Chapter V: ‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’:
A Journey through Images
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‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’: A Journey through Images

Images play a functional role in the novels of Jean Rhys. They emphasise, primarily, on the theme of homelessness of her women protagonists. The sense of rootlessness suffered by these characters has already been discussed in the preceding chapters. This chapter will focus on the intricate web of images, metaphors and symbols which evoke the indecisiveness, vacillations and uncertainties of Rhys’s protagonists. However, the images or the symbols are not unidirectional. They are ambivalent, complex and multi-directional, with positive and negative connotations; they also explore the changing mental states of the characters. The psychological fragmentation of the protagonists who struggle against adverse circumstances and patriarchal structures is also indicated by these symbols and images. As already discussed, the protagonists are mostly emotionally irresolute. The lack of permanent relationships and absence of economic stability make them vulnerable to anxiety and fluctuations of mood. These changes in the psychological disposition of the protagonists are woven into an artistic pattern through the images and symbols. Thus, it is essential to study its intricacy and richness which contribute to the overall pattern of meaning. From the discussion of Rhys’s novels in the two preceding chapters, it is evident that her characters constantly shift from one place to another and are but a
bundle of broken personalities, uncertain, displaced and hysterical. It is difficult to express their indecisiveness, incoherence, schizophrenia, and insanity through an extremely coherent pattern of symbols.

Moreover, the images are often fragmented. These develop gradually throughout her texts. No image exists in isolation. The images gain in dimension and depth as they recur in her novels. The broken images, on the whole, are suggestive of her protagonists’ chaotic, disoriented lives. Her use of images has a close semblance to that of the modernist writers like Baudelaire, Pound and Eliot, who through their periodic use of broken images try to impose a pattern on the otherwise chaotic life of modern men. These images are, as shall be seen, is often graphic, vivid and even picturesque, acquiring a life of their own.

There are multiple kinds of images in the entire corpus of Rhys’s fictions. Among these, the most prominent, and recurring shall be discussed in this chapter. They shall be divided under three broad categories and shall be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Some images are associated with journey or movement which is an important component in her works. There are other images which convey a sense of settlement or its absence, and thereby foreground the main concern or thrust of this dissertation – home and homelessness – more directly. The third category of images addresses the issue of identity. The main characters in Rhys’s works move, in some way or the other, in search for their identities, and all the novels problematizes the concept of self engaged in a dialogue with multiple forces that constitute and inform the self. The next section will deal with the first of the three categories – that of journey or of movement.
I

Psychological and topographical movement of the protagonists in space and time make the images of journey functional in the text. The mind of a Rhysian protagonist undertakes a psychological journey in search of a space of her own. There is a constant tension between an urge to belong to a place one knows as ‘home’ and a resistance to that location. By linking the concept of a ‘location’ to ‘home’ Rhys invariably builds up the nature of both ‘home’ and ‘the self.’ The concept of ‘home’ is determined through a dialogue between the protagonist and the location, and the self/subject may emerge out of the dialogue. The fictions of Rhys explore the dilemma of her female protagonists engaged in such a dialogue. By shifting topographically from one place to another, from one country to another, they journey in space, and, drifting between the past and the present, they also journey in time. When speaking of displaced persons, Salman Rushdie observes that for them the past becomes more vivid than the present: “… it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (9). Rhys’s displaced women protagonists like Marya (Quartet), Julia (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie), Anna (Voyage in the Dark), Sasha (Good Morning, Midnight) and Antoinette (Wide Sargasso Sea) long to re-live their past happy moments which console and give them a temporary feeling of security and happiness.

Broadly speaking, for a displaced Caribbean Creole a negotiation between cultural positions and a constant dialogue with history create multiple identities. There is a perpetual process of shifting, exchange and metamorphosis creating in-betweenity and ambivalence that characterizes the West Indian condition. Rhys’s fictions are strewn with displaced women protagonists, among whom Anna Morgan (Voyage in
the Dark) and Antoinette (Wide Sargasso Sea) are white-Creoles from West Indies. The desire for personal spaces of their own makes the metaphor of journey persistent in her novels. Murdoch, analyzing the integral relation of unhomeliness with the Caribbean creolization, observes:

Valorizing such patterns of creative instability over the fictions of fixity produces "an emphasis not so much on finding, leaving, or coming home, but on the process of voyaging between."... Jean Rhys's use of voyage as psychotropic sign... allow[s] the creole protagonists of her fiction to be both there and elsewhere, inheritors of Englishness who are also unequivocally Caribbean, and who display unmistakable signs of duality, fragmentation and loss when confronted with the materiality of the metropolitan Other. (255; emphasis original)

The motif of journey begins with Voyage in the Dark and ends in Wide Sargasso Sea. If the entire corpus of her novels is taken together, it is undeniably a tale of travel. The protagonists' quest for self-definition, as discussed earlier, makes them journey through space and time. Thus, for the Rhysian woman, it is a journey in search of home and identity. Rhys's characters are of different ages. Marya (Quartet) and Anna (Voyage in the Dark) are aged between eighteen and twenty-one. Julia (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie) is in her late twenties and Sasha (Good Morning, Midnight) in her mid-thirties. Home in Rhys, however, is a momentary realisation for both the younger and the older woman. This might mean that for a 'woman' home is temporary. Thus, each female protagonist represents some gendered aspect or the other irrespective of age. In Rhys's last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea, home acquires an altered dimension for Antoinette who regains her sanity only to realize that her sufferings stem from an
acute sense of homelessness. The affliction of not belonging to where she should have
belonged – her ‘home in memory’ – renders her present existence insubstantial and
compels her to end her life abruptly. Antoinette embodies the totality of female
experience at various phases of women’s life and also symbolizes the journey of a
woman towards liberation. Rhysian protagonists journey back and forth down
memory lane. For them the restructured past, sans the unhappy moments, defines
them. Some amiable characters, who are now dead, define the ‘home’ in some
specific way. Antoinette, in Wide Sargasso Sea, comes face to face with this reality
and she recognizes that her ideal home lies in the past in the company of some
characters who are not accessible now. It is not the past where the Creoles were
despised by the natives, but the past where the black girl Tia smiles and beckons her
lovingly to bathe in the pool of Coulibri. The protagonists, thus, undertake
geographical and psychological journey in search of understanding, companionship,
stability and security which they relate to their image of home. They voyage in the
dark in quest of freedom from their sorrows and miseries. But the gradual
disillusionment registered in the novels transform the protagonist in each text. If we
take a look at all the female protagonists, we find them encountering disillusionment
in one way or other, and, when taken together, they represent a sequence of stages or
conditions. A sane Marya (Quartet), transformed into a hardened Julia (After Leaving
Mr Mackenzie), then changed to a broken Anna (Voyage in the Dark), then again to a
schismatic Sasha (Good Morning, Midnight) and finally into a mad Antoinette (Wide
Sargasso Sea). Thus, Rhys’s composite heroine represents a journey not towards the
attainment of selfhood in the usual sense of the word. This journey is towards the
fragmentation of self. Laing Lessing, a psychologist, refuses to consider his patient
suffering paranoia to be a ‘person’, a ‘totality’ and reduces him or her into a series of
mechanisms.’ He disassociates the ‘I’ from the ‘self’ or ‘me’: ‘An ‘I’ has not ceased to exist, but it is without substance, it is disembodied, it lacks the quality of realness and it has no identity, it has no ‘me’ to go with it. It may seem contradiction in terms to say that the ‘I’ lacks identity but this seems to be so’ (qtd. in Meaney 72). He opines that in the most advanced stage of defence against engulfment or petrification, the ‘true’ self becomes ‘a mere vanishing point’ (qtd. in Meaney 72). This means that the identity of the self with ‘I’ collapses under a situation of coercion or distress or in cases where the ‘I’ fails to establish any connection with society. Antoinette’s entrapment in Rochester’s castle is a case in point. In such incarceration her imagination or ‘dream’ becomes fertile and offers a way out. In her dream she journeys back in time, and relocates her to the past. Only in dream or imagination can she relate to the Caribbean society, albeit a purified one, and form a selfhood. For her, this journey in time cannot be spatial, and therefore death seems to be the only means for a spiritual union.

Psychological journey is also made through dreams. Dream, at the same time, is integrally related to the question of identity. It is considered to be “the hidden language of the soul” (Shamdasani 108). The German psychiatrist Ernst von Feuchtersleben states that dreams are “the occupation of the mind in sleep with the pictorial world of fancy” (qtd. in Shamdasani 112). Dream traces the psychological journey and turmoil of the women protagonists. The adversity of situations prompts Rhys’s characters to journey into the world of dreams. Dream bridges the past with the present; the real with the unreal. Interestingly, all her women protagonists are dreamers who aspire to transform the world of imagination into reality. So the characters derive satisfaction straddling between the illusion and reality. The present reality is for them a nightmare. It is dream that helps them overcome the bitterness of
reality. As Marya, in *Quartet*, notes the importance of illusion: “The Palace Blanche, Paris. Life itself. One realized all sorts of things. The value of an illusion, for instance, and that the shadow can be more important than the substance” (20 – 21). Her reflection sums up the belief of all the Rhysian characters. She herself feels that life is an illusion:

...sometimes she would feel sure that her life was a dream — that all life was a dream. ‘It’s a dream,’ she would think; ‘it isn’t real’ — and be strongly comforted.

