

CHAPTER 4

Religion in Rhys

Steve Pinkerton

Midway through Jean Rhys's first novel, *Quartet* (1928), protagonist Marya Zelli visits the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre in Paris:

The church was very cool and dark-shadowed, when they came in out of the sun. It smelled of candles and incense and ancient prayers. Marya stood for a long time staring at the tall Virgin and wondered why she suggested not holiness but rather a large and peaceful tolerance of sin . . .

"And you don't suppose that it matters to me," said the tall Virgin smiling so calmly above her candles and flowers. (95)

We have here a variation on the "churchgoing scene" that Pericles Lewis has identified as a signal topos of the modernist novel—an encounter with "a residuum of the sacred" within the putatively obsolescent but symbolically resonant monument of a church (6). Yet the Blessed Virgin functions less as a sacred figure in this scene than as a maternal one. In an act of sympathetic identification, indexed by the spelling of her own name, Marya interprets the Holy Mother as a woman who exists to recognize and to "tolerate" the lives of people such as herself. To the Madonna, our heroine wants to believe, "it matters."¹ This silent communion with a female icon is interrupted, however, by the grotesque posturings of the man who has urged Marya to meet him here:

Marya turned to watch Heidler go down on one knee and cross himself as he passed the altar. He glanced quickly sideways at her as he did it, and she thought: "I'll never be able to pray again now that I've seen him do that. Never! However sad I am." And she felt very desolate . . .

“What were you praying about just now?” she asked him suddenly.
 “You!” he said.
 “God’s quite a pal of yours?”
 “Yes,” said Heidler. (95–96)

Worth noting is the way Rhys, like her character Hugh Heidler, “choose[s] a church for a background” to this scene’s revelations. As in many other spiritually inflected passages in Rhys’s novels and stories, the explicitly religious content here supports and elucidates the predominant themes of the work in which it appears (94).

We learn a great deal in this scene about Marya and Heidler, after all, and it is the lineaments of Christianity that provide the impetus to their mutual disclosures. For one thing, we learn from Marya’s reflection that she will “never be able to pray again,” that some form of religious faith has been until now a resource for her to draw upon. But evidently Heidler’s blithe use of such a place and such means—a church, a prayer—for such patently profane purposes has spoiled the very possibility of prayer for Marya forever. Heidler prays only to be seen praying, casting a sidelong glance to ensure his performance has found an audience, and then he brings the chapter to a close with that ridiculous affirmation: God, he thinks, is “quite a pal” of his. This last avowal both complements and vitiates Marya’s gendered reflections on the Virgin, for even if she can count this Madonna among her camp, the rigid hierarchies of the Church continue to uphold a Cosmology of the Men’s Club—one in which God the Father has palled up with his fellow men, leaving women the comparatively cold comfort of an impossibly androcentric ideal, the Virgin Mother.

As Helen Carr has observed, Heidler’s chumminess with God is emblematic of Rhys’s Foucauldian view of power (*Jean Rhys* 51)—but this is just one of the ways Rhys’s uses of religious language and themes underwrite her more frequently discussed preoccupations with sexual politics and with the oppressiveness of authority in its various forms: patriarchy, empire, and prevailing ideologies of race, gender, and class.² Much has been said about the Caribbean religious practice of obeah that Rhys incorporated so memorably in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), but scenes such as these underscore the fact that Christianity was an equally important, and arguably more influential, component of Rhys’s upbringing and education. Catholicism in particular—the religion in which she was steeped as a teenaged boarder at a Roseau convent school, where for a time she “decided firmly” to become “not only a Catholic but a nun”—left an indelible mark on the author and richly informed her approach to fiction-writing (*SP* 65).

To attend to Rhys’s literary uses of Christianity means not only to address something of a blind spot in existing criticism but also to contribute to

an ongoing scholarly effort to reappraise religion's place in modernism and modernity. If it has taken the humanities' "religious turn" a while to catch up with literary study generally—such is the finding of a recent *PMLA* overview of the topic—then this is especially true of modernist scholarship, which has largely continued to assume, in Tim Armstrong's words, "that spiritual values and religious belief do not find a ready place within modernist aesthetics" (Armstrong 204).³ A focused consideration of religion in Rhys thus carries broader implications for the study of religion and literature in the period in which she lived and wrote. Throughout, we shall see that Rhys's investments in religious and specifically Christian language and tropes play an equally important role in the literary qualities that make Rhys both a modernist and a postcolonial writer. Indeed, this topic affords a productive way to bridge what J. Dillon Brown has recently called a "prominent and long abiding" divide between critical views of Rhys as a European modernist, on one hand, and as a Caribbean postcolonialist on the other (568).

For Rhys repurposes theology and religious ritual in definitively modernist ways, critiquing institutional religion while simultaneously drawing on its aesthetic power to feed her own literary practice. If this latter move puts Rhys squarely in league with any number of anglophone modernists, the former lies at the very root of Rhys's political stance toward the British Empire and one of its chief exports, Protestant Christianity. In what follows I examine, first, the religious thematics that predominate in each of Rhys's major works, attending especially to the vacillations in those texts between spiritual yearning and religious antipathy—a dynamic that emerges most notably between Rhys's deeply theological narrative frameworks and her characters' frequently avowed nihilism. I then turn to the political ramifications of Christianity, its alternating functions in Rhys as a means of ideological repression but also of colonial resistance, and finally to an extended reflection on the discourses of religion and modernity—or more precisely, on the mutually implicated rhetorics of scripture and of modern consumer capitalism—as they appear in Rhys's 1934 novel *Voyage in the Dark*.

"The Curse of Eve"

One encounters many enigmatic intrusions of the biblical and the Christological in Rhys's work: a character as "beautiful as some savage Christ," or a small card in a case full of stuffed birds, reading, "I believe in the Resurrection of the Dead" (*CSS* 70, 232–33). Reflecting on this latter inscription recalls to a character's mind the 23rd Psalm, which in turn inspires thoughts of nightmares in which the real-life figures that haunt her are intertwined with refractions of the Psalm's language and imagery, as well as other scriptural reflections (*CSS* 233–34). The story ends with the main character drifting

off to sleep and thinking, in a pessimistic reinscription of Christian doxology, “for ever and ever, world without end” (235). In *Quartet*, Marya sees the Palais de Justice as “a vision of heaven and the Judgment,” while her husband Stephan—like hers, his biblical name has been warped by one letter—returns from prison a “frail and shrunken apostle” whom Marya will later mistake for a sort of “Jesus Christ” (29, 133, 152). And the *commis* in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) personifies that novel’s “thematic of ritualized ‘sacrificial’ violence” (Britzolakis 461)—a thematic that culminates in the chilling final scene, as Sasha Jansen gives her body over to this “priest of some obscene, half-understood religion,” his dressing gown resembling “a priest’s robes” (35).

