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**Juliette Taylor-Batty**

**‘Le Revenant’: Baudelaire’s afterlife in *Wide Sargasso Sea*<sup>1</sup>**

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In Courbet’s masterpiece ‘L’Atelier du peintre’ (1854-5), the ghostly image of a female face appears next to the portrait of Charles Baudelaire (fig. 1). Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire’s mistress for over twenty years, a mixed-race woman who has been effectively erased from history, was literally erased by Courbet at Baudelaire’s request after a quarrel. Over time, however, her image began to reappear on the canvas. Nearly 170 years later, in a multimedia introduction to the painting on the Musée d’Orsay website, Duval is still omitted: the app allows us to click on every known historical figure in the painting to hear their ‘thoughts’, but no tab appears when the cursor hovers over her faint – but clearly visible – image.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly puzzling given Duval’s importance as the inspiration for some of the most famous poems in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*. We can only speculate what Jean Rhys’s reaction would have been to the figure of Duval, but she was certainly interested in the erasure of women from history and in literature. Most famously, Rhys reclaims Bertha Mason, Charlotte Brontë’s ‘paper tiger lunatic’, from the Gothicising

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Anna Snaith, Richard Hibbitt and the two anonymous reviewers, who provided careful readings and constructive comments on earlier versions of this article. Thanks to the organisers and participants of the Jean Rhys Conference at the Sorbonne University in Paris in June 2018, for providing early feedback on this paper, for sharing their research with me and for participating in discussions that contributed to this article’s development. In particular, Ellen Ruth Moerman provided fascinating insights into Rhys’s own library, and Catherine Rovera provided information about the specific editions of Baudelaire that Rhys owned. I would also like to thank the British Academy for facilitating a separate archival project on Rhys which inadvertently provided the germ of this project.

<sup>2</sup> Duval is only referred to via the recording of Baudelaire’s ‘voice’ detailing his reactions to Courbet’s painting. ‘L’Atelier Du Peintre de Gustave Courbet’, Musée d’Orsay, accessed 15 November 2018, <http://entrezdanslatelier.fr/>. Another more recent exhibition, *Le modèle noir, de Géricault à Matisse* (2019, Musée d’Orsay, Paris) directly challenges the erasure of black identities from art history by renaming paintings to include the names of their black subjects. Manet’s painting of Duval, for example - usually entitled ‘Lady with a Fan (Baudelaire’s Mistress, Reclining)’ - is displayed in the exhibition as ‘Jeanne Duval’.

oblivion of Rochester's attic, and muses on the forgotten histories of white Creole women brought to England by their husbands.<sup>3</sup> Rhys's Antoinette Mason is a white Creole; Jeanne Duval was a mixed-race woman of uncertain origin (but possibly Caribbean). The link between Antoinette Mason and Jeanne Duval is more than an evocative association, however. In fact, as this article will demonstrate, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* is of unquestionable significance to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Reading Rhys and Baudelaire together proves to be illuminating: we see more clearly Rhys's complex identification of the white Creole woman with blackness; we perceive her use of the Caribbean practice of Obeah and the figure of the zombi under a sharper lens. Ultimately, we see the extent to which Rhys's novel uses the intersection of race and gender to critique the white European man's exoticising and racially-othering perception of the Caribbean. In using Baudelaire, Rhys places modernist and postcolonial perspectives and techniques in productive counterpoint: she draws on the lush rich languor of Baudelaire's poetry and his challenge to staid bourgeois sexuality, but she also challenges that modernism, subjecting it to a critique that needs to be examined alongside her critique of *Jane Eyre*.

*Les Fleurs du mal* is a canonical text of French literature and of European modernism; *Wide Sargasso Sea* is of undisputed importance to postcolonial literature. Both have been endlessly discussed and scrutinised by critics. How can it be that the connection between these texts has been ignored for so long? Rhys knew Baudelaire's work well and was

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<sup>3</sup> Rhys in 1957 told Selma Vaz Diaz that the novel 'was founded on fact or rather several facts. At that date and earlier, very wealthy planters did exist, their daughters had very large dowries, there was no married women's property act. So a young man who was not too scrupulous could do very well for himself and very easily. He would marry the girl, grab her money, bring her to England - a faraway place - and in a year she would be an invalid or mad. [...] It did happen and more than once. Cited in Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London: Arnold, 1995), 21.

