the islands should be encouraged. Creole population was a minority and there was a constant decrease in the population. Murdoch notes that Orlando Patterson in his survey mentions that in Antigua in 1678 the ratio of white to black was almost equal, it being 2,308: 2,172. However, in 1775, the whites were only 2,590 while there were 37,808 blacks. Murdoch further points out that in 1861 Paget Henry declares the ratio of the whites further decreased after the Emancipation and twenty years later there were 1,795 whites and 27,219 blacks. Frequent cultural admixture between the whites and the blacks had already formed the hybrid Creole culture here.

Creole is a fluid term that emphasizes cultural assimilation. It refers to persons who are born and naturalized in the country but who belong to either European (usually French or Spanish) race or to African race. It refers to persons who are born and naturalized in the colonies but are either European (usually French or Spanish) or
African in their origin. Specifically, the term “Creole” denotes the descendents of colonizers who were born and brought up in the colonies. John Holm elucidates:

The origin of the term creole is.... Latin créare 'to create'....

crioulo,... came to mean an African slave born in the New World in Brazilian usage. The ...meaning was then extended to include Europeans born in the New World.... The word finally came to refer to the customs and speech of Africans and Europeans born in the New World. It was later borrowed as Spanish criollo, French créole, Dutch creol and English creole.” (9; emphasis original)

The term by itself does not have any colour bias. It carries ethnic, linguistic and cultural connotation, and, accordingly, distinguishes one born in a colony or having ancestral connection with Europe or Africa from the aboriginal. A Creole might be black or white, East Asian, colonial or metropolitan. The Caribbean ethnocultural ‘Creoleness’ provides multiple sites of, and strategies for, doubling, differentiation and dislocation of the self on the cultural and the performative planes. Cultural amelioration is not only between the European and the African traditions but also between varied traditions of several African ethnic groups differing in languages and cultures. It is this racial intermixing and cultural assimilation that characterize a Caribbean Creole.

Although the ‘Creoles’ had no association with colour, they were nonetheless classified, according to the colour of their skin, into the black and the white. As Preziuso notes, “the white Creoles whose skin colour has historically prevented to be fully welcomed by the blacks,” were in a problematic situation because “their ‘naturalization’ in the Caribbean has hindered an unproblematic inclusion in the West.
They could ‘pass’ in both spaces, but nowhere fully” (par. 6). Mardorossian similarly observes, “While the white Creoles are torn between a residual “white bias” and a vague feeling of guilt that makes them assume a paternalistic attitude towards the ex-African people, the black Creoles refuse to let their differences from the ex-planters be subsumed” (1084). The white Creole woman was also different from the white European woman. There was a European fear psychosis about the Caribbean islands and their cultures were often stereotyped. Many official and historical reports speak of the degeneration of the whites in the tropics. For instance, Lady Nugent wrote in the beginning of nineteenth century from Jamaica that on their arrival, the Europeans of “the upper ranks... become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything but eating, drinking and indulging themselves” (qtd. in O’Callaghan par. 8). She feels that it was worse with the white Creoles who had traces of white culture in them: “The white creole ‘ladies’ seem... a stupid lot... happiest when disputing or gossiping... or discussing goods with the shopkeepers... and maintaining their household ‘in the Creole style’: that is, with numerous black servants ‘running and lying about’” (qtd. in O’Callaghan par. 8). Frances Lanaghan feels that they were frivolous because of their association with the blacks. As she notes: “[white Creole] girls of fourteen could find no other amusement than, seated upon the floor, amid their negro attendants, to pass their time in eating “sling” [wet sugar], or sucking sugarcanes, while their listless mothers lay stretched upon their couch, leaving their children to learn their alphabet as best as they could” (qtd. in O’Callaghan par. 9). The Creoles were thus in a desperate condition – they were despised by the blacks for being the representatives of the colonial rulers and for having the traces of their ancestral culture. On the other hand, the whites from England and the mainland Europe hated them for their association with the black people.
Jean Rhys experienced such a problematic cultural location throughout her own life. She was a fourth generation Creole on her mother’s side. She was the fourth surviving child of William Rees Williams and Minna Lockhart and was born in the islands of Dominica. Her Dominican name was Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams. Rhys’s name, interestingly, was an amalgamation of two dead girls – Ella, her mother’s sister who had died earlier and Gwen, her mother’s baby daughter, who had passed away nine months prior to Rhys’s birth. Angier mentions that the pseudonym, Jean Rhys, under which her works were published, might have been given by Ford Madox Ford. However, Martien Kappers-den Hollander, probing into Rhys’s Dutch connection, states that after she married Jean Lenglet, Rhys concocted her literary pseudonym from her husband’s nickname and that of her Welsh-born father and preferred to be known as Jean Rhys.