A dream. A dream. ‘La vie toute faite des morceaux. Sans suite comme des rêves.’.... A dream. Long shining empty streets and tall dark houses looking down at her. (96)

She tries to reject reality imagining it to be a dream. Julia’s (*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*) sense of security makes her plunge into an unreal realm of existence in Horsfield’s company. It compels her to remain indifferent to what he was speaking. Her sense of security arouses in her a ‘dream-like feeling.’ Again, her mother’s death was, for her, a ‘dream, too, but a painful dream.’ Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* dreams of nothing but to return to her island in West Indies and it helps her to detach herself from the hard facts of English life. She could identify herself so strongly with her past that her present dissolved amidst it. She tried to imagine her life in England as a dream that would slowly pass:

Sometimes not being able to get over the feeling that it was a dream.

The light and the sky and the shadows and the houses and the people — all parts of the dream, all fitting in and all against me. But there were other times when a fine day, or music, or looking in the glass and
thinking I was pretty, made me start again imagining that there was nothing I couldn’t do....” (134)

Anna in her dream merges both England and West Indies, the first is the reality that she cannot escape and the second is her past where she wants to return. So, dream here acts as a platform where both her feeling of security and insecurity unite, making her sense of loss more complicated and profound. Such a way of contemplation curves a way out for the schizophrenic Sasha in Rhys’s next novel. For Sasha in Good Morning, Midnight, dream implies a plunging into her own personal space and this makes life tolerable: “...you’ve never lived like that, plunged in a dream, when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets” (90). So, it acts as a space of temporary relief for her. In Wide Sargasso Sea, dream reveals insecurity, a moment of epiphany or a dismal forecast for Antoinette. For instance, her dream of walking in the forest displays her feeling of insecurity and anxiety: “I dreamed I was walking in a forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move” (23). Her dream of walking in the forest throws a hint of her complete loss of identity which would result from her marriage to Rochester. There is no path and it hints at the precariousness of her passing on to a realm of no return: “I dreamt I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight” (23). This is her first dream and it prepares the readers for the appearance of Rochester who nourishes a strong hatred for her. Before she would leave the convent, destined to be married to Rochester, the same dream would return to torture her. She would see herself clothed in the bridal dress of white and felt the hatred in his eyes. The high stone wall of Rochester’s castle was also visible. This dream is proleptic of the sad fate which she was soon to
encounter. She would be married to Rochester and later shut off in an attic in his high walled castle in England. The dreams became a path to the unconsciousness and reveal the uncertainty that she felt about her marriage to Rochester. Thus, they become epiphanic. By the time she has the same dream for the third time, the dream that displayed her insecurity had already materialized into reality. This time it gives her a glimpse of her homeland helping her to regain her lost identity. It is also a vision which reveals death as the only means of escape from misery.

Journey in Rhys is both real and metaphorical. The journey of Rhys’s female protagonists in the material space makes them travel from West Indies to Europe, between countries like England and France. Metaphorical journey is undertaken through imagination and dreams. It ushers in the warmth of the tropics with its flora and fauna that is suggestive of the Caribbean islands in all its lushness. Rhys, in such contexts, describes the islands graphically. Unconsciously, the bright islandic colours also figure, occasionally, in the European novels and are related to happy experiences of the protagonists. Creole protagonists, who are culturally rootless, make their psychological journey to identify themselves with the pristine culture of the West Indies. *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* explicitly detail the Caribbean landscape. When engulfed in loneliness, Marya (*Quartet*), for instance, imagines the tropical forests:

> The croaking of frogs came in through the open window, and very faintly, the sound of the sea. Then it was not the sound of the sea, but of the trees in a gale. Dark trees growing close together with thick creepers which hung down from the branches like snakes. Virgin forest. Intact. Never been touched. (125)
Similarly, Julia Martin (*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*) remembers her childhood in Ostend, which is in Brazil, just as her mother longs for the ‘orange trees’ where she had spent her younger days:

I like Ostend. I like it very much. I was happy there, and I always remember places I was happy in. I mean, I remember them so that I can shut my eyes and be there.... We stayed at a little place called Coq-sur-mer, near Ostend. And the water was cold and lovely. Yet not grey. (50)

The image of water or sea, trees and the bright colours in a painting which Sasha (*Good Morning, Midnight*) sees in the Rijks museum fascinates her. Enno and she are in Amsterdam looking at the picture. Enno feels this picture to have semblance with Sasha, and they become nostalgic to return to Paris. The painting becomes an embodiment of the good times they had together:

I am tuned up to top pitch. Everything is smooth, soft and tender. Making love. The colours of the pictures. The sunsets. Tender, north colours when the sun sets – pink, mauve, green and blue. And the wind very fresh and cold and the lights in the canals like gold caterpillars and the seagulls swooping over the water. (117)

Colours and warmth of the Caribbean islands make the protagonists’ journey down memory lane of pleasant experiences.

The tortuous and hopeless movements of the protagonists in real life make their journey circuitous. This is explored through the images of streets and circles. Streets have an important function in Rhys’s novels. Generally, it is the homeless who resides or loiters in the streets. The aimless loitering of the protagonists signifies an
acute sense of homelessness. Streets are insecure places, and are antithetical to ‘home’ which denotes stability and security. It is the drifter, the hobo or the vagabond who occupies the street. However, as has been discussed in Chapter II, Jameson, while speaking of the collapse of homely boundaries in the postmodern age, proposes his concept of ‘the space of dirty realism’ (qtd. in Lewis and Cho 86). He thinks that streets can provide a space to the nomads and drifters for collective dwelling.

However, in Rhys’s image of streets differ from that of Jameson. Streets project the aimlessness and homelessness of her women protagonists. They, sometimes, also are saturated with the memory of pleasant experiences. These are the ‘nonhomes’ revealing the anxiety, disappointment and the alienation of the women protagonists. Wheels and streets become symbols of labyrinth and mazes from which there is no means of escape. The similarity of all streets in Rhys’s fictional works evokes similarity of her protagonists’ experiences which is impossible to evade. Rhysian protagonists, as has already been seen, are drifters who spend most of their time lingering aimlessly. Marya (Quartet) likes to wander listlessly in unknown streets of Paris to get rid of the sense of monotony and dullness that pervades her life. But she has an unplanned existence. With Stephan’s arrest, her sense of loneliness is intensified: “But as soon she put the light out the fear was with her again – and now it was like a long street where she walked endlessly. A redly lit street, the houses on either side tall, grey and closely shuttered, the only sound of clip-clop of horses’ hoofs behind her, out of sight” (29). Her own life is like the emptiness of the streets. They were like her empty room which at the same time protected and threatened her:

“Empty it looked and full of shadows” (28). She even develops closeness to a lonely street: “It was a beautiful street. The street for homeless cats, she often thought. She never came into it without seeing several of them, prowling, thin vagabonds, furtive,
aloof, but *strangely proud*. Sympathetic creatures after all” (52; emphasis added). In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia’s difficult and insecure position is highlighted by the image of her walking uphill: “She was already walking along the street, which was dark, narrow, and inclined steeply up the hill” (42). The narrowness and darkness highlight her stifling sense of anxiety which overpowers her after Mackenzie leaves. With the feeling of uncertainty of finding acceptance amidst her family in London, the streets appear ‘strangely empty, like the streets of a grey dream – a labyrinth of streets, all exactly alike’” (117). The sense of alienation and isolation seems unending for her. She feels as if she is lost in the ‘labyrinthine’ street, in a maze of bitter experience from which there is no escape. It becomes an ‘unreal’ city in Eliotian sense. A sense of loss troubles her and she tries hopefully to assure herself: “That’s all right; I’m not walking in a circle” (117). Julia unlike Marya did not prefer an incoherent and unplanned life: “I hate drifting about streets…. It makes me awfully miserable” (91). Mr Mackenzie’s return and his final departure, at the end of the novel, after giving her some money, the temporary stability and the permanent instability are united in the image of the street: “The street was cool and full of grey shadows. Lights were beginning to come out in the cafés. It was an hour between the dog and the wolf…” (191).

*Anna (Voyage in the Dark)* who was depressed with London felt that ‘looking out at the street was like looking at stagnant water’ (40). London was as colourless for her as it was lifeless. The monotony of sameness haunts her: “Everything was always so exactly alike – that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike” (152). This implies that every course chosen by her ends with the same result of betrayal and alienation. London for her is filled with ‘dead streets’ and ‘blank faces of
the houses' (145). Sasha Jansen (*Good Morning, Midnight*) fails to distinguish the past from the present: “After this it becomes a nightmare. I walk up stairs, past doors – all different, all exactly alike” (26). Streets are like endless labyrinth, leading her nowhere. Her sense of alienation and the helplessness is highlighted by the closed doors: “The passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut…” (31). Tired of life and bitterness, she looks upon the streets as passages of hostility: “I’ve had enough of these streets that sweat a cold yellow slime, of hostile people…” (43). Streets, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, are also equated with Sasha’s problem of identity. Unknown streets, unknown hotels, unknown rooms are what she recollects when she tries to relocate herself:

Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe…. Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name… and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room. (145)

Thus, streets become impersonal places. They are the ‘nonhomes’ which negate all chances of cordial relations. They reveal the boredom, unstable condition and isolation of the protagonist. It does not exist as a space where they could belong. Antoinette’s (*Wide Sargasso Sea*) sense of loss and rootlessness gives way to her fondness of roaming amidst wilderness without any path leading to a fixed destiny: “I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think ‘It’s better than people’” (24). When she stealthily walked along the corridors of Rochester’s mansion in England she felt herself being lost: “As I walk along the passages I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard. They tell me I am in England but I don’t believe them.
We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don’t remember, but we lost it” (148). These ‘passages’ metaphorically are her fragmented memories. She travels down these memory lanes relocating herself in her well-acquainted past. The protagonists search for home and identity was like loitering endlessly in the ‘cardboard’ world of England and she was unable to arrive at a point of self-recognition.