influenced by him: she owned editions of his poetry in French and in English, refers to him in her correspondence, and transcriptions of poems in her handwriting survive in the Tulsa archive.<sup>4</sup> Baudelaire's theorisations of modernity, of the figure of the flaneur, and of fashion have featured in critical studies of Rhys, but his impact on her work is far more significant than has hitherto been realised.<sup>5</sup> In 1962, Rhys told Francis Wyndham that an early title for *Wide Sargasso Sea* was 'Le revenant'.<sup>6</sup> Marina Warner has argued that the source for this title is Lafcadio Hearn's *Two Years in the West Indies* (1890).<sup>7</sup> Warner's broader argument

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<sup>4</sup> Rhys's granddaughter, Ellen Ruth Moerman, has told me that two copies of Baudelaire's poetry exist in Rhys's library. Catherine Rovera has confirmed that the French edition is a copy of *Les Fleurs du mal* (London: Barnard and Westwood, 1942). In a letter to Peggy Kirkaldy in 1946, Rhys mentions her inability to read Rimbaud, Mallarmé or Baudelaire without pain during a winter of depression. (Jean Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*, ed. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 45.) Rhys transcribed the following Baudelaire poems: 'Hymne', 'Madrigal triste', and 'Recueillement'. The theme of 'Recueillement', could be seen as an additional source, alongside Emily Dickinson, for the title of *Good Morning Midnight*: it takes as its theme the paradoxical longing for darkness and night. Miscellaneous Unidentified Fragments. Jean Rhys Archive, Coll. No. 1766.011.1.6.11. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa. Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<sup>5</sup> Deborah Parsons, for example, examines Rhys's *flaneuses* in relation to Baudelaire. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Sophie Oliver has written on Rhys's use of Baudelaire's image of fashion in 'À une passante' in her story 'The Grey Day'. 'Fashion in Jean Rhys/Jean Rhys in Fashion', *Modernist Cultures* 11, no. 3 (November 2016): 316–17, <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2016.0143>. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, critiques Baudelaire's poem 'Le Cygne' (including speculation on whether Duval is the 'negress' in the poem) less than 15 pages before the reiteration of her famous critique of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but fails to make any connection between the texts. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 148–56.

It is not my main aim in this article to defend comparative literary approaches, but this puzzling omission certainly reflects the linguistic bias of Anglophone literary studies and demonstrates the importance of reading comparatively across languages and cultures. The failure to spot the Baudelaire correspondences in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also symptomatic of a general tendency, as Judith Kegan Gardiner already pointed out in 1982, not to acknowledge the full range and erudition of Rhys's reading or to take account of the intertextual sources of her work. French sources have been examined in the earlier work: Gardiner and Helen Carr have presented illuminating analyses of Rhys's use of and references to French literature, although responses to the leads they created have been limited. Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism.', *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1–2 (1982): 233–51; Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996).

Studies of intertextuality in *Wide Sargasso Sea* have, on the other hand, been notably confined to Charlotte Brontë. This has obscured other crucial references, even within the Anglophone tradition. Most recently, Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran have revealed crucial intertexts such as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, expressing astonishment that they and others had not spotted these correspondences earlier. 'Encryption as Transmission: The Secret Gardens of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', in *Wide Sargasso Sea at 50*, ed. Elaine Savory and Erica L Johnson (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, Forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 213.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*, 2004, 154–60.

for the influence of that text on Rhys is revealing, but ignores the fact that 'Le Revenant' is also the title of a poem from *Les Fleurs du mal*.<sup>8</sup> Rhys had a habit of using titles drawn from French literary texts, and this is no exception.<sup>9</sup> Baudelaire's poem envisions a destructive and masochistic ghostly passion that, as I will show, bears powerful correspondences with Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Baudelaire's 'Le Revenant' may or may not have been written with Duval in mind, and does not come from the popularly-termed 'Vénus noire' cycle of poems that focus on Duval,<sup>10</sup> but Rhys brings it into close association with that cycle. The 'Vénus noire' poems provide Rhys with a direct source for her Rochester-figure's intensely sensual responses to the Caribbean landscape and for his exoticising, demonising and violently sexual objectification of the Caribbean woman. 'Le Revenant' is a source for the culmination of that desire, in Rhys's representation of Rochester as both vengeful zombi-figure and as the agent of zombification.<sup>11</sup> It is in Baudelaire, then, that we find the source of Rochester's desire for - and fear of - Antoinette Cosway.