In the early 1830s, slavery and racial discrimination based on the skin colour were abolished. The Post-slavery era in Rhys’s writings, Gregg contends, is “a scene of crisis necessary to the rhetoric of self-figuration, a critical space fraught with the anxiety of origins and representation, with which the self stages its presence” (24). On the one hand, the white Creoles, who identified themselves with the western whites, were hated by the Black population; on the other hand, the Creoles were considered inferior and somewhat incomprehensible by the west. Rhys herself was too white for Dominica, too West Indian for England. She grew up with a belonging and identity entrapped between these political and cultural extremes. Her fondness for the black culture and her rejection of the white culture, which she considered to be snobbish and cold, are evident in her novels as well as her unfinished autobiography Smile Please. She journeyed to England in search of acceptability and improved prospects but there she also met with disillusionment. The unstable situation in post-War
Europe caused further emotional turmoils within her. Europe, at the same time, was a centre of modernist movement and a cauldron of cultural activities, propagating the spirit of bohemianism. Rhys began writing in a period which saw the insipient elements of modernism gradually taking shape and finding expressions. She had been writing her diaries where she recorded her experience of Paris life. The novels sprung out from the notes in her diaries. Paris was at that time a very important metropolitan centre, a hotbed of intellectual activities and innovative creative impulses, a centre of bohemianism which was gradually corroding the foundational values of the European life. Major Anglo-American and European writers, artists, musicians, painters interacted regularly at this seat of experimentation. Rhys's contact with this world had also influenced her life and writings. Herself a kind of a bohemian, moving from place to place, she had this artistic spirit embodied in her fictional world. A keen sense of fragmentation and rootlessness characterizes this world. The scope for a stable life, a 'still centre,' is not ruled out by Rhys but it continues to elude her women protagonists. Therefore, her protagonists move relentlessly searching for a centre; this 'waiting' for something tangible but elusive is a characteristic feature of Modernism. But Rhys's own approach to Modernism is ambiguous. On the one hand, she seems to be in favour of a conventional life; on the other, she represents her women protagonists' as unconventional, fragmented and modernist in their ways. In her personal life, as Angier observes, she conforms to conservative values. She notes: "Modern women want their own independent lives and souls – and these were the last things Jean wanted. From beginning to end, dependence was her way of life" (15). This seems to be quite unusual, rather ironic, since her female protagonists are very unconventional, as shall be discussed in the chapters dealing with her novels. Cultural and social codes in Europe lay shattered by the two great Wars. Midori Saito observes
that the war-torn Europe, especially France, became ‘negrophile,’ looking towards the black culture for inspiration and consolation. Influence of the black culture on Europe will be briefly discussed in Chapter IV. Simultaneously, the non-Europeans were also marginalized. As Terkenli states: “The overwhelming resurgence of racism and xenophobia in Europe is only one such frightful instance in which the dialectical relationship between home and nonhome becomes apparent” (333). Rhys articulates her anxiety and frustration about the prevailing socio-political condition of Europe which had already witnessed two World Wars and had also experienced the great economic depression. This had a great effect on her own generation. This will be discussed in some details in Chapter IV entitled “‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’ in the European Novels of Jean Rhys.”

Rhys’s life consisted of broken relationships and acute financial crisis. This, perhaps, had also created in her an acute sense of homelessness. Rhys’s familial life was not very happy in their Creole household. Her autobiography Smile Please registers that she loved her mother. But although her mother was industrious, she was detached and unresponsive to the child’s gestures. Rhys loved her Granny and Great-aunt Jane but they were seldom together. They lived in Geneva while Rhys stayed in Roseau. The Black Exercise Book, which contains some of the unpublished events of Rhys’s life, records an incident of molestation which greatly affected her. In her teens she had been assaulted by one of her mother’s friend Mr Howard, an English gentleman, who was seventy-two or seventy-three years old. She had failed to communicate it to her parents as they were detached from her. Though Rhys had later confided the incident to her mother, she was not believed, on the contrary, she was forced to accompany him. She further recollects: “My father never seemed to notice us at all, far too engaged in either abuse or praise of various English policies”
(Smile Please 72). In her Creole family Rhys had been clearly starved of affection and security. Moreover, her daughter Maryvonne was also estranged from her. After her divorce from Lenglet, her daughter remained with him and Rhys was allowed to pay occasional visits only. As the result, she could not bring up her daughter as she had dreamt she would. Moreover, with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, all communications with her daughter snapped, and there were no correspondences between the mother and the daughter until 1945. Lack of understanding led to unresponded affection. Maryvonne regretted that Rhys had isolated her in order to give more time to her writing. But Wyndham defends Rhys by commenting that her generosity and her capacity for love remained strong but she did not show much emotion. Even Diana Athill, Rhys’s friend and publisher, testifies in Guardian Unlimited that the mother-daughter relationship was not too smooth and grieves that Maryvonne could not take care of her mother at the fag end of the latter’s life. Athill reveals:

Jean loved her daughter, Maryvonne Moerman, very much; but she was no better at motherhood than she was at filling hot-water bottles, so when she hinted that she might move to Rotterdam, where the Moermans lived, Maryvonne panicked. She came to London, took me to lunch, and told me that although she would continue to visit her mother, and could be called on in emergency, she could not have her in Holland: ‘It would be the end of my marriage.’ So it was me, she said firmly, who would have to look after Jean. (par. 6)

It is ironical that Rhys who searched for homeliness throughout her life became a threat to her daughter’s home. Loneliness and insecurity made her seek consolation in writing as well as in drinks. Rhys did not like to socialize and lived in
isolation for a major part of her life. She frequented only one or two literary parties and so in her life she befriended only a few intellectuals – Ford Madox Ford, the American writer Evelyn Scott, Eliot Bliss, E. Morchard Bishop, Sonia Orwell, and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. Apart from them, she was also familiar with Rosamond Lehmann and Germaine Richelot. Though Ford helped Rhys to build up her literary career, her friendship with him and his wife Stella Bowen embittered. She was very fond of Evelyn Scott, hailed as one of the leaders of the American modernist movement for her poetry. Their relationship, also, turned sour later. Literary recognition, came to Rhys with the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W. H. Smith Award and this made her comment later that ‘the honor had come too late’ (qtd. in Frickey 1).

II

Multiple aspects which manifest in Rhys’s works draw much critical attention and lead to a variegated interpretation of her works. Most of the critics discuss her works from dominant perspectives; they, however, draw insights from more than one framework. For example, while some critics discuss her novels from the perspectives of geo-cultural identities like that of the Caribbean or the British, they also interweave the question of coloniality or postcoloniality or feminism into it. It is, thus, difficult to classify the critical receptions of Rhys’s novels in a neat and rigid fashion. Nevertheless, as Sue Thomas comments: “The paradoxes of Rhys's belonging in her world, of her protagonists' belonging in theirs, and of where Rhys fits in postcolonial, Caribbean, feminist, and modernist literary and cultural histories are staple themes of Rhys criticism and debate generated by and around her work” (2). In this section an
attempt will be made to classify critical opinions on Rhys into some categories for the sake of convenience. The division, however arbitrary it may be, will give some idea about the spectrum of the critical corpus on Rhys.

Quite a few writers have approached Rhys’s works from biographical perspectives, while most others have employed identity as the main critical framework. Discussion on identity has also embraced geo-cultural perspectives such as West Indian, Creole, even British. Quite a few critical writings also interpreted Rhys’s works from psychological/psychoanalytical perspectives. Some critics have also viewed her, rather unproblematically, as an English novelist. They were obviously influenced by Alvarez’s influential piece in *The New York Times Book Review* (17 March 1974), which classified her as the “best living English novelist” (7). A few critics have also attempted to make thematic and stylistic evaluation of Rhys’s works.

A close correspondence between the life and style of Rhys and those of her protagonists has led Carole Angier to attempt an autobiographical perspective of Rhys’s works. In her book *Jean Rhys* (1990), Angier offers a keen insight into Rhys’s sensibility, illuminating the story of a modern woman artist’s life. She observes that Rhys’s women protagonists are homeless and alienated, which add a modernist perspective to her works. But Rhys, in fact, “explored her own age, its mood and changes, almost by accident. What she set out to explore were her own personal feelings” (16). Thematically, her works are the expressions of her deepest experiences and feelings of love and rejection, hate and revenge, fatality and fear. While Angier interweaves the literary texts with the biographical facts, Wyndham offers a contesting view. In his “Introduction” to Rhys’s *Letters*, he recollects Rhys as ‘a fiercely private person who took no pleasure in publicity’ (9). He states: “She firmly
believed that an artist's work should be considered in separation from the facts of his or her life, even though the facts had provided the raw material for the work” (Rhys, *Letters* 9). That her works cannot be analysed exclusively from autobiographical point of view is borne by her own assertion during a conversation with Mary Cantwell:

> It’s hard to explain how, when and where a fact becomes a book. I start to write about something that has happened or is happening to me, but somehow or the other things start changing. It’s as if the book had taken possession. Sometimes a character will run away from me... and get more important than I intended. It happened beyond my will. But the feelings... the feelings are always mine. (Frickey 24)