Contrarily, at times, streets also temporarily develop into a positive image. The feeling of suffocation which Marya (Quartet) experienced being left lonely lessens after she met the Heidlers who, like her, were from England. She felt less alienated and was comforted with the idea that they would help her out of her misery. Her feeling of depression reduces and her idea about streets transforms: “...she began to picture the endless labyrinth of Paris streets... crowded with hurrying people. But now she thought of them without fear, rather with a strange excitement” (38). The image of wandering with Heidler in ‘quiet empty... long street glistening with light like a sheet of water’ (57) suggests both the emptiness of the relationship and existence of a transitory bond which is implicit in the comparison with water. Even the street ‘empty, silent and enchanted in the darkness’ (69) contains within it the implication of the fantasy world in which Marya was living at the moment. Sasha (Good Morning, Midnight) who had spent a short time with her husband in Paris sometime feels intimate with the known streets, finding them friendly among all the strangeness:

Sometimes somebody comes in for stamps, or a man for a drink. Then you can see outside into the street. And the street walks in. It is one of those streets – dark, powerful, magical....
‘Oh, there you are,’ it says, walking in at the door, ‘there you are. Where have you been all this long time?’

Nobody else knows me, but the street knows me. (107)

Therefore, the image of streets is ambiguous. Its implication alters depending on the emotions of the protagonists and the situations they find themselves in a particular moment. It, at times, operates as a transitory ‘home,’ but finally, it remains a permanent ‘nonhome’ space.

As streets are paths through the land; a voyage is a route through sea. So, the sea route also is as significant as the streets. As is seen in her Caribbean novels, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the ‘home’ for the protagonists, Anna and Antoinette, rests beyond the sea. But traversing it is impossible. Marya (*Quartet*) is sent to Nice by Mr Heidler for a change. She hears the sound of the sea coming through the window; Julia (*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*) recalls her ‘home’ in Ostend in Brazil, where the water was cold and blue; and Sasha (*Good Morning, Midnight*) has a strange fascination for the sea. Even when she sees the sea in a painting in the Rijks museum, it attracts her. The sea symbolizes the intermediary space between the real and the ideal. To journey across it topographically is unthinkable. Thus Rhys’s female protagonists make a psychological and metaphorical journey for a home hidden in the mists of the past, illuminated occasionally by sudden flashes of memory.

Rhys’s protagonists move through a circuitous route when they journey through the streets. But the similarity of their experiences is made more poignant through the image of a circle. It appears prominently in all her novels. The circle in each novel signifies the onset of uncertainty. This uncertainty is succeeded by a phase of temporary hope. The cycle becomes complete with the protagonists once again
plunging into hopelessness. They arrive at the same point of departure. Every attempt to change their circumstances is nullified. Antoinette by jumping into the fire frees herself from this circle. Marya (Quartet) sees the merry-go-round in Lion de Belfort fair. It is symbolic of the maze of a triangular relationship in which she will shortly be entrapped. She has a temporary illusion that she is cared for by the Heidlers: “The merry-go-round made her feel more normal, less like a grey ghost walking in a vague, shadowy world” (46). The Heidlers were English like her and this makes her feel more comfortable. It helps her to identify herself with them. Previously, she was like an alien among the Parisians, herself a shadow of a character. When Lois remarks that Marya’s should be put ‘on the joy wheel, and watch her bang about a bit’ (67), Mr Heidler suggests that the of Marya’s misery is slowly leading towards completion. With Mr Heidler’s gradually decreasing interest in her and Stephan’s abandonment, Marya’s circle of doom is complete. Similarly, in Mr Mackenzie, after Julia returns to London from Paris, she feels that her course in life is circular:

A church clock chimed the hour. At once all feeling of strangeness left her. She felt that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined, she had returned to her starting-point, in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly two years before. (67)

With this identification of her own self with her old place, she gets a momentary feeling of assurance. Julia’s relation with Mr Mackenzie ends in Paris. Her relationship with Mr Horsfield which starts in England is destined to end when she leaves for Paris. So she journeys through a circular route with a vain attempt to gain acceptance and respectability. In Voyage in the Dark, too Anna’s feeling of
uncertainty and nervousness about her looks before meeting Walter was a torture which she couldn’t ward off and for her it was similar to walking round a circle without a beginning or an end: “I was so nervous about how I looked that three-quarters of me was in a prison, wandering round and round in a circle. If he had said I looked all right or that I was pretty, it would have set me free” (66). Circle symbolizes continuity and is unambiguously the ‘nonhome’ space. Rhys’s protagonists are tied to this wheel of perpetual torture, “turning and turning in the widening gyre”, destined to live in insecurity and anxiety.

II

Actual journeys of Rhys’s protagonists introduce images of ‘dwellings,’ not at homes, but in temporary and impersonal places like hotels. In Rhys these are ambiguous places, both claustrophobic and liberating, threatening and protecting, depending on situations. Giving an overview of Rhys’s characters and her representation of the urban reality, Naipaul comments:

    Men and money are connected: in this half-world men are the only people with money, and they are at once predators and prey, sexual partners, arbitrary providers of dinners, rooms, clothes. Their jobs remain vague, their larger legitimate life unknown. No homes are entered; the metropolis is reduced to few cafés, boardinghouses, and hotels. (55; emphasis added)

Naipaul, thus, underlines the restless lives of Rhys’s characters lacking permanent settlements. As he points out, “No homes are entered” – instead of ‘homes’ what we
get are cafés, boarding houses and hotels – all temporary places which reject all possibilities of rooted and community lives. Metropolitan backgrounds offer such impersonal sites as suitable for flotsam people. Deprived of the scope for building homes they involve themselves in cheap pleasures. They are seldom found to have a proper domestic or family setting. Only Antoinette had a beautiful house at Coulibri estate that was burnt down and Anna’s house in Morgan’s Rest will be sold away by her step-mother Hester. Thus, they become unhomed. The loss of this house/home space make the protagonists create ‘period houses,’ as has been discussed in Chapter II. Instead of domesticity that they long for, they lodge in well-furnished rooms in hotels as travellers. Absence of fixity and stability in life is signified through multilocality. One of the glaring absences of Rhys’s novels is the near-total absence of descriptions of domestic places. Wherever she describes residential houses, she projects them as sites of discord or of emotional starvation. Interestingly enough, there are hardly any descriptions of ‘motherly’ figures and of furnishings within the rooms. Such ‘lacks’ are indicative of homelessness of the characters and of the intensity of their ‘homing desires.’

Hotels as a place have been approached from different perspectives. At times they have been referred to as non-places. In non-places people ‘coexist or cohabit without living together’ (Cresswell 45). Hotels are uprooted places distinguished for mobility and travel. It is impermanent, fleeting, temporary and an ephemeral place of residence essentially related to travellers. Clifford identifies hotel as ‘a site of travel encounters’ without the idea of a fixed residence and Bakhtin also registers it as a location of provisional nature. As has already been discussed in Chapter II, Adorno, speaking of the homelessness in the post-modern times, thinks that a rented room or a hotel can be taken to be another alternative for home as it can serve as a temporary
getaway from one's own home or might become a permanent alternative for a home for the homeless. A hotel space can be positive, there being no hassle of ownership or the responsibility of maintenance. But a hotel also implies a lack of all possibilities of personalization and privacy. It, thus, acts simultaneously as a space of shelter and homelessness. There might also be a constant anxiety for the lack of control over the space and for being at the mercy of the hotel owner. It thus acts dominantly as a traveller's space, a temporary shelter. It has also been approached from the woman's point of view. Speaking of motel, a modern version of a ‘hotel,’ Morris associates it with freedom of a female subject: "With its peculiar function as a place of escape yet as a home-away-from-home, the motel can be rewritten as a transit-place for woman able to use it. Motels have had liberating effects in the history of women's mobility" (qtd. in Wolff 189). In Rhys hotels and hotel rooms are an ambivalent symbol, acting as a transitory space and providing the protagonists a sense of momentary shelter. Living temporarily in this transit point, they dream of the pleasant experiences of the past which is truly their private space. In the unhomeliness of the hotel rooms, they long for the homeliness of a ‘pure’ past. Rooms in hotels are non-places, if Marc Augé's definition of place be considered: “Place... has traditionally been thought of as a fantasy of a ‘society anchored since time immemorial in the permanence of intact soil” (qtd. in Cresswell 45).