Perhaps no religious theme so pervades Rhys’s fictions as that of Original Sin, the theological quandary that lies at the root of the “fallen” modern woman’s predicament as Rhys depicts it time after time: “the perpetual hunger to be beautiful and that thirst to be loved which is the real curse of Eve” (*CSS* 3–4). This sentence comes, incidentally, in the first story of Rhys’s first book, *The Left Bank* (1927), making the scene of the Garden and of humankind’s first sin as foundational in her oeuvre as it is in the Bible. Appropriately, then, Rhys’s women protagonists wander through life as though damned, seeking happiness in the smallest modicum of grace. Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931) knows the score: “Get money, get money, get money, or be for ever damned” (91). As often, Rhys here transcribes a Christian theological lexicon into a seemingly profane, solely materialist equation: damnation equals poverty, money equals grace. Rhys’s theological investments are not limited to these materialist transcriptions, however. The scholastic problem of free will, for example—whether any actual human agency is possible at all—is a quandary that besets all of Rhys’s heroines. So, in *Mr. Mackenzie*, Julia attempts to explain “that everything I had done had always been the only possible thing to do. And of course I forgot that it’s always so with everybody, isn’t it?” (52).⁴ Marya Zelli’s own vision of humanity adheres faithfully to the doctrine of Original Sin: if she, in her own estimation, is a “naïve sinner,” that is because “We are all miserable sinners and the dust of the earth” (*Q* 101, 95).

But where, finally, does Rhys’s fiction stand on the God question? Is He dead, as Nietzsche claimed; “indifferent,” as Antoinette asserts in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (130); or just “very far away,” as Rhys suggests in *Smile Please* (70)?⁵ And what have the trappings of Christianity to do with that God, if He exists? We can begin to tackle this latter question by returning to *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, in which Julia sees the rituals of a Christian church service as concealing, not revealing, spiritual truth: “she was obsessed with the feeling that she was so close to seeing the thing that was behind all this talking and

posturing, and that the talking and the posturing were there to prevent her from seeing it" (130). Julia attempts to imagine "the thing" as *nothing*, but the effort is only "almost successful," and in a moment she succumbs to what looks like a religious experience: "in a miraculous manner, some essence of her was shooting upwards like a flame. She was great. She was a defiant flame shooting upwards" (130–31). But then there is another reversal: "the flame sank down again, useless, having reached nothing" (131). Such vacillations between spiritual yearning and nihilism characterize many of Rhys's women characters. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette remembers Mount Calvary Convent in fittingly ambivalent fashion as a series of binary incongruities: "a place of sunshine and of death . . . light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell" (57). Antoinette refuses to speak of "perpetual light" in her devotions; she finds worldly sunlight "more beautiful than any perpetual light could be" (57).⁶

Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* attempts to secularize the sacred, defining heaven as a stage one reaches in life "when you don't care any longer if you live or die," but she also senses that this paradise cannot last: "As soon as you reach this heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell" (91). Yet God continues to have His uses. In Sasha's case, the deity is required to lend an authorized black humor that, when all else fails, might at least make some sense of her existence. She remembers a "quite ordinary joke" scribbled on a lavatory wall "that made me laugh so much because it was signed God. Just like that—G-O-D, God. Joke, by God. And what a sense of humour" (185). Her own life has been like that: a dark joke, lived out in the world's hidden places and authored, she seems to think, by God—which is what, if anything, makes it all so "funny."⁷ All the same, Sasha's atheistic leanings are betrayed by her ultimate vision of a godless, mechanized, terrifying world, with no one beyond the machine to appeal to: "even Jesus is dead. All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel" (187). This machine, outfitted with "innumerable flexible arms," glaring lights, eyeballs, and dried mascara, evokes the conditions of Sasha's entrapment and that of the rest of Rhys's modern women: the sense of constant surveillance and appraisal, the enforced requirement that one be seen in the right clothes and the right makeup, the implied commodification of the female body, and the seeming inevitability that one will always eventually disappoint—that one's mascara will have always already dried out along with one's romantic and financial marketability (187). The machine's very existence suggests that there can be no God at the controls—Sasha discerns only a terrifying "grey sky" in the background—unless He is a malicious god, as indeed Sasha decides after the death of her infant son: "God is very cruel . . . A devil, of course. That accounts for everything—the only possible

explanation" (187, 140).⁸ Or as Anna Morgan's father puts it, in a passage excised from *Voyage in the Dark*: "don't you think the idea of a malevolent idiot at the back of everything is the only one that fits the facts[?]" (quoted in Nancy Hemond Brown 50).⁹

The closest Rhys came to writing a really religious piece of fiction was in her late short story "Sleep It Off, Lady," though it too is hardly free of ambivalence. At the beginning of the tale is a reference to the "merciful dispensation of Providence," a sentiment that will prove strikingly discordant with the story's ending (CSS 375). Some lines later we encounter an image of Calvary, clearly visible from protagonist Miss Verney's window: "In the distance there was a rise in the ground—you could hardly call it a hill—and three trees so exactly shaped and spaced that they looked artificial" (375). The story's subject is an aged woman's fear of death, symbolized by a large "Super Rat" she believes has been stalking her backyard shed, a structure that is likewise described in terms that resonate with the Crucifixion: nails protrude from its wooden rafter, evoking the nails on the Cross (376). The shed, like the rat that haunts it, spells death to Miss Verney. (In her dreams, it transforms before her eyes into a coffin [377].) Her short-lived belief that she can eradicate the structure recalls Donne's Christian defiance ("Death, thou shalt die!"), a defiance she celebrates in her own pious way by singing to herself "The Day of Days" (383). This hymn celebrates the day of Christ's resurrection from the tomb; Miss Verney sings it at each birthday, as though in hopes that she too might conquer death.

Whether Miss Verney meets her Maker after she dies miserably on the floor of that shed—where she suddenly finds herself helplessly paralyzed—is a question the story leaves unresolved. In Rhysian fashion, however, the workings of Providence on this side of death are dispensed unmercifully enough. "God, don't leave me here," she prays. "Dear God, let someone come" (385). And who should come but the neighbor girl, a "horrible child" who has always bemused and even frightened her. "Sleep it off, lady," she tells Miss Verney now in the latter's hour of need, and skips away (385). Alone, friendless, Miss Verney dies. We are not told what happens to her soul, if she has one. But the story that succeeds this one in *Sleep It Off, Lady*—and thus closes the last book Rhys published in her lifetime—perhaps affords an answer. "I Used to Live Here Once" depicts a woman making her way across a river toward a house she once lived in. Her trajectory marks an overtly symbolic crossing from life to death, recalling the lyrics that float through the mind of *Good Morning, Midnight's* suicidal heroine: "One more river to cross, that's Jordan, Jordan . . ." (44). In this final story, the protagonist comes upon two children, both of whom fail to respond to her greeting and evidently take no notice of her; instead they remark a sudden chill and run back to the house.

