

Abstract

Antithetical to the oft-repeated accusation that Jean Rhys's heroines are "passive victims", I intend to conclude that her protagonists are bold, heroic, resilient and unconventional figures when placed in the context of modernist writings of early twentieth century. They rip apart patriarchal hierarchical norms and language structures and are audacious enough to create their own versions of truth.

Rhys's woman resides in a space of physical and psychic alienation, marginality and homelessness. She confronts the prejudices of a xenophobic culture which does not recognize difference and treats it as deformity. She is variously defined by other people and is forced to structure her identity through the prevalent hegemonic discourses. It is ultimately through the power of her pre-referential language structure that she attempts to recreate herself and is able to shed the cloak of masochistic self-abasement and sense of worthlessness thrust upon her by the traditional bourgeois society. Writing for her is a form of resistance without which she would "not have earned death", she states in her autobiography.

Through this thesis I attempt to explore her protagonist figure's courageous attempt to voice her unique and doubly-marginalized identity through diction. Her identity crisis is reflected through her language structure which is semiotic, paratactic, literal, clipped and fragmented. The thesis would be an exploration of the ways in which language can construct human experience and render it decipherable for the protagonist

Chapter I will contextualize Rhys in the broader modernistic crisis of language in the context of other convention ridden women authors such as Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen and Dorothy Richardson. In Chapter II, the central narrative techniques of Rhys i.e. "Intertextuality" and "Rewriting" will be unveiled, specifically with reference to her novel Voyage in the Dark. Chapter III will feature a study of her novel After Leaving Mr Mackenzie. An analysis of Julia's quest for meaning while posing a challenge to the void from which discourse is created will be the central focus of this chapter. Chapter IV shall dissolve the illusory dichotomous oppositions between anger\laughter, farce\emotions, whimsy\psychological depth, victim\victimizer, slave\master in Rhys's Good Morning Midnight. Wide Sargasso Sea is distanced from her earlier novels by a gap of thirty years. Chapter V will include her last novel with an attempt to cohere the argument that Rhys's heroine does achieve a measure of unification of identity through reorganization of her psychic space. Throughout the thesis, the language theories of Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray will be applied on the novels of Rhys.