A room in a hotel plays an important role in the novels of Rhys. It emerges as an ambivalent symbol. Sometimes it serves as a positive image of security and at times it is a negative image of claustrophobic reality. Each of Rhys’s fictions presents its central character as a traveller and temporary-dweller in cheap hotels. They constantly shift in search of comfort and security. The kind of feeling a room evokes depends on their psychological state and their financial stability. In Quartet Marya,
separated from Stephan after his arrest, takes her refuge from the hostile world in a hotel that acts as a ‘home’: “Marya went back to her bedroom from the misty streets and shut the door with a feeling of relief as if she had shut out a malignant world. Her bedroom was a refuge” (28). When Marya had felt assured and happy in Mr Heidler’s company, ‘the grey-blue room seemed to be growing larger, the walls had receded, the bulbs of the electric lights expanded mysteriously. Now they looked like small moons’ (34). While the room holds out a better prospect in the context, it eventually induces psychological uneasiness in the protagonist. As for instance, when Marya meets Stephan in the prison, the room becomes associated with confusion and threat:

She went into the parloir, which was a huge room full of the buzz of voices… she sat down on the wooden bench and stared steadily through the bars that were like bars of an animal’s cage. Her heart began to beat heavily. The buzzing noise deafened and benumbed her. She felt as though an iron band were encircling her head tightly, as though she were sinking slowly down into deep water. (30; emphasis original)

The image of the prison reminds her of confinement, suffocation and her own vulnerable situation. On her next visit she finds Stephan curiously transformed into a ‘bright-eyed animal, staring at her’ (45). Again, living with the Heidlers and succumbing to Mr Heidler’s fancy in the flat in the Avenue de l’Observatoire lends the room a variant perspective: “Fancy being shut up in a dark dirty cell when the spring was coming. Perhaps one morning you’d smell it through the window and then surely your heart would nearly burst with the longing for liberty” (54). The room gets transformed into ‘a dark dirty cell’ with her feeling of suffocation. It reveals her non-acceptance of her identity as Mr Heidler’s mistress. Her present condition stands in
contrast to the coming of 'spring' in Nature. Nature blooms with colours outside but she fails to participate in this regeneration. She is destined to feel the coldness and failure in relationship. Cell and prisons, at the same time, are 'unhomely homes' and deviant spaces. As Marya is reduced to a mistress of Heidler, she feels constricted to a 'cell.' When nature is in full bloom, she is ironically plunged into a life of perpetual winter. The fertility in Nature is contrasted with the aridity in her personal life. Such a situation generates in her a longing for liberty. Heidler's secret nightly visit frightens her. Consequently her room metamorphoses into the image of a trap: "...she was in a frenzy of senseless fright. Fright of a child shut up in a dark room. Fright of an animal caught in a trap" (71). Marya is caged in Heidler's room and she is fed, clothed and attended to like an animal but in exchange she must transform herself as an object of Heidler's carnal pleasures. Staley, a perceptive critic, finds this image of confinement Kafkaesque: "The cage has given way to a grotesque Kafkaesque image of claustrophobia and vertigo, reflecting Marya's horror, fear, dislocation, and desperation" (220). It reflects the closing in of forces against her and her inability to cope with them. The caged fox that Marya sees in the zoo gets resonated in her present condition. The room for her undoubtedly degenerates into a cage.

Julia, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, after being dispatched off by Mr Mackenzie felt better locked away in her hotel room. When her landlady felt her to be mad and queer 'always alone in her bedroom', she felt it was a 'good sort of place to hide in.... until the sore and cringing feeling, which was the legacy of Mr Mackenzie, had departed' (11). Although Julia was disheartened being cast away by Mr Mackenzie, she was not 'altogether unhappy. Locked in her room – especially when she was locked in her room – she felt safe' (11). She felt comfortable being shut off from the glaring eyes of the society which looked upon her as nothing more than a
dismissed prostitute. The significance of the room alters after she is paid her complete monetary dues by Mr Mackenzie and leaves the place on her own volition. She feels ‘as a prisoner might feel who has resigned herself to solitary confinement for an indefinite period in a not uncomfortable cell and who is told one morning, ‘Now, then, you are going to be let off today. Here’s a little money for you. Clear out’ (19). Overcome with the feeling that she has to drift once more planning her course anew she became indecisive and nervous. It indicates that although she is not happy as Mr Mackenzie’s mistress, she has got used to it like a prisoner gets used to its confinement. Her familiar surroundings takes on an aura of strangeness: “The room already had a different aspect. It was strange – as a place becomes strange and indifferent when you are leaving it” (19).

In Voyage in the Dark Anna’s impression about the rooms expand and contract as her relationship with Walter surge and wane. After she fails to sensually gratify Walter, she shifts to Walter’s bedroom. Although this room felt cold ‘it had a secret feeling – quiet, like a place where you crouch down when you are playing hide-and-seek’ (21). Her desire to confess her love to Walter and yet keeping it from him is equated with the game of ‘hide-and-seek.’ The feeling for Walter was a secret that she hid. Walter’s room seemed to resonate with this secret. The alternative between two contrasting desires – either to satisfy Walter or to be a ‘virgin... silly cow’ finds reflection in the fluctuation of temperatures in different rooms. She finds Walter’s bedroom ‘warm’ but the other room where she takes refuge is cold in spite of the burning fire: ‘The fire was like a painted fire; no warmth came from it’ (31). When Walter does not force her to get intimate with him and leaves her in her own hotel, coldness creeps into her nerves: “I undressed and got into bed, but I couldn’t get warm. The room had a cold, close smell. It was like being in a small dark box” (22).
It is her inexperience about sexual relationships that separates her from her other companions and encloses her into a stifling space. Ordered by the landlady to leave the room and rebuked as a tart, she felt ‘the walls... getting smaller and smaller until they crush you to death’ (26). This sensation of the same room changing in size and temperature is an interesting method through which Rhys indicates and measures the protagonists’ moral condition. This is made clear when, with Walter’s departure, the room again begins to grow in size: “He went out. The room looked different, as if it had grown bigger” (29).

Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* longs to have a beautiful room in Paris where she could luxuriate as she was weighed down by her anxieties and miseries:

Suddenly I feel I must have number 219, with bath – number 219, with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath. I shall exist on different plane at once if I get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can’t escape from your fate? I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219. (37)

This is a room where she had pleasant experiences when she was in Paris with Enno. Sasha desires to return to those lost time. The numbered room in a hotel suggests temporary dwelling. It at once becomes a symbol of longing for comfort and hope for rejuvenation, albeit temporary. An urge to re-live her happy experiences of the past makes her long for it. At the same time, a good room at a dear price gives her an opportunity to show off her monetary capability giving her a feeling of empowerment:

That’s my idea of luxury – to have the sheets changed every day and twice on Sundays. That’s my idea of the power of money.
Yes, I'll have the sheets changed. I'll lie in bed all day, pull the curtains and shut the damned world out.... (81; emphasis added)

With every opportunity to establish her financial strength her sensation about the rooms changes and she feels enlivened: “I am surrounded by the pictures. It is astonishing how vivid they are in this dim light.... Now the room expands and the iron band round my heart loosens. The miracle has happened. I am happy” (99). Sasha comes to the Russian painter to buy a painting. She feels good thinking of having enough money to buy it. She goes on to think of a ‘room of her own’ with a ‘bed,’ a ‘mirror’ and a ‘stove’ and it would have all the paintings that she sees here.

Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea feels safe locked in her bedroom in the Coulibri Estate. Hers is a room space that belonged to her. It is not like the hotel rooms that are temporary lodgings. After her nightmare of a man ‘whom she hated’ following her, she feels protected when she realizes that she was in her familiar surroundings of Coulibri Estate: “I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers” (23). The island of Jamaica is surrounded by the Sargasso Sea. So outsiders or the Europeans cannot invade the place easily. She feels secure thinking of the sea protecting the island.

When Antoinette’s mother turns mad, she is sent to the convent, which acted as a substitute for the lost security that resulted from her mother’s insanity: “This convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death…” (47). While leaving the convent with her stepfather she is encircled by a ‘feeling of dismay, sadness, loss’ which almost chocks her and her feeling of insecurity returns to haunt her. Facing the unfamiliar world with new experiences and vague fear of the unknown future haunts
her: “They are safe. How can they know what it can be like outside?” (50; emphasis original) She was even unsure about how far the plans of her stepfather about her happy future would materialize. With Antoinette’s marriage to Edward Rochester and their shifting to England her room in Rochester’s castle degenerates into a confined attic space. This room of hers was nothing more than a solitary prison, cold, dark and high walled: “There is one window high up – you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room” (147).

Every bit of familiarity is wiped off as it might offer a glimpse of the past. He succeeds in shutting her off from everything she loves:

I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but hopelessness. Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die. (140; emphasis original)

He successfully wipes away the meaning of life from her. In Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels, O’Conner observes:

When the room is all that one of Rhys’s heroines has, one knows that she has reached the limit of destitution, isolation and hopelessness.