“That was the first time she knew,” Rhys writes, concluding her career with a subtle ghost story and leaving us with a view of the afterlife that is every bit as cold and gray as her characteristic depictions of London—as though to pass from life to death were a lot like passing from Dominica to England (CSS 388). There may indeed be other shores to reach beyond death, Rhys suggests, but if this life is any indication, we’re not bound to like what we find there.

In accordance with the spiritual pessimism suggested by these two late stories is the strong current of religious antipathy that courses through *Voyage in the Dark*. This novel’s protagonist, Anna Morgan, finds a kindred spirit in the former tenant whose poetry she has discovered in a drawer: “Horse faces, faces like horses,/And grey streets, where old men wail unnoticed/Prayers to an ignoble God” (47). Not only does the unknown poet, like Anna, decry London’s inhumanity and washed-out homogeneity, but he also shares Anna’s intuitions of the English God as an “ignoble” deity. Church bells toll, in Anna’s ears, with a “tinny, nagging sound,” and the Sabbath oppresses her as something “heavy, melancholy, standing still. Like when they say, ‘As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end’” (41). In the novel’s first sustained reflection on Christianity, Anna derides a woman in her Maple Street hostel for “praying with uplifted face and shut eyes . . . Just like a rabbit she was, like a blind rabbit. There was something horrible about that kind of praying” (21). This reference to the praying subject as “a blind rabbit” initiates a persistent symbolism in *Voyage in the Dark* aligning religion with inhumanity and blindness, as well as with deafness and invisibility.¹⁰ Anna’s religious antipathy culminates, though, in her hallucinatory dream of “The boy bishop,” “a little dwarf with a bald head” who emerges, dressed in a priest’s garments, from “a child’s coffin” near the novel’s end (165). There is clearly something uncanny about this miniature man of the cloth; while Anna expects him to begin intoning the mass (“In nomine Patris, Filii”), he instead remains silent, flopping about “like a doll” in the arms of a sailor (165). Religion here is commodified, infantilized, and rendered an appropriately mute figure for the “climax of meaninglessness, fatigue, and powerlessness” into which Anna has fallen (165). Further, the boy bishop in his coffin suggests the child that Anna has chosen not to have. Rhys has reserved for the novel’s final pages her most brutally condensed evocation of religion as a mute and impotent abomination—as little more, indeed, than an abortion.¹¹

Christianity as Repression and Resistance

Rhys does not always represent Christianity in so harsh a light. In fact, while much has been said for the politically resistant virtues of obeah in her work, Rhys’s texts also put Catholic traditions to similar use—typically pitting the

island Catholicism in which she was steeped against the repressive effects of British Protestantism, the colonizers' faith.¹² From the beginning, Rhys was attracted to Catholicism for the very reasons many white islanders shunned it. The Church impressed her as "un-English," and the image of blacks and whites integrated in the pews—a sight to be seen in the cathedral but not in the Anglican church—"pleased me very much," as Rhys reports in *Smile Please* (O'Connor 17; Rhys, *SP* 65). Inevitably, such pro-Catholic sentiment finds its way into her fiction. On All Souls' Day, a character in "Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers" wishes vainly that her father's friend "could have been buried in the Catholic cemetery" instead of the Anglican one, which "was deserted and silent. Protestants believed that when you were dead, you were dead" (*CSS* 284). A Protestant might well dispute that final line, but it underscores the way Rhys's depictions of Christianity fit schematically into the colonial order of values she articulates throughout her works: England is cold, gray, Protestant, dead; the West Indies warm, colorful, by turns Catholic and obeah, but in any case alive.¹³

Elsewhere Rhys recalls her feeling that "a Protestant service was all wrong in King's College Chapel," associating this service implicitly with British colonization: "'You've forgotten that you stole it from the Catholics but it hasn't forgotten,' I thought" (*CSS* 318). *Quartet's* churchgoing scene similarly dramatizes the British religious invasion of Catholic spaces, as the English and presumably Protestant Heidler profanes the hallowed interior of a Catholic church. In another such passage, a servant in *Wide Sargasso Sea* opposes his island Christianity to the racist imperial religion imported from England: "The Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for him" (18). That does not mean, of course, that the whites won't be held accountable for their treatment of the African Caribbeans. "One day when he was drunk," Antoinette recalls, "he told me that we were all damned and no use praying" (33). The British Protestants, of course, have very different ideas. In a passage edited out of *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys has Anna Morgan recall the colorful island Masquerades of her youth, which she could view only from behind the blinds of an upstairs window ("it was all colours of the rainbow when you looked down at it and the sky so blue" [51])—but she also recalls an Englishwoman's remark that such displays "ought to be stopped": "it's not decent and all these Roman Catholic priests and nuns in an English island ought to be stopped too" (Original 52; Rhys's spacing).

England itself, the seat of empire—what Rhys sardonically describes as "this holy and blessed isle"—is also the home of the damned, a cold hell through which her characters are condemned to wander (*CSS* 223).¹⁴ As Lilian Pizzichini puts it, "The god of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie had little in common with the all-forgiving Bon Dieu of the French," or with the

Catholic God Rhys came to know while a schoolgirl in a Caribbean convent (152). Rhys's story "The Day They Burned the Books" likewise points up the perversely sacral character of repressive British imperial ideology, depicting a woman's complaisant submission to her British husband as a "sacred" duty to God and country. At dinner one night, her husband suddenly pulls her hair without any apparent reason (though he has waited for the arrival of their Caribbean servant to make this display of his authority); the wife's response is to laugh and "to pretend that it was all part of the joke, this mysterious, obscure, sacred English joke" (CSS 152).

Rhys most memorably aligns the impulse of the Original Sinner with that of British colonialist ideology in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and in the character of Rochester, whose approach to the island combines the desires of Adam and Eve with the desire for imperial domination. In striking contrast to Antoinette's peaceful contemplation of Coulibri, the family estate, with its Edenic garden and "tree of life," Rochester lusts after a hidden tree of Knowledge: "What I see is nothing—I want what it *hides*—that is not nothing" (19, 87). Like Heidler in the much earlier novel *Quartet*, Rochester is sure God's a pal of his. He at one point refers to "My God" in a strikingly possessive manner, then affirms his belief "in the power and wisdom of my creator"—as though that power and wisdom sanction all of his actions toward his new wife (127). Needless to say, *Wide Sargasso Sea* ultimately authorizes Antoinette's far less confident, and less egocentric, understanding of God.¹⁵

Antoinette's recurrent dream (26–27, 59–60, 187) further contributes to the novel's anticolonial critique, and again in biblical terms. In this dream a man guides her to "an enclosed garden" that evokes Eden and the Fall while also echoing the corrupted paradise and "sacred place" of Coulibri: "Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild" (60, 132, 19). As Veronica Gregg writes, Rhys's "allusion to the Garden of Eden as a beginning is simultaneously written as intimations of Apocalypse" (85). When it arrives, I would add, that apocalypse is rendered in terms of a specifically Christian eschatology. Our first intimation that this Paradise also bears connotations of Inferno comes when Antoinette wakes from the dream's second iteration and reports, "I dreamed I was in Hell"; her final dream confirms that those enigmatic "steps leading upwards" from the Garden ascend not to heaven but to the hell of Rochester's attic ("I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room . . .") (60, 187). This attic "hell" speaks both to the tortures of the colonially conquered, here embodied by Antoinette, and to the retribution such colonization invites—for in the novel's final pages, Antoinette transforms her hell into something more closely resembling that of Christian iconography: fire, brimstone, a place of falling masonry and demoniacal laughter. Rhys thus uses a pervasive

symbolism of the biblical Fall—from the loss of the garden to the destruction of Coulibri to the quite literal fall of Antoinette and of Rochester’s estate—to convey the black heart of the imperial will-to-conquer, as well as empire’s inevitable decline.