More recently, in 2009, Lillian Pizzichini has also attempted a biographical study of Rhys. Although she depends on Angier for most of her primary materials, she writes about Rhys differently. She attempts a more ‘autographic’ approach to Rhys and tries to imagine herself in her situations, striving to make the readers feel the same. When Angier confuses Rhys’s life with her fictions, Pizzichini attempts a new kind of biography aiming to dispose ‘old foggyism’ found in the old school of biographers. It is, however, very challenging to make an autobiographical reading of Rhys as it is hard to make a clear demarcation between her life and her fictions. As Annette Gilson observes, the autobiographical components in Rhys’s fictions can only be determined by taking into consideration the issues related to gender, psychology and biography as they merge together in Rhys as the fiction writer. In this context, Lauren Elkin quotes Gilson: “Recent theorists of autobiography discuss the ways in which fiction interpenetrates texts that claim to represent the truth about the “I”; as a result, there is growing interest in hybrid genres such as the autobiographical fiction that Rhys
writes, generally termed 'autography' (par. 38). Martien Kappers-Den Hollander in his essay "Jean Rhys and the Dutch Connection" probes into her travel to Holland and her relation to Jean Lenglet as had influenced her writings.

Rhys’s strong desire for the Caribbean islands and her vivid portrayal of it in her works makes Rhys emerge as a Caribbean novelist. Teresa O’Connor, influenced by this view in Louis James’s book Jean Rhys (1978), makes a study of Rhys’s Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea as ‘West Indian novels.’ She excludes the other texts where the reference to the Caribbean is more suppressed. She thinks that Rhys’s writings expose the experiences of a child, of a woman and of a colonial in one voice. Veronica Marie Gregg in Jean Rhys Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing a Creole (1995) makes a historical survey of her life and works against three frames – historical narratives of the post-slavery period, the historiographical break between the 1930s and the 1960s and the movements that took place between 1960s to 1970s. She discusses the significance of Caribbean social revolts, the Second World War and the movements for independence in the colonized countries between 1930s and 1960s. Gregg feels that the analysis of these historical moments is necessary to understand and contextualize the structures of Rhys’s writings as that of a West Indian Creole. Even Elaine Savory in her book Jean Rhys (1999) takes a Caribbean-centric approach to Rhys and discusses the way it influenced her stylistically. She explores her stylistic innovations like her use of colours, her exploitation of the trope of performance, her experiments with creative non-fiction, and her use of humour. V. S. Naipaul in his essay “Without a Dog’s Chance: After Leaving Mr Mackenzie” suggests that reading of Rhys remains incomplete without a discussion of her affiliations to the island of Dominica. He further suggests in the New York Review of Books:
...she was outside that tradition of imperial-expatriate writing in which the metropolitan outsider is thrown into relief against an alien background. She was an expatriate, but her journey had been the other way round, from a background of nothing to an organized world with which her heroines could never come to terms.

This journey, this break in a life, is the essential theme of her five novels.... (54)

Kathleen Ochshorn in her essay “Of Woodlice and White Cockroaches: The West Indian Girlhood of Jean Rhys” also emphasises the importance of Rhys’s Caribbean childhood as it had influenced her works. Himadri Lahiri in his article “Interrogating Colonial Englishness in Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea” makes an interesting study of the concept of Englishness as is evident in the novel. The essay demonstrates how the political and cultural superiority of the British imperial power has been contested and subverted by Rhys.

The prominence given to the female characters in Rhys’s novels has naturally attracted quite a few critics. Mary Lou Emery, for instance, in Jean Rhys at World’s End: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile (1990) analyses Rhys from a feminist perspective. She also studies her Caribbean writings against the context of European modernism. Rhys, for her, is a writer of “plural and often conflicting outsider identities as West Indian writer, European modernist and woman writer at the closing of the era of empire” (8). She focuses on “the ways in which she occupied the spaces in between such identities” (8). She applies Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of internal dialogization arguing that dreaming, masquerading and masking are ways to disrupt and subvert traditional narratological structures. She also dismisses the fact that the
women protagonists in her fictions are the autobiographical accounts of her own victimization. She rather considers them as representations of the Caribbean females. Rhys's novels have also been discussed from the point of view of Mother-daughter relationship. Liz Gunner in “Mothers, Daughters and Madness in Works by Four Women Writers: Bessie Head, Jean Rhys, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ama Ata Aidoo” discusses the concept of ‘mothering and motherhood’ as is evident in the three writers. She demythologises the illusion of the colonial as the ‘motherland’ or ‘mothercountry.’ She links up the psychological disorder with the (m)othering that results from the experiences of colonialism. She writes: “The writing in of the self into the predominantly male canon by women writers has taken a number of forms among African and Caribbean women writers... but in a number of cases the triad of mothers, daughters and madness has formed a crucial element in the establishment of a woman's discourse” (139). Madness, she explores, is a “colonial disease” (139). This is evident in the case of the female protagonist of the Wide Sargasso Sea.
Deborah Kelly Kloepfer in “‘Voyage in the Dark’: Jean Rhys’s Masquerade for the Mother” sees the loss of the mother as the loss of the centre for the protagonist Anna. She mentions:

Voyage in the Dark operates in the canon like the "forgotten" images in dreams – the space, often, of greatest significance. Similarly, within the text itself, constituted of dreams, memories, and gaps, is a central absence... the space vacated by the mother, a mad, spectral, distracted, or dying figure around whom constellate some of the most significant moments, thematically and linguistically, of Rhys's texts. (444)
Sue Thomas in her book *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (1999) makes a feminist study of Rhys’s works. She inspects into the rebellious nature of her women protagonists. She implores into the gaps, silences and blind spots and attempts to recover Rhys’s voice. Apart from schizophrenia which questions sanity as society sees it, she also investigates into the reasons for the emergence of the deviant categories of women such as the prostitute, or the insane as they figure in Rhys’s novels. She locates Rhys historically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, focussing on the moral panics around the rise of prostitutes in England in the 1910s and 1920s and at the same time around Obeah in Dominica around 1904.

Todd K. Bender finds a modernist affiliation in Rhys in the essay “Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad and Charlotte Brontë.” Impressionism, as a movement in art, originated to capture the reality differently in the modern times. Ford Madox Ford who was one of the principal advocates of Impressionism had greatly influenced Conrad and Rhys and this article explores the characteristics, origins, and the manifestations of impressionism as is evident in the writings of these writers. Sheila Kineke in her essay ““Like a Hook Fits an Eye” Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, and the Imperial Operations of Modernist Mentoring” explores Rhys’s relationship to Ford. But she goes beyond this to show Rhys’s idea of *metropolitan modernism* and the way in which Rhys understood and critiqued it through her self-conscious creation of unconventional women protagonists. Fragmentation and psychosis, which become important characteristics of modernity, makes a reading of Rhys’s works as thematically modern. Rhys was influenced by modernist and experimental novelists like Joyce. She dismisses linearity in narrative, and represents the chaotic life in modern urban spaces. In her book *Jean Rhys* (1991) Coral Ann Howells locates Caribbean identities in Rhys’s characters. She finds them
invested with the spirit of modernism and feminism. Howells fuses together both the feminist and colonial interpretations to read Rhys’s works and notes: “[W]hat Rhys constructs through her fiction is... a feminine colonial sensibility, becoming aware of itself in a modernist European context, where a sense of colonial dispossession and displacement is focussed on and translated into gendered terms, so that all these conditions coalesce, transformed into her particular version of feminine pain.” (5–6).

Howells, therefore, points out that the implication of a journey is different for a woman than for a man. She unravels in Rhys a sense of colonial dispossession and displacement in terms of gender, making her works narratives of victimized women. Rhys, she thinks, renders this through modernist sensibilities and style. Stylistically, Rhys uses elliptical poetic prose and is poetic in her mode of narration. She has a strong concern for subjectivity and language. Thematically, loneliness, anxiety and loss permeate the entire corpus of her works. From the locational point of view, she uses cosmopolitan and metropolitan backdrops. All these give her works a modernist flavour. Rishona Zimring in “The Make-up of Jean Rhys’s Fiction” observes how the women protagonists of Rhys are the portraits of modern women in war-raging and post-war Europe who used make-up as a devise of concealing their battered existence. Kristin Czarnecki in “Jean Rhys’s Postmodern Narrative Authority: Selina’s Patois in “Let Them Call it Jazz”” focuses on the female protagonist Selina, a martiniquaise mulatto who defies the centre through her Creole speeches, transforming the female voice into one of authority. The intersection of racial and linguistic constructs in Rhys’s exceptional narrative mode make Czarnecki reflect upon it as a postmodern narrative.