Of course, one reason why critics have not talked about *Les Fleurs du mal* in the context of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is because it is a silent intertext in this novel. Rhys clearly intended, at an early stage, to signal its relevance to her novel through the working title 'Le Revenant', but this title is later suppressed. Thus, while Brontë is subjected to very explicit and vocal

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<sup>8</sup> I do not wish to argue for Baudelaire as the only source for Rhys's title. 'Le revenant' does echo Hearn's text as well as others: Moran and Johnson have recently argued that it also echoes the name of Rebecca's boat - 'Je reviens' - in du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*. 'Encryption as Transmission: The Secret Gardens of Wide Sargasso Sea'. [page]

<sup>9</sup> 'La Grosse Fifi' echoes Maupassant's 'Mademoiselle Fifi', 'The Day They Burned the Books' was originally titled 'Fort comme la mort' (the Maupassant novel that appears within the story), and Rhys told Wyndham that a possible title for a future work might be 'fanfare atroce', a quotation from Rimbaud's poem *Le bateau ivre*. Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 279.

<sup>10</sup> See Pichois's annotations to the poem for a discussion of its contested attribution to Duval. Baudelaire, Charles, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, vol. I, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 945.

<sup>11</sup> Rhys's Rochester-figure is never named, a decision that it in itself significant. However, for ease of reference, I will refer to him as 'Rochester' in this article.

critique, Baudelaire holds a more ambivalent status. Rhys's novel is postcolonial by virtue of its 'writing back' to *Jane Eyre*, but it is also modernist, and that modernism derives partly from the influence of Baudelaire. Rhys uses Baudelaire as much as she critiques him; she appropriates his work in a way that helps us to understand her novel's liminal position at the borders of modernism and postcolonialism.

*Les Fleurs du mal* was first published only ten years later than *Jane Eyre* but it belongs to a different era: in Baudelaire, unlike Brontë, the colonial 'other' is very much present: her 'blackness' is appropriated by the poet for the purposes of artistic innovation and to challenge bourgeois sexual mores. Baudelaire's literary configuration of a sexualized 'blackness' is central to his seminal position as an early modernist as well as decadent writer, and prefigures the modernist primitivism so famously embodied in paintings such as Picasso's 'Les Femmes d'Alger' (1911).<sup>12</sup> As Kalliney has argued, Rhys had some sympathy with the use by white modernists of race 'both to experiment technically and to disaffiliate themselves from mainstream culture'.<sup>13</sup> Leah Rosenberg and Mary Lou Emery have both demonstrated, however, that Rhys's early work poses a challenge to the racialized discourses of modernist painting.<sup>14</sup> For example, when Julia Martin, in *After*

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<sup>12</sup> As Anita Patterson writes, '[t]he idealization of blackness and the tropics that recurs throughout Baudelaire's poetry helps to explain why his work figures so prominently in the tradition of literary primitivism that flourished in Europe'. *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter J. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 229.

<sup>14</sup> Leah Rosenberg, 'Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys', *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 219–238; Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Rosenberg does not mention Baudelaire or focus on *Wide Sargasso Sea*: her argument responds to later modernist and avant-garde primitivism – works such as Picasso's 'Les Femmes d'Alger' (1911) and Jules Pascin's 'The Temple of Beauty' (1924) – and to Rhys's direct engagement with primitivism in her works of the 1930s. (Rhys refers to Modigliani in *Voyage in the Dark* and in *Good Morning, Midnight*, the painter Serge Rubin makes 'African' masks.)

*Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, sees a Modigliani painting on the wall of an artist's studio where she is working as model, the woman in the portrait, with her 'face like a mask, a long, dark, face', becomes 'more real' than Julia, embodying a visual discourse that, as Mary Lou Emery writes, 'denies her self-representation'. As Emery argues, the Modigliani painting demonstrates Julia's status 'as a woman literally and figurately painted over' whose subjectivity has been denied.<sup>15</sup> When we examine Rhys's use of Baudelaire in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it becomes clear that Rosenberg and Emery's arguments are relevant to the later novel, which engages with – and critiques – modernist aesthetics just as much as her earlier texts do. Indeed, in using Baudelaire, Rhys exposes what I will argue to be the 'zombification' at the heart of early modernist responses to race and female sexuality.<sup>16</sup>

### **Writing Rochester**

*Les Fleurs du mal* is directly useful to Rhys by providing a white male exoticizing perspective that she can draw upon for her characterization of Rochester. It also provides a source for the lush exoticizing language of Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys told Francis Wyndham why she took on *Jane Eyre*: her anger at Brontë's 'portrait of the "paper tiger" lunatic, the all wrong creole scenes, and above all by the real cruelty of Mr Rochester.'<sup>17</sup> Rhys struggled, however, with her Rochester, realising eventually that she had not adequately addressed the motivations for his cruelty:

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 211.