Continuing her assault on British Christianity, in an undated essay Rhys contrasts the Bible’s “stark, modern touch” with what for her are the backward and limited sensibilities of the English (44). From there she draws a sweeping inference about those sensibilities and their relation to the British talent for exploiting the Bible in the service of profit, empire, and ideological consolidation, ending with an expression of amazement at “the ingenious way they set about making money out of ‘God said “Let there be light” and there was Light’ ” (44–45). The Bible is thus an important cog in what for Rhys is “a very efficient propaganda machine turned on the average Englishman from the cradle to the grave” (44). Worth comparing here is the closing passage of the early short story “Night,” which enacts a conflict between, on one hand, the Protestant conventionality that this propaganda machine exists to create and, on the other, the deep Catholic feeling that impacted the narrator’s upbringing—and Rhys’s. The story, an extended suicidal rumination, ends with the narrator reciting the Litany to the Blessed Virgin:

Mater Dolorosa: Mother most sorrowful. Pray for us, Star of the Sea. Mother most pitiful, pray for us.
 Ripping words.
 I wonder if I dare shut my eyes now.
 Ridiculous all this. Lord, I am tired . . .
 A devil of a business . . .

(CSS 48–49; Rhys’s ellipses)

Mater Dolorosa here competes with a bourgeois British disavowal of feeling (“Ripping words,” “Ridiculous all this”), while the final line collapses the two by invoking the devil in a way that indexes both English cliché and, on another semantic level, that concern for the lures of Satan that preoccupies the devout Catholic mind. Such tensions are ever at play in Rhys’s texts, though there is also a further and, as Rhys depicts it, equally religious tension: that which inheres in the fervent but often frustrated faith in consumption that characterizes modern consumer capitalism.

A New Faith, a New Gospel: Consumerism and the Language of Advertising

Rhys often takes pains to stress the interrelations of religious faith with her characters’ faith in the healing powers of consumption. She appropriates,

for instance, the language of Proverbs 9:17 to describe the sacred aura that attends one's urgent desire for "the perfect Dress": "a craving, almost a vice, the stolen waters and the bread eaten in secret" (CSS 4). For Rhys, such spiritual drought and hopeless searching are among the more salient aspects of "the real curse of Eve," and no one has better illustrated the spiritual dimensions of the modern faith in money and in the clothes it can buy (CSS 4). John Berger, though, has given us perhaps the most concise analytic description of this falsely redemptive faith: "The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself. One could put this another way: the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product" (134). Rhys's fictional depictions of this dynamic veer with great verisimilitude from pre-purchase faith to post-purchase regret and back again: "The idea of buying new clothes comforted her . . . She at once dressed herself in the new clothes, but the effect was not so pleasing as she had hoped"; "Something in her was cringing and broken, but she would not acknowledge it. 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'"; "she looked at herself in the mirror opposite, still thinking of the new clothes she would buy. She thought of new clothes with passion, with voluptuousness" (ALMM 58, 182, 20). "Voluptuousness," incidentally, is the same word Rhys uses elsewhere in response to what is a patently baptismal image: "Bathing in that blue jewel of a sea would be a voluptuousness, a giving of oneself up. And coming out of it one would be fresh, purified from how many desecrating touches" (CSS 75–76). More typically, Rhys's characters seek such purification and renewal from that ever-elusive "perfect Dress."

As Berger's demystification of advertising emphasizes, the marketplace essentially sells one commodity again and again: the consumer's own image, "transformed" into a far more desirable future self that is nonetheless never realizable—at least not in this life. The cynic might add, and Rhys's novels are nothing if not cynical, that religion finds itself largely in the business of selling the same thing. Throughout *Voyage in the Dark*, especially, Rhys portrays consumption as an ironic object of reverence. For example, Anna Morgan makes much the same point that Berger does in her depiction of hopeful window-shoppers: "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, and that's the way the world goes round . . . So much hope for each person. And damned cleverly done too" (130). Anna recognizes that faith, once the province of religion, has been co-opted by the marketplace, as has the promise of a better tomorrow ("their eyes were

fixed on the future”) and of an eventual transcendence of this earth-bound existence, when all who believe will be “quite different” than they are now. These shop-windows are not made of stained glass, but they may as well be. The shoppers are the faithful parishioners, the mannequins their idols, their shopping expenditures the tithes that will earn their admittance to consumer heaven.

In the year of *Voyage in the Dark*'s publication, T. S. Eliot published his own sentiments on marketplace theology, lamenting that Western capitalism had become “a god before whom we fall down and worship with all kinds of music” (18). Eliot here sketches a thesis more elaborately presented by others—from Max Weber to Ernst Bloch, from Walter Benjamin to Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek—that commodity capitalism is modernity's true religion, a sacred and even pseudo-Christian machinery that relentlessly re-captures all who would try to elude it. (When Benjamin characterized capitalism as more “purely” religious than the merely “so-called” religions it had superseded, he evidently felt no need to resort to metaphor [“Capitalism as Religion” 288].) This machinery bears comparison both to the British Empire's “very efficient propaganda machine” that Rhys describes in “The Bible is Modern” and, even more especially, to Sasha's frightening vision of the world as “an enormous machine” she cannot escape—not to mention Rhys's short story “Outside the Machine” (CSS 189–209). Anna Morgan, too, finds herself caught in the machine; for all her perspicacity, she is far from immune to the faith in a promised future predicated on purchasing-power. “*This is a beginning*,” she thinks as she steps into a shop to buy a dress. “*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*” (VD 28). The beginning as well as the end, one might add: the Alpha and Omega of the consumerist faith.

