

ABSTRACT

The Function of Imagery in the Novels of Jean Rhys

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This dissertation explores the power of selected image patterns to illuminate areas of character consciousness within Jean Rhys's five novels. Rhys's protagonists are often restrained in their dialogue; their deeper and more spontaneous expressions are mirrored in the novel's various patterns of imagery. In Quartet, Rhys's first novel, four prison images reflect the heroine's unending sense of entrapment. Marya Zelli's involvement in a ménage-à-trois creates a psychological prison for her, from which her eventual freedom is less predictable than that of Stephan, her husband, incarcerated in a jail outside Paris. In After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, the patterns of imagery reflect the consciousness of a slowly fragmenting yet resilient figure, Julia Martin. She is forced to deal with the devastating realization that she has reached an age where she is no longer able to attract men and live on their money. Through patterns of nature images and death images, the novel reflects her consuming fear of her lot, and her daring tactics in dealing with it. In Voyage In The Dark, the image patterns resulting from a contrast between the West Indian

environment and that of England reflect the depth of the culture shock that Anna Morgan desires to resolve; only through the traumatic experience of a bungled abortion does she accomplish this. A complex merging of the patterns of imagery signals the integration of Anna's divided consciousness. In Good Morning Midnight, the images of death and destruction haunt the aging protagonist, Sasha Jensen, until she invents a fantastic reality in which she thinks she is, for the first time, dependent on no man. In Wide Sargasso Sea, fire imagery illuminates the gamut of image patterns, to reflect the conflicting cultural orientations and expectations of the West Indian principal, Antoinette Rochester, and her British husband. The differences in their worlds are mirrored, as are the varying depths of the consciousness of each, through intricate patterns of fire imagery. Throughout Rhys's five novels, the image patterns often suggest a developing assertiveness reflected in the consciousness of these inarticulate, deracinated individuals, despite their social subjugation and alienation.