<sup>16</sup> In presenting this argument, I am also challenging the sharp distinction posited by Kalliney in his assessment that Rhys in her early work 'uses race much like her fellow [white] modernists', while in the later work the 'depictions of racial difference' appear more as 'those of a writer imitating and competing against her fellow West Indians'. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters*, 230.

<sup>17</sup> Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 262.

my Mr R was *all wrong*. Also a *heel*. First, he coldly marries a girl for her dough, *then* he believes everything he's told about her, finally he drags her to England, shuts her up in a cold dark room for *years* and brings sweet little Janey to look at the result – this noble character! Noble!!<sup>18</sup>

Rhys wrote a poem called 'Obeah Night' which provided her with the answer: that Rochester 'must have fallen for her – and violently too. The black people have or had a good word for it – “she *magic* with him” or “he *magic* with her”. Because you see, that is what it is – magic, intoxication. Not “Love” at all.’<sup>19</sup> Rochester, then, is not a ‘heel’ at all, but ‘a fierce and violent (Heathcliff) man who marries an alien creature’ [...] mostly because he has been ‘magicked’ by the Caribbean, ‘a lovely, lost and *magic* place but, if you understand, a *violent* place.’<sup>20</sup> Rhys realised that the male European exoticising perspective was crucial to the novel, but writing Part II was ‘impossibly difficult’, partly because - as she told Wyndham - she had not been able to draw on aspects of her own experience, as she had with Parts I and III.<sup>21</sup> Brontë would have been no help: she gives us the demonization of Bertha without Rochester’s desire for her, his cold anger and hatred without the passion that preceded it. Rhys suggests *Wuthering Heights* as another source for her ‘Rochester’, but numerous unmarked intertextual echoes point to Baudelaire’s male decadent aesthetic as a much more vital and detailed source for her representation of the white man’s ‘magicking’ by the

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<sup>18</sup> Rhys, 269.

<sup>19</sup> Rhys, 262.

<sup>20</sup> Rhys, 269.

<sup>21</sup> Rhys tells Wyndham that ‘When I was despairing I could say *this happened*. So I could manage Part I because I *did* go to a convent. [...] The place I have called Coulibri *existed*, and still does. [...] The end was also possible because I *am* in England and can all too easily imagine being mad.’ When it came to Part II, however, ‘I had no facts at all. Or rather I had one - the place. [...] The characters though had to be imagined - not one real fact. Not one. No dialogue. Nothing.’ Rhys, 276–77.

Caribbean. In the 'Obeah Night' poem, and the scene as it occurs in Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette gives Rochester a love-potion reluctantly provided by her nurse, the Martiniquan Obeah-woman Christophine. 'Magic' in Rhys thus takes on two main meanings, both of which can also be found in Baudelaire: lustful infatuation and intoxication (including intoxication by the island itself), and 'magic' in the sense of the Caribbean cultural practice of Obeah. Baudelaire's infatuation with Duval is configured as a form of bewitching, a sensual intoxication that both draws on the colours, sounds and scents of vaguely-imagined exotic climes and invokes death, corruption and violence. Rhys's Rochester justifies his 'angry love' for Antoinette by her suspected Obeah practices against him; Baudelaire's anger and hatred, as we will see, are justified by Duval's Gothic representation as predatory vampire, ghost, snake, cat, demon – even 'Beelzebub' himself.

### **Imagining Duval**

First, however, I want to pause to consider representations of Jeanne Duval. When we think about Brontë's representation of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, we think of the erasure of the Caribbean woman's subjectivity: she is reduced to a Gothic figuration of otherness, a monstrous madwoman in the attic. Jeanne Duval provides us with a striking historical example of a nineteenth-century, probably Caribbean, mixed-race woman's invisibility and erasure. Baudelaire is one of the key canonical poets of European literature, and Duval was his lover and companion for over twenty years, yet there is nothing certain about her actual cultural identity, origins, character, or even appearance.<sup>22</sup> Within the 'Vénus noire'

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<sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Richon's study of Duval and Baudelaire opens with the assertion that, unlike most biographies, which build on substantial documentary evidence of their subject, his is motivated by the fact that 'il ne subsiste à peu près rien de cette femme aujourd'hui.' Emmanuel Richon, *Jeanne Duval Et Charles Baudelaire:*