Traditional religion, as Anna distills it, holds that “[t]he poor do this and the rich do that, the world is so-and-so and nothing can change it. For ever and for ever turning and nothing, nothing can change it” (43). The market, in contrast, promises the possibility of social mobility, suggesting that the right clothes, the right accessories, the right accommodations can transform a negligible young woman into a “lady.”¹⁶ Consequently, money has the power to save, to redeem, and also to deify (“Because he has money he's a kind of God. Because I have none I'm a kind of worm”), or even to become God itself: “Oh, great god money—you make possible all that's nice in life. . . . Even the luxury of a soul, a character and thoughts of one's own you give, and only you” (ALMM 112; CSS 106). Anna seeks to supplement her own lacking sense of self with the panacea of shopping, believing willfully in consumption's power to fulfill her: “I'll do anything for clothes. Anything” (VD

25). When a man gives her 25 pounds, the prospect of buying new clothing so thrills her that, momentarily, she “forgot about feeling ill” (27). As soon as she has made the desired purchase, however, she unsurprisingly “began to feel ill again” (29). The clothes have not sufficiently ameliorated Anna’s condition; they’ve merely restored, in the act of buying, a tenuous sense of equilibrium whose real completion will always be forestalled by fashion’s obligations. For next week the new “Paris models” will arrive, and further supplementation is already necessary. As Urmila Seshagiri has observed, Rhys’s London in *Voyage in the Dark* “promises but never delivers the transformations of fashion and upward mobility” (496). Like religion, Anna’s faith in shopping fails to satisfy. And yet, as ever in Rhys’s novels, it is the faith that persists when all others have gone.

If this faith has a scripture, it is to be found in the false promises of advertising copy—so it is appropriate that Rhys’s depictions of advertising are accompanied with astonishing frequency by theological reflections. A character in one story imagines the market potential of bottling up the blue of the sea as a spiritual cure (“Try our bottled blue for Soul Ills”), while a bizarre window display promoting “the Elixir of Abbé Pierre” strikes another character as “unholy” (CSS 82, 53). The image of this Abbé’s elixir ad stuck with Rhys over the years, reappearing more than a decade later in *Good Morning, Midnight*: a repeated invocation that again underscores a homology between the language of the Church and its clergymen, on one hand, and the language of commodity culture on the other (132). Nor is this homology a benign one. Everywhere one looks in Rhys’s fiction, one finds conspicuous advertising—posters and billboards and shop windows promoting everything from tea to “Pâtés de la Lune” to Johnny Walker—and the effect of such ads and displays is invariably lugubrious (Q 131, 98; CSS 140). The “placards in shop windows” take their place alongside “the livid sky, the ugly houses, the grinning policemen” as synecdoches for London and its oppressive impact on Rhys’s protagonists (CSS 187). “Behind the trains a background of huge advertisements: a scarlet-haired baby Cadum: a horrible little boy in a sailor suit: *Exigez toujours du Lion Noir*. A horrible little girl with a pigtail: *Evitez le contrefaçons*” (Q 110–11). Such universal distaste for advertising approaches a genuine phobia in Rhys’s work. One narrator refuses to walk along Norton Street, for there “a doll, or a dressmaker’s dummy, would stare blankly, a cigarette poster, untouched, flapping in the wind, would smile, beckon, wave a coy finger” (CSS 232).

These characters’ traumatic responses to commercial promotion are in keeping with their similar responses to the language of Christianity’s own self-promotion. In a passage that condenses the shared logics of consumer

capitalism and religious evangelism, the protagonist of “Tigers Are Better-Looking” opens his newspaper to discover what at first seems a truly bizarre juxtaposition:

Two remedies for constipation, three for wind and stomach pains, three face creams, one skin food, one cruise to Morocco. At the end of the personal column, in small print, “I will slay in the day of My wrath and spare not, saith the Lord God.” Who pays to put these things in anyway, who pays?

“This perpetual covert threat,” he thought. “Everything’s based on it. Disgusting. And down at the bottom of the page you see what will happen to you if you don’t toe the line. You will be slain and not spared. Threats and mockery, mockery and threats.”

(CSS 177–78)

To the question “Who pays?” an implicit answer is the reader, the consumer, the convert. For what such coercive evangelism shares with the language of modern commercial advertising is the logic of a “covert threat”: buy in, or be left behind. Purchase your self-worth for the price of this product, or find your own value diminished even further than it was before you ever saw this ad or heard the Good News.

Rhys is hardly alone among modernist writers in representing the language of advertising as akin to a kind of scripture. In this her texts recall, for example, the world-stopping reverence accorded a sky-written toffee advertisement in the opening scene of *Mrs. Dalloway*, a moment Septimus Warren Smith intuits to represent “the birth of a new religion” (33). Rhys’s novels also echo Joyce’s *Ulysses* in their interpolations of advertising and in turning those seemingly meaningless advertisements into resonant symbolic intertexts. Like Joyce’s recurrent use of an ad for potted meat (“What is home without/Plumtree’s Potted Meat?/Incomplete./With it an abode of bliss”), the advertisements featured in *Voyage in the Dark* carry sexual overtones that speak suggestively to the protagonist’s anxieties and sense of herself (75). They also, like the Plumtree ad, have much to do with the definition of in/completeness and with the commodity’s in/ability to supplement the lacking self—a concern that goes directly to the vacant heart of a work such as *Voyage in the Dark*.

But perhaps the most salient modernist analogue to Rhys’s alignment of religion and modern capitalism appears in *Ulysses*’ “Ithaca” episode, as Joyce’s two male protagonists chat over a cup of instant hot chocolate, “Epps’s massproduct, the creature cocoa” (677). The scene is revealing of modernity’s relation to Christianity and to capitalist mass production, for these men’s ritual cup of cocoa comes loaded with religious as well as economic implications.

This *Mass*-product adopts the Catholic iconography of the Eucharist, serving as the commodity-cum-relic around which Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus stage their entirely modern version of Communion. More subtly, as William York Tindall has pointed out, cocoa derives from the plant genus *Theobroma*, Greek for “God food” (571). Mass-produced commodity thus functions here as eucharistic nourishment, cleverly suggesting modernity’s changing of the guard—from worship to commodity-fetishization, from prophets to profits, from divine providence to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand.” Joyce’s pun on “mass” additionally contributes to the sense that modernity has transposed the sacred into the realm of commerce—and vice versa, as the market’s aims acquire an increasingly religious significance. (Bloom, an ad man, elsewhere recognizes the similarity of the Church’s strategies to those of the marketplace: “Pray for us. And pray for us. And pray for us. Good idea the repetition. Same thing with ads. Buy from us. And buy from us” [677].) In Rhys’s novels, the concerns highlighted by this brief passage from Joyce—mass production, its implicit sacralization, and even the specific figure of cocoa—undergo a gendered elaboration. For Rhys not only depicts the market’s displacement and tacit re-appropriation of the sacred, but also speaks eloquently to this displacement’s consequences for the modern woman.

“What Is Purity?”: Voyage in the Dark and the Ideology of the Blessed Virgin

We began by considering the archetypal virginal body, that of “the tall Virgin” who figures so centrally in Marya’s churchgoing in *Quartet* and who embodies an idealized purity: conceived miraculously, the Madonna herself conceives without being sullied by man. And we have seen that Marya tries earnestly to rewrite that figure’s repressive connotations, only to see this effort dashed by Heidler’s reinforcement of patriarchal order. By invoking his status as God’s pal, Heidler implicitly denigrates women’s position within a Christian hierarchy, as Marya’s subsequent dream makes more clear. I want to return now to the figure of the virginal body and to its discursive idealizations at the hands of religion and of a modern commercial marketplace which, as Rhys illustrates, successfully appropriates the religious trope of the “pure,” unprofaned body—an appropriation that places an impossible demand on women who, like *Voyage in the Dark*’s Anna Morgan, see no alternative to the incessant and constantly de-valuing circulation of their own bodies.