It is quite natural that Rhys’s own background, experience and literary representation would invite scholars to discuss her works from postcolonial
perspectives. Rhys has been discussed as an archetypal postcolonial writer by Denise
Decaires Narain. He emphasises that the collision and the intersection between “the
oral” and “the scribal” or the written is evident in the works of the postcolonial
women writers as Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid. His essay “Writing ‘Home’: 
mediating between ‘the local’ and ‘the literary’ in a selection of postcolonial women’s
texts,” reveals the importance of patois as a ‘local register’ in capturing and
articulating the specific Creole feelings and experiences against the globalizing
hegemony of Standard English. Mardorossain, in his article, “Shutting Up the
Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso
Sea” discusses race and gender in the novel within the framework of feminist
postcolonial studies. The focus is on the representation of racial otherness and black
resistance as a complex interplay between colonial strategies and subaltern practices.
Graham Huggan in “A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Uses of Colonial
Mimicry” emphasises the use of colonial mimicry as a significant means to criticise
the dominant discourse. He points out the significance of the parrot in the Coulibri
Estate in Wide Sargasso Sea in destabilising the process of colonial mimicry.

Schizophrenia, neurosis, psychosis and insanity are very prominent in Rhys’s
woman protagonists. Critics have thus attempted psychoanalytic reading of Rhys. A
recent work by Cathleen Maslen Ferocious Things: Jean Rhys and the Politics of
Women’s Melancholia (2009) examines that the anguish of the female as the root
cause of Rhys’s writing. She notes that sexual, cultural and ethnic displacements are
the cause of her women protagonists’ suffering and their psychic traumas. She argues
that her works, at the same time, reveal and resist the Eurocentric and anti-feminist
paradigms of melancholia and nostalgia. The ferocious female voice in Rhys is
paradoxically constructed hinting at a slight departure from the feminist and the post-
colonial at the same time. *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Trauma* (2007) by Patricia Moran combines the issues of modernism, sexuality and subjectivity in the works of Woolf and Rhys. She explores the manner in which Rhys’s traumatic childhood experiences of physical abuse influenced her narratives and the way in which Woolf’s views on sexuality contrasts the contemporaneous works on sexology. The work deals both with the modernist female aesthetics and sexual trauma of the writers. Her exploration of the crisis and ‘damage’ of Woolf and Rhys is a significant contribution to psychoanalytic theories, sexology and abuse survival. Elizabeth Abel in “Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys” analyses the manner and the extent to which Rhys’s female protagonists are schizophrenic. She finds them to be ‘schizoid.’ She finds instances of such personalities in Anna (*Voyage in the Dark*) and Sasha (*Good Morning, Midnight*). Katharine Streip in ““Just a Cérébrale”: Jean Rhys, Women’s Humor, and Ressentiment” analyses Sasha’s (*Good Morning, Midnight*) schizophrenia and indecisiveness as comic which gives the novel its humorous edge. Maren Linett in ““New Words, New Everything”: Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys” surveys the polyvocal, nonlinear narration in Rhys which is presented through the interior monologues of the female protagonists. She exemplifies the modernist fragmentation in the protagonists of the novels *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*.

The male characters in Rhys, like the female ones, have also been focussed in critical studies. In such discussions male characters are shown as part and parcel of the prior structure that exploits and discriminates women. Stella Bowen, for instance, observes of Rhysian characters: “Rhys’s fiction ‘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...’”
Veena Jain, more recently, has elaborately surveyed the male characters in Rhys's novels in her book *The Male Presence in Jean Rhys's Novels: A Study of Power Structures* (1999). It is a detailed discussion on feminist concerns, psychological dilemmas of the female protagonists, narrative devices, modernistic trends and the male power structure as it operates in her novels. She attempts to focus on feminist concerns from varied angles concentrating particularly on male dominance.

Absence of a concrete space called home in Rhys's works has been spoken of by eminent Rhysian critics like Helen Carr and Lucy Wilson. Carr contends that "'homelessness' is the terrain of Rhys's fiction," "dealing as it does with those who belong nowhere, between cultures, between histories" (xiv). Erica L. Johnson, in recent times, finds the Rhysian female protagonists living in a 'fictional terrain' (14). She feels that they yearn to call a place their home and simultaneously realize that such a place cannot exist in their lived experience. She uses three terms 'home,' 'maison' and 'cassa,' the last two words being the equivalent term for 'home' in French and Italian respectively. She discusses how the anxiety for the loss of the home space – as a land and culture – is articulated through the three women writers – Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras and Erminia Dell'Oro respectively. Johnson’s work *Home, Maison, Cassa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras and Ermina Dell'Oro* (2003) contains a detailed section concentrating on Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*. All the three writers share the common experience of a fascinating childhood which is terminated with their arrival in Europe. As for Rhys, it is necessary to remember, her perception of home evolves eventually through all her narratives, and not just through *Good Morning, Midnight*. In Johnson’s study of Rhys, she coins the term *terragraphica* 'to describe the way in which the lands of
their births function as literary homes in the works of repatriated writers' (27). She explains that Rhys lacked *terra firma* or a specific cultural and topographical space of belonging and wrote from the anxieties and turmoils arising from the lack of it. These ideas will be dealt on at the appropriate points of this dissertation.