However, in Wide Sargasso Sea, more than in any of Rhys’s other novels, the causes for that finale are not simply the result of a passive and self-destructive personality. They are social and historical as well. Unlike her predecessors, Antoinette has not locked herself up. (195)

For the Rhysian protagonists the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity transforms their rooms into walls and prisons and subjects them to a perpetual torture. An escape from their miseries is next to impossible. Rooms are the psychological space of the
protagonists which gets filled with their anxiety and loneliness, trauma and insecurity. Their embittered selves either find temporary respite in these rooms or get evocation of the unpleasant memories of the past. For instance, Sasha’s similarity of experience in different rooms altered them to a mere materialistic entity:

A nice room?... But never tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system. All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair.... *A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is.* (38; emphasis added)

She had become cynical and the happy moments of the past remind her of her present misery: “This damned room – it’s saturated with the past.... It’s all the rooms I’ve ever slept in, all the streets I’ve ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms...” (109).

Similarity of experience in hotel rooms and unknown streets transform them to a meaningless entity. By drawing a comparison between a room in Virginia Woolf and that in Rhys, Helen Carr reflects:

For Woolf a room of one’s own is privacy within the bourgeois home:

for Rhys a room is never a home, only a latest bleak retreat from a hostile world. If Woolf is the modernist flâneuse, who after her street-haunting returns to a welcoming domesticity, the postmodernist migrant can only go back to her temporary and friendless lodging, indistinguishable from the last.... (51)

For the Rhysian protagonists like Marya, Julia, Anna, Sasha and Antoinette the room forms a symbol of temporary security of ‘home’ and then is transformed into an
uncanny ‘unhomely home’ like a cell, an attic, a convent, a cage, a prison or a dungeon. Instead of sheltering or defining their individual self, it further alienates them. Neither having a room in a home, nor a personal space of their own, they inhabit cheap hotel rooms ‘where they sleep, dream, drink, mechanically have intercourse, and are consumed by their helplessness in the world outside’ (Staley 222). Rhys, in order to liberate them from this claustrophobia, may have unconsciously provided the key to Antoinette who in the darkness of night steals it from Grace Poole, her keeper, and creeps into ‘the cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it’ (148). This is Rhys’s last novel and the four walled attic is transformed into ‘wall of fire protecting’ (154) Antoinette from the clutches of the outsiders and freeing her finally from the loss of self that had tortured her all her life. In it the duality of ‘home’/ ‘unhomely home’ merges as she finds her loved ones whom she had left behind and the clear sky and green foliage of Jamaica.

III

Journey by the females in Rhys are made for relational affiliation, in search of cultural assimilation, selfhood and realization of their cultural identity. Their journey in search of identity emphasizes the pertinence of the image of mask, dress and looking-glass. Home and identity is integrally related. Interaction of the individual on the social front gives them an identity and home as a personal space ensures the formation of an integrated personality. Rutherford who relates ‘home’ as a personal space to identity, contends: “Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised – this is home, this is belonging” (24).
Personal coherence of an individual and recognition of the self by the others necessitates the formation of identity and thus, identity rests on the threshold between the interior and the exterior, self and the other. Similarly, Andrew Gurr also comments: “The need for a sense of home as a base, as a source of identity even more than refuge has grown powerfully in the last century” (13). Schizophrenic fragmentation of the self and a disturbed existence results from the absence of selfhood. Consequently, acceptance within a social frame brings in social and cultural identities. When dress and mask are integrally related to social identities and acceptance within an atmosphere of cordiality, looking-glass is associated with self-identity. Integration and individualization in the public occur at the same time through dress and mask. Both are equally protective as well as revealing. When dress brings in class associations, economic status and respectability or how one should be looked upon, proper social masking helps to find acceptance within the society. Improperly and shabbily dressed Rhysian protagonists live in the societal fringes making them more vulnerable to insults. As Gornick observes about these women:

... Rhys poured her... language and form, making of sexual abandonment and the loss of respectability a parable of modern life.... [S]he...is alone on the shipwrecked sea of her life, longing for rescue: if only this room weren’t so dreary life would be tolerable. If only she had a new dress everything would be different.... Rhythmically and endlessly, she thinks of a better room, a new dress, a descent man. (9)

Dress and mask bring in insularity, transformation and acceptance. Their way of dressing associates them with commoditized women distinguishing them from those that are ‘respectable.’ When room is associated with an internal space – a
psychological one—dress displays their social manifestation. It defines them and gives them a location.

Although monetarily insecure, the protagonists always desire to be warm and well clothed. Dressing properly gives them confidence. If properly dressed, they will be able to flaunt themselves; it would also hide their inner vacuity. Purchasing a new dress implies a sense of empowerment. Perhaps it is this search for confidence that drew Marya to Stephan because he too was very particular about what Marya wore:

“He criticized her clothes with authority and this enchanted her” (16). Julia (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie) repents selling off her fur coat which successfully concealed her miserable state: “She began bitterly to remember the coat she had once possessed. The sort that lasts for ever, astrakhan, with a huge sunk collar” (80). She knew a proper dress could command respect from people hiding her social inferiority:

“People thought twice before they were rude to anybody wearing a good fur coat; it was a protective colouring, as it were” (80). Anna (Voyage in the Dark) too articulates a similar feeling:

When I thought about my clothes I was too sad to cry.

About clothes, it’s awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. Jaw, jaw, jaw.... ‘Beautifully dressed woman....’ As if it isn’t enough that you want to be beautiful, that you want to have pretty clothes, that you want it like hell. As if it isn’t enough. But no, it’s jaw, jaw and sneer, sneer all the time. And the shop windows sneering and smiling in your face. And then you look at the skirt of your costume, all crumpled at the back. And your hideous underclothes. You look at your hideous underclothes
and you think, 'All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything — anything for clothes.' (22)

When Sasha, the protagonist of Good Morning, Midnight, is thrown out of her job, she laments thus:

In this fitting-room there is a dress in one of the cupboards which has been worn a lot by the mannequins and is going to be sold off for four hundred franc. The sales woman has promised to keep it for me. I have tried it on; I have seen myself in it. It is a black dress with wide sleeves embroidered in vivid colours — red, green, blue, purple. It is my dress. If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid.... Now I shall never have that dress. Today, this day, this hour, this minute I am utterly defeated. (28)

With the loss of the job, and consequently of the dress, Sasha loses the opportunity of overcoming her inadequacies which impede her progress across the social ladder. Though Sasha had a meagre income, she longed to appear beautiful and attractive. For Julia uplifting one’s perturbed spirits means having a new look: “She told herself, ‘I must get some new clothes. That’s the first thing to do.’ And she longed for someone to whom she might say: ‘I don’t look so bad, do I? I’ve still got something to fight the world with, haven’t I?’” (19). Anna in Voyage in the Dark also feels delighted when she goes to buy the dark blue dress: “This is a beginning. Out of this warm room that smells of fur I’ll go to all the lovely places I’ve ever dreamt of. This is the beginning” (25; emphasis original). Anna is also drawn to Walter for his sophisticated style of dressing: “I liked the room and the red carnations on the table and the way he talked and his clothes — especially his clothes. It was a pity about my
clothes, but anyway they were black. ‘She wore black. Men delighted in sable colour, or lack of colour’” (19). She associates a new and fashionable dress with optimism: “The clothes of most of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future. ‘If I could buy this, then of course I’d be quite different.’ Keep hope alive and you can do anything…” (111). Thus, dress for them means a transformation, a change for the better. Sasha’s friend advises her to go to Paris and breathe fresh air: “I think you need a change. Why don’t you go back to Paris for a bit? ... You could get yourself some new clothes – you certainly need them” (11 – 12).

Dress for Rhysian heroines is as important for their famished mind as food is for their body. It can be noted that when Marya explains her financial insecurity to Stephan, she unconsciously chose the metaphor of dress, “I owe for the dress I have on” (18). She was in debt to her dressmaker for the dress that she is presently wearing. Stephan who comes forward and wants to repay her debt impresses her. He appears to be nothing less than an Arthurian knight who saves the maid afflicted with poverty. With Stephan’s arrest she is forced to sell all her beautiful dresses to procure some money. This had an adverse effect on her health as she unwillingly parts with it: “At the beginning of next week she sold her dresses. She lay in bed, for her cold had become feverish” (31). With the passage of time they had become her personal possessions. During the period of adversity she continues to think about beautiful dresses. This consoles her:

When she had bathed she would lie and think of little stupid things like a yellow dress that Stephan had bought her once at Ostend. He always chose beautiful clothes. He had a flair for that sort of thing. It had been
fun to wear beautiful clothes and feel fresh and young and like a flower. The greatest fun in the world. (127)

Dress for her is an asset. So Marya has grown into her dress as if it is her skin shielding her from the miseries. In her meeting with the Heidler’s at the splendid restaurant her tattered dress revealed her poor condition. The selling of the dresses also signifies the end to her dream of her secured life with Stephan. Only a woman ‘qui fait la noce’ (who is getting married) will usually buy la robe de soirée, the evening dress, that was best of her collection. Thus Madame Hautchamp, the dealer in dresses, does not want to buy it. Instead, she says, “It’s not a practical dress... it’s a fantasy, one may say. Therefore if it is bought at all, it will be bought by that kind of woman” (31). Julia (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie) who was derelict and psychologically tormented, once more feels consoled ‘thinking of the new clothes she would buy’: “She thought of new clothes with passion, with voluptuousness. She imagined the feeling of a new dress on her body and the scent of it, and her hand emerging from long black sleeves” (20). Later when Julia was anxious about her future she felt better thinking about clothes: “The idea of buying new clothes comforted her, and she got out of bed and dressed” (58). When the protagonists feel insecure the idea of a new dress consoles them. As Julia began ‘to imagine herself in a new black dress and a little black hat that just shadowed her eyes... why give up hope when so many people had loved her?...’ (181 – 182). She feels reassured. She loved fantasizing about the dresses in order to escape frustration:

In her mind she was repeating over and over again, like a charm: ‘I’ll have a black dress and hat and very dark grey stockings.’
Then she thought: ‘I'll get a pair of new shoes.... The last ones I got there brought me some luck. I’ll spend the whole lot I had this morning.’ (182)

Dress also signifies one’s financial stability or lack of it. For instance, Nora’s (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie) ‘pale-green dress with a red flower fixed in the lapel of the collar... had lost its freshness, so that the flower looked pathetic’ (71) is suggestive of the extreme poverty in which the family was immersed. In Voyage in the Dark, Ethel had examined Anna’s coat and suggested her to sell it off. Anna was very possessive about the coat as it was the one which Walter had bought for her. This coat also helped her to conceal her dresses that were in their poorest conditions: “I can’t come in this dress. It’s torn under the arm and awfully creased.... That’s why I keep my coat on” (100). Later she would be compelled to sell this fur coat and would use the money for abortion. She associates the idea of buying a good dress with prosperity. Merely looking at beautiful ones without the means to purchase them depresses her: “… thinking about my room in Camden Town and I didn’t want to go back to it. There was a black velvet dress in a shop-window.... A girl could look lovely in that, like a doll or a flower” (111). The usual womanly aesthetic sensibilities in Anna are aroused when she sees this dress.

While thinking of beautiful dresses, it evokes in them a youthful pleasure which is associated with pleasant memories of the past. Marya (Quartet) recalls her yellow dress that Stephan had bought from Ostend. Similarly, Sasha also recollects a dress which was brought by her husband Enno:

Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner, in the Rue Victor-Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation
astrakhan coat? It was then that I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder – calling myself Sasha. (12)

Accordingly, dress also becomes associated with hope, mirth and luck. Again, her English hat and old coat causes suspicion regarding her identity when she fails to produce her passport to the hotel assistant: “I tell him I will let him have the passport in the afternoon and he gives my hat a gloomy, disapproving look. I don’t blame him. It shouts ‘Anglaise’, my hat. And my dress extinguishes me. And then this damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else – the last idiocy, the last incongruity” (15). Distressed life, displacement and loss suffered by the female protagonists are sought to be concealed through the acts of beautifying themselves. The device of dress and make-up restores some self-respect. Dress helps the protagonist to conceal the emotional crisis and it, at the same time, masks their financial instability.

Dress is firmly linked to individual identity. As is found in Voyage in the Dark, Anna goes out with Laurie to meet Bill and Joe, and borrows Laurie’s dress, her own being creased and torn. Laurie had already taken to prostitution. Anna’s borrowing of dress is suggestive of her attempt to gain the identity of a prostitute which she fails resulting in Laurie’s snatching away the dress from her: “If you think you’re going to walk off with my clothes you’ve got another guess coming” (108). Anna in drunken frenzy tries to seize it from her but fails: “The dress was hanging over the end of the bed. I took hold of it, but she hung on to it. We both pulled. Joe started to laugh” (108). Jealousy had sprouted in Laurie who felt that Joe was more interested in Anna than in her. Their fight with the dress is symbolic of their desire to impress Joe battling the inferior out. Laurie succeeds and rebukes her: “I think you are
a bit of a fool... you will never get on, because you don’t know how to take people.
After all, to say you’ll come out with somebody and then to get tight and start a row
about nothing at all isn’t a way to behave” (110). Thus, Anna’s identity remains
confined as a betrayed mistress and could not be transformed into that of a tart. In
Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette too was angry with Tia, her little black playmate, for
stealing her starched, clean and ironed dress and leaving her own dirty ones for
Antoinette. Tia’s stealing of dress may suggest the black native’s hatred for the white
Creole. Antoinette was ashamed of meeting the English visitors in Tia’s dirty clothes
as ‘they were very beautiful... and... wore such beautiful clothes’ (21). Antoinette,
linked ancestrally to England, and the English, felt that she should wear clean and
descent dresses to prove her true status. She, at times, tries to assume a white
woman’s identity and often rejects it in favour of the native culture. She oscillated
between the two cultures. Her mother’s suggestion of burning Tia’s dress may display
the colonizer’s strong dislike for the black natives who were considered inferior to
them. Antoinette instead is given one of her old muslin dresses which tore as she tried
to force it on. This symbolically suggests Antoinette’s problematic cultural location.
The black girl’s identity is neither desirable nor possible, nor is the English identity,
culturally ‘pure,’ is compatible. Her culturally in-between situation is clearly
conveyed by this dress episode. Much later, when she was locked in the attic, her red
dress in the wardrobe evokes in her all pleasant memories of Jamaica. It is a reminder
of what is not possible now, of the fragrance of old days, a symbol of lost identity:
“This scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The
smell of vetiver and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are
flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain” (151). The red dress
gradually stimulates her memory which was slowly fading away as Rochester had
been taking control of her life and trying to erase her past. It helps her to relocate herself within a familiar topography and a familiar memoryscape. It helped her own self to relate to incidents and personalities which had shaped her life. It is this dress that gives her a moment of epiphanic vision of liberation from her confinement arousing in her the hope of getting reunited with the land from which she was torn away: “But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do” (153). She also remembers Sandi whom she had loved and had met wearing the same dress on the last day of departure. She had a longing to go to Jamaica, but had hurt her step brother Richard with a knife when he had paid her a visit. She had a strong dislike for him as it is he who is responsible for the miseries in her life and had attacked perhaps for his failure to recognize her. Richard had plotted with Rochester for the share of Antoinette’s property after her marriage to Rochester. She laments near Grace: “He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that? .... ‘Have you hidden my red dress too? If I’d been wearing that he’d have known me’ “(151). The dress transports her to the past, gave her a tactile sensation of getting back a lost realm of security: “… ‘only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning’” (151). It acts as an object that triggers memory that Rochester could not destroy. The dress had survived as a concentrated form of memory that felt and smelt of the past which was her home. Smell is strongly associated with the object, and she can recognise it by the smell: “… I held the dress in my hand wondering if they had done the last worst thing.
If they had *changed* it when I wasn’t looking. If they had changed it and it wasn’t my dress at all – but how could they get the scent?” (152; emphasis original)

Rhys did not forget to describe nature that garbs itself in green with the coming of spring. It vibrates with life and vitality. Marya reflects: “The spring came early... one day the branches of the trees in the Luxembourg Gardens were bare and grim and next they waved cool leaves in kind wind.... Then the chestnuts flowered and the girls walking along with linked arms began to discuss their new clothes endlessly. ‘*Ma robe verte... mon costume gris...*’ (53; emphasis original). This change on the face of nature is sharply contrasted with the solitary confinement and spiritual aridity in which Marya (*Quartet*) was forced to live. She would have loved to participate in this joviality that the season offers. But her poverty, her inability to purchase new dresses prevents her.

On the contrary, change of style in men’s dress becomes an element of concern. In *Quartet*, for instance, Heidler’s wearing of a bowler hat makes Marya uncomfortable: “… she was still thinking uneasily about the hat, because it seemed symbolical of a new attitude” (89). This change in Heidler’s style anticipates his change of attitude towards Marya in near future. Stephan too straightens his tie and wears his hat preparing to desert injured Marya.

Mask which is closely allied with dress emerge as a significant image. The act of masking is associated with socio-cultural practices. Masks use colour for decoration and distortion. It acts as a means of protection and concealment of one’s identity. The English had mastered the art of social masking but a black native uses mask more to ridicule the centre than to appropriate its culture. Ellison observes: “We wear the mask for purposes of aggression as well as for defence; when we are
projecting the future and preserving the past. In short, the motives hidden behind the
mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals” (55). In *Smile Please*
Rhys registers her fondness of Caribbean masks in the carnival observed in Roseau, a
place in Dominica:

I have watched carnivals in television. They were doubtless very
colourful but it seems to me that it was all planned and made up
compared to the carnival I remember, when I used to long so fiercely to
be black and to dance, too, in the sun, to that music. The carnival I knew
has vanished. (59)

In a Caribbean carnival, mask becomes oppositional and subversive. Usually,
unidentified men concealed behind the mask jeered and sneered at the Creoles. The
pretentious nature of the Europeans made Rhys feel as if she was looking at them
through a mask, unable to comprehend them. Rhys was a Caribbean and so was well
acquainted with this idea of masking during carnivals where people hid their
identities. As Anna recalls a mask that she saw during her early years in West Indies:
“A pretty useful mask that white one watch it and a slobbering tongue of an idiot will
stick out – a mask Father said with an idiot behind it…” (156). In *Voyage in the Dark*,
the use of the masks conveys a collective expression of indignation and rebellion. The
native people mimicked, ridiculed and jeered at the Creoles from behind their masks.
The Creoles stood outside the pageants as they thought it lowly to get mixed up in
these silly performances. Rhys employs masks as a strategy for fictional effects.
Sometimes they are used as a means of mimicking and critiquing the hypocrisy of
white men and women; sometimes they are also used to conceal one’s identity.
In the European context the word ‘mask’ may be taken in a broader sense. Application of cosmetics is artificial and may be taken as an attempt to conceal, distort and affect what is natural. But it is also often taken as an effort to aesthetically enhance one’s beauty. In a repressive society, it may also be considered to be a part of deliberate attempt to break free from traditional normative patterns, and is even taken as an expression of free choice. Post-war Paris became reputed for the display of cosmetic allure through dress and mask along with bohemianism and sexual adventure. Alexis Lykiard in his book *Jean Rhys Revisited* describes the importance of the perfume ‘L’Heure Bleue.’ It captures and resonates the aura of dressing and masking in France prior to the First World War. As Elkin quotes from Lykiard:

[T]he talk at one point touched upon lipstick and perfume, these two singular women reaching enthusiastic agreement on their favourite scent -- Guerlain’s peerless and ever sophisticated L’Heure Bleue.... With L’Heure Bleue, first produced in 1912, had thus been born a delicate strength, a most feminine subtlety, and it was pleasing that such qualities could cohere and endure so long.... L’Heure Bleue, how it lifts the heart and lightens the mood! Dusk, it suggests to us perhaps – that sentimental time of early evening, crepuscular hour or promise, romantic lull or interlude, an interim moment of flirtation. Just the time for intimate drinks in some sidewalk café, making the most if any evanescent glow. Our twilit hour that seems to soften and anoint everything it passes, on its own way to becoming inevitable dark. (par. 60)

Dress and mask had become significant also for the women protagonists of Rhys who were constantly moving in Paris during the pre-war and post-war period. Joan Riviere
and J. C. Flugel surveyed that the use of cosmetic powder and paint became more prominent among the women in the post-War Europe. He opines that this use of colour has a dual function – when, on one hand, it is a backward step into primitivism, on the other, it is also a victory over the old habits of sexual repression and social subordination. Consequently, masking through colours emerged as an ambivalent symbol associated with women’s modernity.

The use of dress and cosmetics has various connotations in the novels of Rhys. In *Quartet*, Lois’s use of loud colours and application of the same by Marya make them objects of exhibitions. They appear to be puppets dressing in accordance with the male whims. Cosmetics and dress act as a tool of exploiting women. Marya responds inadequately to the demand for concealing her perturbed self:

> She was very pale, her eyes were shadowed, her lips hastily and inadequately rouged. She was wearing a black dress under her coat, a sleeveless, shapeless, sack-like garment, and she appeared frail, childish, and extraordinarily shabby. (38 – 39)

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* uses female dressing as a text of resistance. Julia Martin uses dress to mask the frustration and dejection resulting from rejection and betrayal. Rhys in the text reflects: “To stop making up would have been a confession of age and weariness. It would have meant that Mr Mackenzie had finished her” (14). ‘Masking up’ a world of her own to face the outside world is what is strived at. Her resistance to the personal and social forces which conspire against her shapes her spirit: “She dressed herself and then went and stood by the window to make up her face and to put kohl on her eyes, which were beautiful – long and dark, very candid, almost childish in expression” (14). The description of the eyes gives an expression of
the innocence of the girl and it is indeed unfortunate that she has to apply 'make up' to such a beautiful face. The focus on the use of cosmetics underlines the manipulative nature of society. Julia maintains a sardonic distance from the society and acts as an observer of the system where her beauty plays an important part. Rishona Zimring, a very perceptive critic, emphasizes the importance of 'make up' and social masking in Rhys’s works:

For Rhys, these forces included the production of women’s new looks and performances in the realm of cosmetics, not only an instrument of women’s commodification and exploitation, but also, and in complex ways, a realm in which women could express and even empower themselves, both symbolically and materially.” (215)

Make-up as a mask stands symbolic of urbanity, the demands of which made them put it ritualistically although it failed to conceal the strains of modern living. She further points out: “…cosmetics signified the transgressive femininity of the non-domestic woman; the made-up female face connoted abandonment of an ideal, nineteenth-century “natural” face… that was supposed to convey fixity and essence of identity removed from fashion and consumption” (219). In Rhys, the women are unhomed drifters and their made-up faces become associated with their unhomely lives. Makeover is feminine disguising the interior self from society. Although it defines femininity it, at the same time, gets associated with an alienated individualism. It is ambiguous in the sense, when masking is negatively associated with women it might signify the disintegration of self, alienation, fluidity of identity, commodification and consumption. However, it at the same time, might allow her to be a player, creator and performer. Zimring observes:
Through her deft manipulation of shopping scenes, dress, symbolic urban landscapes, and especially cosmetics, Rhys critiques consumer subjectivity and the commodification of women. Make-up and other adornment do offer her protagonists some means of self-assertion, but these women never achieve final consolation. (216)

Anna after being deserted by Walter still cherishes the hope to be accepted by him when he wants to meet her. Although, she is having tough times she tries to use dress as a mask to impress him and hide her misfortune:

I dressed very carefully. I didn’t think of anything while I dressed. I put on my black velvet dress and made up a bit with rather more rouge than usual and when I looked in the glass I thought, ‘He won’t be able to, he won’t be able to.’ There was a lump in my throat. I kept swallowing it, but it came back again. (82)

As moving from men to men had become a habit so did the melancholic repetition of the make-up to mask the shattered self while moving in the social front. The using of make-up becomes an obsession with Rhys’s women. Sasha whose beauty is destroyed by age, drinking and depression, consoles herself by calling her ugly face a mask:

I watch my face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller… it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily? (43)
Thus Sasha, who is schizophrenic, in a drunken frenzy confuses her own selfhood. Through the grotesque aesthetic of masking Sasha’s two selves emerge with a voice of ironic detachment displaying a wounded female concealed therein. She fails to identify her present self which is scarred and unprotected and tries to distance her self from it. It is this feeling of insecurity that she wants to conceal under hats and veils so that it may add an air of confidence to her look concealing her misery. Rhysian protagonists are addicted to the concept of masking and dressing and for them it defines their existence.

The looking-glass, as has been said earlier, is another image that prominently reveals the split personality of the Rhysian females. So, the problem relating to the protagonists’ identity will remain incomplete without focussing on it along with the concept of masking and dressing as it appears in Rhys’s novels. The looking-glass has been an archetypal image in the literary texts. The image of the mirror, in the modern times, is usually associated with issues related to identity. Society tends to pattern the lives of men and women as per its dictates and the one who transgresses these is called an outcast. Rhysian protagonists do not conform to the social norms and thus they are perceived as ‘mad’ or ‘amateurs.’ Luce Irigaray, speaking of the importance of the identity of the self, opines: “Better than the gaze of the other, which is necessarily threatening because of its different viewpoint, is the subject’s self-observation, the protective and reflexive extension of his own gaze” (qtd. in Meaney 172). Self-observation is an act of self-scrutiny, self-reflection, forcing the gaze on to one’s own self, and thus is an act of empowerment as well. Refusing to accept the identity that has been thrust upon, one may look at themselves in one’s looking-glass in search of one’s own individuality and self-definition. But the self-discovery in most
of the cases in Rhys’s novels leads to disenchantment. For instance, Marya (Quartet), living as Mr Heidler’s mistress, looks at the mirror and fails to recognize her own self:

Her eyelids were swollen and flaccid over unnaturally large, bright eyes. Her head seemed to have sunk between her shoulders, giving her a tormented and deformed look. Her mouth drooped, her skin was grayish, and when she made up her face the powder and rouge stood out in clownish patches.

She would stare at herself, feeling a horrible despair. A feeling of sickness would come over her as she stared at herself. (97)

She loathes her own self-image as she recognises her own dependence on Heidler, and her constant longing and fear, of being left by Heidler, had transformed her beyond identification. But her image on the mirror changes as she feels happy when Stephan returns: “She opened her handbag and looked at herself in the little glass, and was astounded because her mouth was so smiling and peaceful” (104). In After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, Julia, by looking at her reflection again and again, tries to reassure herself that she is young and well-dressed and beautiful, because she knew that ‘age and weariness’ was gradually catching up: “…when she looked in the glass she thought that she had never seen herself looking quite so ugly…. She took her hat off and sponged her face with cold water, powdered it, brushed her hair flat and pulled out her side-locks carefully from under her hat” (119). Mr Horsfield, the man from London who sympathises with her, wondered, “…She must have some pathetic illusion about herself or she would not be able to go on living” (91). It is this illusion that inspires Julia to go on: “She looked at herself in the glass and thought: ‘After all, I’m not finished. It’s all nonsense that I am. I’m not finished at all’” (59). She finds a
Narcissistic pleasure looking at herself trying to believe that she was still young. It revives her interest in life. Again, Anna (Voyage in the Dark) observes that she looks different in different looking glasses. This highlights her fractured identity. She hated the mirror in Walter’s bedroom as it imaged her ‘so thin and pale’ (35). Perhaps it is her hatred of her own alien look that made her dislike it: “I put my face nearer the glass. Like when you’re a kid and put your face very near the glass and make faces at yourself” (72). Her inability to relate herself with cold and colourless England and her longing for a concrete identity perhaps makes her hate her image which, she feels does not correspond to her own self. Mirrors are such an important aspect for Rhys’s characters that even when Sasha (Good Morning, Midnight) pictures in her mind an ideal room, she cannot forget her looking-glass:

Perhaps one day I’ll live again round the corner in a room as empty as this. Nothing but a bed and a looking-glass…. Lying near the stove in complete peace…. and then having a drink and lying all the afternoon in that empty room – nothing in it but the bed, the stove and the looking-glass and outside Paris. (100)

Her reflection in the lavabo mirror seems to reflect familiarity: “Well, well,” it says, ‘last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren’t you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one – lightly, like an echo – when it looks at me again?” (170). The mirror, thus, is a reservoir of memory. Every time one looks at its depth, an echo is created, and the echo reaches the past and unearths memories of happy days. Sasha was young and beautiful when the songs of old days reverberate. Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea sees herself reflected in Tia and so Tia acts as Antoinette’s mirror. She
had longed to be black and gay like Tia. This would have integrated her to the island. But Tia, mimicking the natives, found her nothing more than a white cockroach. When Antoinette wanted to be with her, Tia displayed an antagonistic attitude by hitting her with a stone:

... I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to live Coulibri. Not to go.... When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, and tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (38; emphasis added)

The sensation of pain and grief that she had felt was reflected in the tears of Tia and thus established her as one with the black girl. Both of them are, at different social levels, receivers, and both are outside the purview of the white imperialist ideas of normality. Both carry a history of racist and imperialistic domination in different proportions. Both of them feel, as the above extract demonstrates, the loss of an opportunity to bridge the gap both at personal and community levels. Tiffin suggests that Antoinette and Tia are "[v]ictims of history, one is the true sacrificial mirror image of the other.... Here at last is a mirror in which Antoinette can perceive herself, not the English distortion of self" (338). The looking-glass is strongly related with Antoinette’s identity. Rochester recollects: “All day she’d be like any other girl, smile at herself in her looking-glass” (76). It was a kind of negotiation with her own self – a
kind of convincing oneself of one’s own worth. Later, by confining her to an attic, Rochester denies her the consolation of having a looking-glass. This means that she would have no reflection of the past, no echo in her memory, no scope for a dialogue with her own self. Antoinette laments:

There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself and yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us – hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (147)

This deprivation evidently causes a deep anguish. The mirror that usually hurls one’s image back, which creates a link between the past and the present, reminding what one had been in the past and what one, is now missing. This gap in the personal history of continuity creates an identity crisis. There is another dimension to the presentation of the image of the mirror. While it facilitates the dialogue between the two temporal zones and establishes continuity, it nevertheless prevents the revival or reincarnation of the past in the actual life of the present, except in the metaphorical sense. The above extract also points out the extra-real life of an individual at another level – a more adorable and perhaps more ideal – but Antoinette’s attempt to kiss a sign of admiration and love the self image does not succeed. In between her lips and those of the image falls the ‘shadow’ or rather, more literally, the mirror – the reality – which is ‘hard, cold and misled.’ When she sets fire to Rochester’s castle, the shooting flames transform the sky to a mirror where she sees a distinct reflection of
the past that she had forgotten. In this pool of fire she saw the bathing pond of Coulibri and her childhood friend Tia beckoning her to join in. Infinite reflections take place when two mirrors are kept parallel to the other. Similarly, between the red flames and the red sky Antoinette finds infinite number of images of the forgotten past. Like her red dress, the mirror too helps her to relocate herself to the forgotten past, helping her in the process to recover her identity which had already faded. The image reflected in a mirror is illusory. The fire and the sky become the metaphorical mirrors of escape from the sordid reality. Luce Irigary emphasizing on the symbols of mirror and fire comments: “There where we expect to find the opaque and silent matrix of a logos immutable in the certainty of its own light, fires and mirrors are beginning to radiate, sapping the evidence of reason at base” (qtd. in Meaney 182).

Her projected insanity and the consequential acts of creating the fire sabotage the logo-centered world and its rationale. The history of the Creole identity is indeed kept outside this Eurocentric, gendered world, and she must strike back at the root. The looking-glass image of Tia calling her and the act of igniting Rochester’s ‘home’ of patriarchy are all acts of revolt. Antoinette’s whiteness is outside the history and the geography of the racializing tendencies of the white people. In a similar way Gregg interprets “the jump into the mirror image of Tia and Coulibri as a gesture of resistance…. The cathexis between Antoinette and Tia, as Self/ Other, Narcissus/ Echo, the separation and the intimacy all work toward the construction and de(con)struction of the white creole woman” (99 – 100). Gayatri Chakroborty Spivak feels that Antoinette occupies an in-between space between an English imperialist and the black Caribbean native. Accordingly to her, Antoinette desires a self-consolidating mirror, which collapses the imperialist project of subject-constitution.
In the previous sections of this chapter it has been seen that Rhysian protagonists drift perilously through the ‘nonhomes’ of streets, passages, and live uncertainly in hotels and on the fringes of family spaces not their own. They dream of ‘home’ and are in its search forever. In her fictional world, ‘home’ can never be realized as there is an absence of an integrated personality. Integrated personality for her characters is an impossibility because they are compelled to battle against the harshness of realities. They do not have proper family environment, they hardly talk of their family spaces. Their domestic life is incomplete with no strong ties between parents and children, between siblings or between one family and another. There are hardly any descriptions of any intense community activity. As they move from place to place, and country to country, they feel displaced. This sense of displacement and lack of integrated personality find expression, as we have seen, in different images and symbols. The images of hotels, streets, restaurants, and other people’s families are tantamount to homelessness. Relationships that they develop there are based not on genuine love or affection, but on mutual interest and even coercion. In such a context a home remains a distant possibility. What particularly distinguishes Rhys from the other writers is not her female protagonists’ constant search for a lost home, but its non-existence in real life experience. The ‘home’ exists only in imagination in a form of an ideal one or of a fossilized ‘period house,’ which the protagonists perceive but can never arrive at.

The symbols and images are interwoven with the other. It is the motif of journey that unites her works, a voyage in search of belongingness and self-definition. The female protagonists’ are denied the congeniality of the sacred ‘home’ where they
should actually reside. Rooms in hotels sometimes offer illusory sense of ‘home,’ but more often than not they emerge as temporary points of stay during their passages.

When bitter social reality can be averted by being confined to a room, the situational reality can be camouflaged through an expensive dress or masking. Looking-glass and dream unites as mirroring or revealing what is illusory or unreal. Reflection of a person is the image; it at the same time is identified with the person and is also different ‘looking back’ at him/her. It is seldom identical, and such mirroring is found among Rhys’s women and the women protagonists who stand as the distortion of the other. For instance, Lois Heidler is mirrored in Marya, Norah in Julia, Francine in Anna, Sasha’s schismatic self looks at her ‘other’ who stands beyond recognition, Tia in Antoinette and vice-versa. Female protagonists are negatively reflected by the social mirror while other women who are traditionally portrayed posses what is non-existent in them. The women protagonists are ‘free’ and homeless. Their unstable life is contrasted with the social and cultural belongingness of the traditional women.

Similarly, nightmare, dream and reality exist simultaneously bringing in the psychological world of illusion and their world of wretched reality. That which is a nightmare becomes real that which they desire never happens. A constant shuffling between the real world and that of the dream emphasizes the absence of security, permanence, and happiness on the topographical as well as in the psychological plane. Circle and streets signify the eternal ‘nonhome’ or a place of non-belonging. Streets bring in the idea of derelict, drifter and unhomed. The protagonists are caught in the labyrinths and mazes of broken relationships. Their aimless journeys lead them nowhere. To end the journey of self seeking self-definition they are to break the repetitive circle of life. Their quest philosophizes the truth of selfhood in relation to the self and this selfhood is defined in terms of positive relations of affectionate
bonding. Antoinette realizes it and arrives at it through her selective memory where she relates herself not as a wife to Rochester but as a Creole of fascinating Jamaica, a friend of Tia, a niece of Aunt Cora, like a daughter to Christophine. It is this realization which enlightens her about the truth of her identity. She arrives at meaningfulness from a state of meaninglessness which Rochester strived to dissolve through solitary confinement. This, for her, is liberation and her jumping into the fire registers the protest against further dissolution of her identity. She dies with a vision of the real truth that had escaped her comprehension so far. Thus, the symbols expose the theme of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ and they are of immense significance in accentuating the perils of the female protagonists.

Notes

1. The phrase ‘homing desires’ is used in the context of diaspora is taken from Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. She distinguishes a ‘homing desire’ from a desire for a ‘homeland’ – the former is informed of an ideology of ‘return.’ “[N]ot all diasporas,” she observes, “sustain an ideology of ‘return’” (16). Since in the cases of Rhys’s female protagonists the desire of returning to the land of pristine beauty and peace was intense, and they were seized by an urge to return ‘home’ in its purest sense, the phrase can also be applied here.

flow of global capital. Non-places, such as the above, are impersonal places through which people pass and where people do co-exist but do not stay together. They are symptoms of ‘accelerated global society.’ Zygmunt Bauman refers to these as ‘places without place’ (qtd. in Hubbert et al 8).

3. Commenting on the nature of the women protagonists of Rhys, Veronica Marie Gregg in Jean Rhys’s *Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* quotes Wyndham:

   In 1950 Francis Wyndham put forward the theory of the composite heroine, observing that “essentially the novels deal with the same woman at…different stages of her career”…. This has been the single most influential approach to the Rhys text. (3)