When the topic of virginity’s value arises early in the novel, Anna opines, “People have made all that up” (36). Her prospective lover, however, insists—as Heidler does in Marya’s dream in *Quartet*—that “it matters. It’s the only

thing that matters” (36). Indeed, when Anna first meets this man, Walter Jeffries, he objectively appraises her value—looking her over “very quickly up and down, in that way they have”—but, notably, the basis for his appraisal lies not in her physical qualities (11). “He didn’t look at my breasts or my legs, as they usually do He looked straight at me and listened to everything I said . . . and then he looked away and smiled as if he had sized me up” (13–14). What he has sized up has less to do with her exterior than with something less visible but apparently more important: her virginity, and the high exchange value that obtains with it.¹⁷ In this, he has followed the logic and the dictates of two mutually informing dogmas: that of Christianity, in its less attractive aspects, and of consumer capitalism, both of which extol relentlessly the pure, the ever-new, and the virginal—in both its figurative and its literal senses—while denigrating those souls, commodities, and commodified bodies that fail to make the grade.

This latter dogma is communicated primarily through advertising copy, so it is fitting that two theologically inflected ads receive substantial attention in *Voyage in the Dark*. The first, found on the back page of a newspaper, promotes Bourne’s Cocoa—another brand of the God-food featured in *Ulysses*—as the oddly straightforward answer to the question “What is Purity?” (58–59). The second, a broadsheet remembered from the West Indies of Anna’s youth, advertises “Biscuits Like Mother Makes, as Fresh in the Tropics as in the Motherland, Packed in Airtight Tins” (149). Like “pure” Bourne’s Cocoa, these biscuits’ most alluring attribute is their freshness, ably maintained, through the magic of Airtight Tins, over the long journey from maternal metropole to far-flung colony.¹⁸ What the biscuit makers are selling—and also what Anna, and other young women attempting to negotiate the market of male desire, must try to sell—is the illusion of purity, of uncompromised chastity sealed tight to maintain its freshness. Anna herself comes to learn the paradoxical exchange value of virginity: it commands a high price from its first and last consumer, but ever afterward the no-longer chaste woman must trade on the illusion of a non-renewable resource that has already been depleted. As the nuns preach in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, chastity is a “flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended” (54). Or, as Heidler instructs Marya in her dream in *Quartet*, “Intact or not intact, that’s the first question”—a point he makes, significantly, within the setting of a church (161).

In addition to citing its product’s airtight freshness, the biscuit ad’s brief text twice stresses England’s maternity, figuring Albion metonymically as “the Motherland” while also exploiting the figure of the literal mother. According to this ad’s logic, only in England does the latter figure fully exist—as though the colonial periphery can only access its “mother” through British

export. Yet as Anna can well attest, the Motherland seems a far cry from the welcoming arms of a mother. Rather, as Joy Castro rightly observes, England becomes for her the very heart of darkness: “A rebuttal of imperialist assumptions, *Voyage in the Dark* is distinctly the story of a colonialist returned to the home country, in contrast to the sojourn Conrad’s Marlowe makes in the so-called primitive wilds of Africa. The center of empire, not some out-flung province, is the darkness through which Anna Morgan travels” (34). This broader imperial critique, I would add, is largely aided and abetted by Rhys’s more specific critique of advertising, which entails showing how the Motherland *sells itself* to the rest of the world. Rhys foregrounds the logically circular relationship between imperial propaganda and the language of commercial advertisement, each discourse exploiting while at the same time reinforcing the other. That the Motherland is pure and virtuous can be tasted right in its biscuits, which themselves can be touted as pure and fresh because they emanate from the Motherland. In highlighting this cynical reciprocity, though, Rhys also illumines how the colonial project really figures “mother” not as a pure and virginal presence, but as a whore—as a woman who sells her wares through empty words and outright deceit, under the guise of virgin “freshness.”

Mother, virgin, commodity, whore: of all these categories, the one with which Anna never seems able to identify is that of mother. She is the product, not a producer, of the market in which she finds herself inextricably caught. She has become as much an object on that market as was a girl named “Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant”: a name on an old family slave-list that haunts Anna not just as a reminder of the “sins of the fathers” but also as a reminder of what Anna herself has become. Maillotte Boyd’s body belonged to one market, and Anna belongs to another. Like her predecessor, Anna’s body is fungible; it can be bought, owned, and sold by men, even if not in quite the same economic terms as those that governed the buying, owning, and selling of African slaves. Indeed, Anna comes to see herself as a commodity whose greatest economic distinction from a tin of biscuits or cocoa is her rapidly declining and inevitably unsustainable value (52–53).¹⁹ And lest we underestimate the extent to which Rhys aligns Anna with nameless commodities packed in airtight tins, consider an otherwise perplexing bit of foreshadowing from early in the novel: as the uninitiated, still “Airtight” Anna writes to respond to a wealthy man’s dinner invitation, a hardened chorus-girl advises her, “Tell him to borrow the club tin-opener. Say, ‘P.S. Don’t forget the tin-opener’ ” (19). This chorus-girl, whose whole conception of Anna arises from the younger girl’s virginity and inexperience (“keep the door shut, Virgin”), here bluntly suggests that Anna’s “intact” body, to borrow Hugh Heidler’s wording, amounts to little more than an airtight tin

that will soon have its chaste contents consumed for the first and inevitably last time (16).

* * *

Rhys complained, in a June 1931 letter, “I am always being told that until my work ceases being ‘sordid and depressing’ I haven’t much chance of selling” (*Letters* 21). As Anna discovers painfully over the course of *Voyage in the Dark*, that which is “sordid” indeed tends to be difficult to sell, particularly in a market that extols “Purity” and the ever-new as a product’s most desirable attributes. This insistent valorization of purity recalls nothing so much as the logical contortions required by Christianity’s desire to cleanse and purify its embodied God, a desire that discursively requires not only the virgin birth of Christ, but the “immaculate conception” of Mary as well, leaving Christ twice removed from any stain of impurity. Like Bourne’s Cocoa and the Biscuits Like Mother Makes, the Messiah has been carefully packaged—wrapped airtight in dogma that forecloses any hint of contamination and that ensures His perpetual marketability. And just as the sacred has been commodified, so has the modern commodity been sacralized, as indicated by the mass-produced “God food” that attains such theologically suggestive status in Joyce and which, in its incarnation as Bourne’s Cocoa, nicely ties together the strands of Rhys’s commentaries on religion, colonialism, the market, and the female body.