The point that emerges from the above discussion is that the aspect of home and homelessness has been addressed sporadically. Even where it has been dealt with in a more focussed way, for instance in Johnson’s book, the discussion is not very comprehensive simply because only one fiction is taken up. There is an unmistakable gap in this area. Further aspects of home and homelessness are likely to emerge from the discussion of Rhys’s novels. It is for this reason that the present dissertation will make a comprehensive study and a detailed analysis of all the novels of Jean Rhys.

III

The four chapters that follow will detail the problematics of home/homelessness in Rhys’s novels. The second chapter “Theorizing ‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness,’” will discuss various dimensions of the home space. An attempt is made to analyse the theoretical perspectives on ‘home’ and ‘homelessness.’ It will be argued that for an individual, ‘home’ is not only a material place but also a metaphorical, psychological and cultural space. The three divisions of ‘home,’ ‘unhomely home,’ and ‘nonhome’ will also be discussed taking into consideration the degree of homeliness and homelessness found to exist in a home space. Such a discussion, it is hoped, will theoretically contextualise our analysis of Rhys’s novels.

The next two chapters will primarily concentrate on the fictions of Jean Rhys which have been divided into two types on the basis of the topographical and cultural
orientations found in them. The first of these – Chapter III entitled “‘Homelessness’ in Jean Rhys’s Caribbean Novels” – will deal, as its title indicates, with the Caribbean novels of Rhys. The Caribbean islands is taken as the ‘homeland’ of Rhys. This chapter will explore the dilemma of the characters who simultaneously experience the conditions of both home and homelessness in the ‘homeland’ and in the ‘home culture.’ It will discuss the two novels of Rhys – *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* – and show how the portrayal of the idyllic but challenging topographical setting of the Caribbean islands stands in sharp contrast to the native intolerance of the Creoles, and the psychological longing of the Creole women protagonists for an acceptance and assimilation in the land where they were born and brought up. They make repeated attempts to identify themselves with the natural setting of these islands. The islands become a symbol of the desired home where fulfilment of the female subjectivity would be a reality. It appears that a female character who identifies herself with these islands is destined to be trapped into insanity as she arrives in England. The dissolution of identity, it will be argued, takes place for the female as soon as she is weaned away from the islands. An attempt will also be made to explore how the formation or dissolution of the protagonists’s identities is determined, to a large extent, by their movement from one topography to another, from one culture to another.

The Chapter IV entitled “‘Homelessness’ in Jean Rhys’s European Novels,” focuses on her European novels. This chapter will discuss three novels – *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight* and explore how the protagonists’ attempts to relocate themselves to new environments fail miserably. These novels were written during the inter-War period and the anxieties of women characters during the period have been represented in the novel. During the First
World War many women who were forced to act as prostitutes or 'amateurs' were scorned by the society. It was also a period when women started questioning marriage as a social institution and sometimes even looked at familial relationship with scepticism. They often viewed psychological relationships as more significant than the compulsory exploitations, both physical and psychological, sanctioned by the laws of marriage. Extra-marital affairs became more commonplace. Another significant factor that was evident during those times was the continual movement of people beyond places of their settlements. Roots thus gave way to routes. Places which were culturally more tolerant were preferred to those with stern conventional cultures. England was therefore abandoned and Paris became a new centre for modernist art and culture. Issues related to the existence and the security of home was changing subsequently. Attitude to home was undergoing changes. Set against such a background, the Rhysian protagonists, in the three novels mentioned above, break traditional boundaries and voice forth their experiences and unfulfilled desires. This chapter will focus on their quest for 'home' and identity in such a complex socio-cultural environment. Filial relationships and strong family bonds that Rhys's Creole characters find and the homeliness of the Caribbean households, as is noticed in the previous chapter, are absent in the European social space where the protagonists, as is found in these three novels, seek refuge.

In the fifth chapter entitled "'Home' and 'Homelessness': Journey through Images," it will be argued that images and symbols employed in Rhys's novels have important functional roles. The intricate web of metaphors, images and symbols contribute to the rich meanings that the texts evoke. In order to capture the texture of the broken lives, Rhys has made use of complex, ambivalent and multidimensional images. The images are categorized under some groups in this chapter and it will be
argued that all these categories of images contribute to the overall sense of homelessness that pervades in Rhys’s fictional works.

The concluding chapter will sum up the arguments given in the preceding chapters and will try to establish the main thesis point. It will be shown how Rhys’s characters respond to the absence of a personal space in the family and society at large and how they negotiate the multiplicity of cultures they confront at the ‘home’ space (in all its meanings) and outside it. An attempt will be made to assess how in their lives and times they conceive the meanings of the terms ‘home’ and ‘homelessness.’ A stable psychological space that they lack in their own lived experiences and which exists only in their imagination prod them on. This construction of an imaginary space, it will be argued, helps them sustain in the midst of all adversities. It will be shown that in all her fictional works the concept of home functions as a powerful subtext.

Notes

1. It is evident from Rhys’s *Letters* that she occasionally suffered from bouts of depression. Wyndham, in his introduction to the *Letters*, speaks about Rhys’s ‘spiritual sickness – a feeling of belonging nowhere, of being ill at ease and out of place in her surroundings’ (Rhys, *Letters* 11) and about her conflicting impulses that ‘condemned her to a personal life made miserable by frustration’ (11). In her letter to Maryvonne she registers the psychological damages and cultural transformations caused by the war:
Personally I’ve always thought the Lost Generation a good name for us.

To start with – eight nearly nine years of war is a lot out of a life.

The 1914 – 1918 war spoilt our youth, and the other one smashed anything one had achieved between. And how!

You see I have not been often happy. I haven’t a happy nature to start with. But really few of my lot have come through, and those not the best it seems to me. (53)

Angier also mentions that during the 1930s Rhys displayed signs of ‘erratic’ (63) behaviour and her frequent drinking bouts had been a major concern for her husband Leslie Tilden Smith. Her worse obsessions were with ‘age and ugliness, drunkenness and paranoia’ (Angier 65). In 1949 Rhys had been found guilty of assaulting a man living upstairs and banging on his door. She was angry with the members of the family for their rudeness. She was sent to the hospital wing of the Holloway prison for medical investigation of her sanity/ insanity. She had to spend five days there and the doctors released her, declaring her sane.

2. Most of the primary materials on Rhys, thankfully, had been available in the National Library, Kolkata. However, procuring secondary materials on Rhys had been considerably difficult. Majority of the secondary materials are not available in libraries in India. Most publishers were either unwilling or unable to procure these for a researcher like me. This underlines the lack of proper infrastructure that a third world, non-metropolitan researcher encounters. Fortunately, Dr. Suparno Banerjee, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Texas State University – San Marcos, USA, to whom I was introduced by my supervisor, was greatly helpful in sending me some required materials. However, I could not gain
access to the unpublished manuscript of Rhys preserved in the University of Tulsa except through references made by her critics. It took a considerable time to collect whatever materials I could obtain on her.

3. In spite of my best efforts I failed to get a copy of Glissant’s book of Barnabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant (to be mentioned soon) either in original or in translation. I have some training in the French language and the books would have yielded richer understanding. I, therefore, have to depend on Murdoch’s discussion.

4. Rhys’s affair with Ford Madox Ford spoilt their friendship. Party feud broke her relationship with Scott. Scott used to host these dinner parties attempting to popularise the works of Rhys. After Rhys’s quarrel with Scott, she writes to her in a letter:

I think that the anglo-saxon idea that you can be rude with impunity to any female who has written a book is utterly damnable. You come and have a look out of curiosity and then allow the freak to see what you think of her. It’s only done of course to the more or less unsuccessful and only by anglo saxons.

Well my dear if it were my last breath I’d say HELL TO IT and – to the people who do it –. (Rhys, Letters 32; emphasis original)

No copy of Scott’s response can be found. Patricia Jean Tyrer notes that at this period of Scott’s life, she had confided to ‘Emma Goldman that her life had become overbearing, that she had even quit communicating with her dearest friends’ (12).
Gregg records that Rhys had helped her friend Eliot Bliss, also a West Indian Creole, in getting her work *Luminous Isle* republished in 1984. Rhys too had familiarity with Phyllis Shand Allfrey who, like her, belonged to the early settlers of the white Caribbean ruling class. Her famous novel *The Orchid House*, as Virginia Blain observes, reminds one of Rhys in many ways. It is a story of a woman who loved her islands and the black servant-narrator articulates her nostalgia for the loss of the post-colonial world of the past. The house lies empty of men and the daughters, who arrived there from the cities of Europe or the USA. They came loaded with money, sensuality and socialist politics.

In between 1964 and 1976, Rhys had correspondence with Sonia Orwell, the pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair, who was the last wife of George Orwell. Rhys was also familiar with the English novelist, reviewer and translator E. Morchard Bishop, the pseudonym of the writer Oliver Stoner who had translated *Le moyen de parvenir* into English as *The Way to Succeed*, and who had written *End of Mr Davidson* (1932), *Two for Joy* (1938), *Aunt Betty* (1939), *The Green Tree and the Dry* (1939) and *The Song and the Silence* (1947).