During a tense conversation with her stepmother, Anna’s mind wanders from her own precarious self-marketing to the marketing of the cocoa: “I kept wondering whether she would ask me what I was living on. ‘What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne’s Cocoa’ ” (59). Unlike the biscuit ad, but in adherence to the same imperialist logic, this one proclaims a commodity’s purity by obscuring, rather than foregrounding, its likely geographic origins—in this case, British West Africa rather than the Homeland. As for the rhetorical question that dominates the ad, Rhys may have been inspired by similar marketing campaigns for products such as Baker’s Breakfast Cocoa. One characteristic Baker’s ad—a full-page, full-color advertisement of 1926—features the cherubic face, blonde hair, and fair shoulders of a young woman in a white gown: the very embodiment, it seems, of chastity and virtue (Baker’s 33). Above her head, the word “PURITY” indexes her virginal innocence as well as the “*Delicious and Wholesome*” Baker’s Cocoa she ostensibly drinks.²⁰ (It also connotes an unadulterated racial ideal that eludes Anna as much as it did the “mulatto” Maillotte Boyd.) Conspicuous in Rhys’s adaptation of such advertising copy is the adjacency of newness—untouched “Purity”—and agedness: “For Thirty-five Years the Answer has

been Bourne's Cocoa." For 35 years, this brand of cocoa has remained perpetually fresh, always pure, born ("Bourne") anew each time the consumer opens another tin. How long, we sense Anna wondering, can she maintain the marketable appearance of Purity? Will she make it even to age 35? "Fancy being thirty-five years old. What is Purity? For Thirty-five Thousand Years the Answer has been . . ." (59). Anna recognizes the disquieting discrepancy between what she and Bourne's have to offer; the illusion of purity is far easier for a mass-produced homogeneous powder to maintain than it is for the aging female body. The Bourne company's shtick only gets better with age, and in 35,000 years, should the world and the world market still be spinning, its cocoa will remain as pure as it is in 1914.

This is "Purity" with a capital *P*: the market's own telos, whether the product in question be cocoa, biscuits, or a woman's body. Anna sells hers cheap, and the remainder of the novel documents her subsequent dissolution, both psychically and as a body that becomes less and less marketably pure, decreasing in value but increasing in prostitutional availability. Her thoughts at novel's end, in the aftermath of her nearly fatal botched abortion, concern the unreal possibility of "starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again . . ." (188). The thought of becoming pure again, of emerging "new and fresh" out of her experience, seems at first a positive one, if depressingly unrealizable. The final sentence, however, with its repetition of repetition ("all over again, all over again"), registers an unmitigated horror at having to return to the marketplace. Such a return could never be an easy one. But it will be still harder on this confirmed "tart" now grown so callously wise to her place, and her value, in an impossibly sacralized economy of bodies—and she isn't getting any younger.²¹

This is the predicament that most of Rhys's women face, and though they do so with varying degrees of Christian piety, antipathy, and ambivalence, Rhys returns again and again to religious language and theological frameworks in order to depict most fully these characters' sins, their falls, and their bleak yearnings for salvation in this life or the next. After all, "anything might happen," and there is always a chance, perhaps, that when these women cross that final river the ceaseless repetition will cease; that they will be reborn as "new and fresh" as only a "perpetual light" can make them; and that each of them may wear, for eternity, that Perfect Dress that never goes out of style. Yet if this seems finally too optimistic a reading, it probably is—especially if we consider Rhys's original conclusion to *Voyage in the Dark*, which she felt compelled to discard at her publisher's insistence, and which she long affirmed as the better of the two versions (see Nancy Hemond Brown, "Jean Rhys" 40–43). In this earlier ending, Rhys suggests that the light we face in death is

hardly perpetual, that it may indeed be only a final flicker of electric luminescence (“the ray of light along the floor like the last thrust of remembering”) glimpsed below the door of one’s sickroom (56). Anna Morgan’s abortion here proves fatal, and whatever afterlife awaits her looks bleak indeed. Her last words seem to emanate from the perpetual “blackness” into which she has finally passed, a darkness less colorful, even, than the gray streets of London: “and there was the ray of light along the floor like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out and blackness comes . . .”

Notes

1. It is no accident that a postcard of this same “Miraculous Virgin in the church of St Julien-le-Pauvre” should appear, in the story “I Spy a Stranger,” among the belongings of an ostracized female character who has written a series of acerbic reflections on patriarchy and institutionalized misogyny (CSS 242, 251).
2. Sleepless at two o’clock of some subsequent morning, in a kind of traumatic return, Marya closes her eyes to see Heidler praying in the church “and looking sideways at her to see if she were impressed . . . ‘God’s a pal of mine,’ he said. ‘He probably looks rather like me . . . I’m in His image or He’s in mine” (Q 161). Such are the tenets of a patriarchal, non-Catholic and un-catholic Christianity. Should this gentleman find time he “might,” if reminded, write even a woman the necessary “letter of introduction”—but the club cannot tolerate hysteria or unreason, those terms with which one so readily dismisses the female voice: “No trouble at all. Now then, don’t be hysterical . . . Nobody owes a fair deal to a prostitute” (161).
3. Gauri Viswanathan concludes in this *PMLA* article that “the field of literary studies has not witnessed a corresponding breadth of scholarship” on religious topics (466). Recent work by Pericles Lewis and others has begun to address the topic of religion and modernism, though for the most part these scholars have tended to focus on the most traditional of high-modernist canons: James, Conrad, Proust, Joyce, Woolf. In this sense, such scholarship seems hardly to reflect the broader interests of the new modernist studies. (In addition to Lewis, see Jennifer Hardy Williams; Erickson; and Pecora 157–94). As for Rhys, there has of course been some consideration of her literary treatments of Christianity in specific texts. Teresa O’Connor discusses Christianity in the context of *Voyage in the Dark*’s “recurring sub rosa religious references” (90), while Elaine Savory reads *Good Morning, Midnight* as a “moral fable,” a critique of modernity’s “empty religious conventions” to be read in the light of Rhys’s Catholically informed moral sense (*Jean Rhys* 116, 132). Nonetheless, the topic of religion in Rhys has not yet been pursued in any in-depth or systematic fashion across the spectrum of her published works.
4. “I think there’s a good deal of tosh talked about free will myself,” her interlocutor answers vaguely (*ALMM* 52.) At times, the topic gets taken to seemingly Jansenist lengths: “She felt that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined, she

- had returned to her starting point” (67). Elaine Savory rightly finds a Jansenist, “almost Calvinistic” strain running through Rhys’s work (*Jean Rhys* 110)—which perhaps sheds light on Sasha Jansen’s surname in *Good Morning, Midnight*.
5. “Before I could read,” Rhys recalled, “I imagined that God, this strange thing or person I heard about, was a book”—an intimation of the deity’s illegibility that she often encountered in adulthood and dramatized in her writing (*SP* 20).
 6. Julia in *Mr. Mackenzie* nevertheless summons the strength to recite these lines from the Requiem Mass for her dying mother: “Let perpetual light shine upon her./May she rest in peace” (122). “I must pray,” Julia decides. “It’s probably no good, but somebody must try. It might be some good” (122). She elsewhere confesses to other, rather less pious prayers: “I used to pray that he’d lose all his money, because I imagined that if that happened I’d see him oftener . . . Oh, but that was nothing to a girl I knew, who used to pray that the man she loved might go blind” (173).
 7. Sasha might best be described as having the “temperament [of] an early Christian,” as Djuna Barnes describes the somewhat analogous character of Nora Flood in *Nightwood* (56). Sasha waits impatiently throughout the novel for “the Miracle” to come, in language that subtly connotes an imminent, eschatological terminus when she, and the rest of the weary, can put off their armor and rest (*GMM* 15). Later her End-Times visions acquire a markedly more violent character that befits the Revelation of John: “may you tear each other to bits, you damned hyenas [i.e., humanity], and the quicker the better . . . Let it be destroyed. Let it happen. Let it end, this cold insanity” (173; Rhys’s ellipsis).
 8. In an analogously heterodox spirit, Sasha’s friend Alfred recites, from an Alfred de Vigny poem, “Answer with a cold silence the eternal silence of the divinity” (*GMM* 126). The fact that he is “Sweating like hell” as he says this, however, suggests that he finds it a difficult posture to maintain (126).
 9. The original, unpublished ending of *Voyage in the Dark* was first printed with an introduction by Nancy Hemond Brown in *London Magazine* 51 years after the publication of the novel.
 10. The eyes of a man preaching in a London park have “a blind look, like a dog’s when it sniffs something” (48). Such evangelists are represented as both unseeing and unseen; near Anna’s apartment in London, “There was always some old man trailing along singing hymns—‘Nearer, my God, to Thee’ or ‘Abide with me’—and people making up their minds ten yards off that they were not going to see them and others not seeing them at all. Invisible men, they were” (40). No one sees this man, just as no one listens to a disciple in the park “bawling something about God. Nobody was listening to him. You could only hear ‘God . . . God . . . The wrath of God . . . Wah, wah, wah, wah . . .’ ” (48; Rhys’s ellipses).
 11. This “boy bishop” carries, incidentally, a historical resonance as a carnivalesque inversion of Church hierarchy. In medieval Catholic tradition, each year a chosen choirboy would don the garments and duties of the bishopric, even preaching at Mass, in his role as *episcopus puerorum*, the “leader of the revels” on Holy Innocents’ Day (“Boy Bishop” 741). According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, “For

the duration of the festival, the choirboys took over the senior positions in all the cathedral ceremonies and offices” (741). Given this tradition’s obviously carnivalesque aspects—the Church prohibited it in 1435, though it proved “too popular to be entirely suppressed”—this chilling scene at the end of *Voyage in the Dark* might be read as a counter-Bakhtinian appraisal of carnival’s subversive potential (741; cf. Bunson 159). Such a reading finds support in the concluding pages’ coinciding imagery of masquerade and futility (184–85) and suggests a sobering counternarrative to critical readings of carnival’s liberative functions in this and other Rhys novels. Sylvie Maurel offers such a reading (99–101), going so far as to claim a positively liberatory value for *Voyage in the Dark*’s conclusion: “In the final monologue, Anna . . . gives birth to a utopian, undifferentiated text transgressing conventional separations and categories and implicitly undermining those active in the identification of gender roles” (100–1). Mary Lou Emery gestures toward a similarly positive though more qualified interpretation of the novel’s end (“*World’s End*” 79–81). The boy bishop in *Voyage* suggests, however, that such carnivalesque transgressions and inversions are doomed to be as mutely irrelevant as the religious hierarchy they mock.

12. Teresa O’Connor stresses Rhys’s literary treatments of obeah as a form of resistance associated with female power (118). For more on the obeah theme in Rhys, see E. Campbell (59–66) and Thomas (158–67).
13. Rhys was to recall her period of intense Catholic belief as “the happiest time of my life”: “I haven’t escaped much but at least I escaped the horrible effects of a British religious upbringing” (qtd. in O’Connor 17).
14. When a man in *Good Morning, Midnight* asks Sasha which god or goddess England worships, she responds, “I don’t know, but it certainly isn’t Venus. Somebody once wrote that they worship a bitch-goddess” (47).
15. When Rochester questions her about her beliefs, she responds with a view of life that chimes with the worldview propounded in Rhys’s other novels: “‘It doesn’t matter,’ she answered calmly, ‘what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these.’ She flicked a dead moth off the table” (127).
16. Thus does Anna’s friend admire her closet for its enviably ladylike garments: “Very ladylike . . . Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat she has something, there’s no getting away from that” (45). The promise of real social mobility is illusory, though, as this friend’s choice of words suggests—“*ladylike*” stressing that clothes can create at best only a simulacrum of the social standing they are meant to signify—and as Anna has already learned for herself. Indeed, a landlady earlier adduced Anna’s new expensive apparel as evidence that her tenant, then still a virgin, was nevertheless merely a “tart” (30).
17. A further indication of the undesirability of a polluted product comes when Walter sends back a bottle of corked wine (*VD* 19–20). Before long, Walter will jettison Anna in like manner, her purity irrevocably compromised; Anna seems presciently to appreciate this fact when, as Walter seduces her for the first time, she reports: “I remembered him smelling the glass of wine and I couldn’t think of anything but that, and I hated him” (22).

18. Yet the advertising image contains its slogan's own contradiction, the product looming in Anna's mind as "a squashed-fly biscuit"—hardly a fresh or pure image—caught in the possessive gaze of a miniature male figure: "There was a little girl in a pink dress eating a large yellow biscuit studded with currants—what they called a squashed-fly biscuit—and a little boy in a sailor suit, trundling a hoop, looking back over his shoulder at the little girl" (VD 149).
19. It is the memory of this biracial slave once owned by the Morgans—whose blood, given the not-uncommon sins of the slaveholding fathers, may or may not be mingled with Anna's own—on which she meditates at night in place of the eschatological "Four Last Things," suggesting that, as resistant to religion as she has become, her anxiety over the "impure" body remains very much entangled with Christian orthodoxy (VD 55–56).
20. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette wears a similarly pure-white dress in her recurrent dream; in an instance of symbolic profanation, though, she lets it drag in the dirt behind her. Like Rhys's other protagonists, she cannot maintain the lineaments of unspoiled virginity for long—not even in dreams.
21. For recent work on Rhys's concern with market forces, and with their determination of the individual in a consumption-driven society, see Rishona Zimring's examination of cosmetics as both an instrument of, and potential reaction against, "women's commodification and exploitation" (215). In another recent essay, Cynthia Port analyzes Rhys's "gendered response to the economic and social consequences of ageing for women" (204–5). See also Andrea Zengulys's chapter in this volume.