sequence of *Les Fleurs du mal*, her blackness and her sensuality are emphasised through a profuse and scattered range of cultural associations with Asia and Africa (e.g. ‘La Chevelure’), with Caribbean Obeah practices (‘*Sed non satiata*’), and with a vaguely-imagined tropical island (‘Parfum exotique’).<sup>23</sup> The poetry gives us nothing about her actual cultural origins, and historical records are no more help: Duval is usually described as coming from the Caribbean (Martinique, San Domingo, and Haiti are all presented as possibilities), though she might have been French-born.<sup>24</sup> In biographies of Baudelaire, she is a shadowy figure: although she was his most important companion, and probably the single most important influence on his poetic output, she is reduced to a series of vague, racially-obsessed references.<sup>25</sup> Not even her name holds any certainty: ‘Jeanne Duval’ is a code now commonly used to refer to a woman whose surname also appears as ‘Lemer’, ‘Lemaire’, and ‘Prosper’, and whose first name may have been ‘Berthe’.<sup>26</sup> Of Baudelaire’s voluminous correspondence, we find only one letter to Duval.<sup>27</sup> In the case of Courbet’s ‘L’Atelier du

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*Belle D’abandon* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1998), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Baudelaire’s vague conflation of various geographical regions is symptomatic of nineteenth-century exoticism, but, as Françoise Lionnet has argued, that vagueness has led more recent critics ‘to construct their own imaginary geographies of the “faraway lands” he visited.’ Lionnet shows that the postcolonial readings of Miller and Spivak, for example, have themselves obscured Baudelaire’s engagement with the specific cultures of Mauritius and Réunion. ‘Reframing Baudelaire: Literary History, Biography, Postcolonial Theory, and Vernacular Languages’, *Diacritics* 28, no. 3 (1998): 63–85.

<sup>24</sup> See Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (Routledge, 2013), 309 n40.

<sup>25</sup> Enid Starkie describes Duval as ‘mulatto’, and details her absence of talent, ‘selfish weakness’, and ‘passion for drugs and drink’, conceding guardedly that ‘[in] spite of all the hard things that have been written in her disfavour, there must have been something in her which could hold Baudelaire, and in some queer way he must have been genuinely fond of her.’ *Baudelaire* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), 69–71. Claude Pichois refers to her as ‘Une mûlatresse ou une métisse’, and his introduction to her opens with the judgements on her racial identity by Baudelaire and his contemporaries. *Baudelaire* (Paris: Julliard, 1987), 180–81. Joanna Richardson also focuses on the question of racial categorisation, assuming that Duval was as she was judged by others: greedy, stupid and degraded. *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray, 1994), 73. All these biographers make a point of emphasising how little is known of Duval, but do not acknowledge the racial prejudice that is inherent in contemporary accounts of her. References to Duval are brief as well as prejudiced. As Richon points out, another of Baudelaire’s muses, Apollonie Sabatier, is subject to numerous studies, despite the fact that Baudelaire’s relationship with Sabatier was far less significant than his relationship with Duval. Richon, *Jeanne Duval Et Charles Baudelaire*, 23–24.

<sup>26</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 261–62.

<sup>27</sup> The two-volume edition of Baudelaire’s letters includes only one to Duval, from 1859. Charles Baudelaire,

peintre', her erasure is literal. Duval herself thus becomes a 'revenant' of sorts - a haunting figure, as ghostly as Bertha Mason.

All that remain are accounts of Duval by Baudelaire and other contemporaries and some visual depictions of her. As a muse lauded for her beauty and sensuality, we might at least expect some consistency in how her physical appearance is described. On the contrary, however, depictions are so different from each other as to make any historical woman disappear behind the kaleidoscope of images. Baudelaire sketched her a number of times, always emphasising her 'blackness' and highlighting her 'African' features, even to the point of caricature (fig. 2, 3). Baudelaire's representations are highly subjective: the images are sketched from memory, based on an idealised memory of her at the peak of her youth and beauty. Manet's painting 'Lady with a Fan (Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining)' (1862) (fig. 4), presents an unsettling and Gothicised image of an older, emaciated, and by now very ill Duval. Reclining in a huge white crinolined dress, she is pale-skinned, is not defined by stereotypically 'African' skin colour and facial features, and is barely recognisable as the same subject of Baudelaire's heavily racialized drawings.<sup>28</sup> The verbal descriptions given of Duval by a range of her contemporaries are also notably inconsistent. Griselda Pollock's important study of 'Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining' collects a number of these together: the photographer Nadar describes her as 'a negress, a real genuine negress, at least incontestably, a mulatto',<sup>29</sup> Théodore de Banville presents her as a '*fille de couleur*', later

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*Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, vol. 1, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 639–40.

<sup>28</sup> There is some controversy over the question of Duval is the subject of the painting at all: in 1983, Jean Adhémar argued that it was in fact a portrait of another mistress of Baudelaire's, though Therese Dolan has argued convincingly that the painting draws on the 'Vénus noire' cycle of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Therese Dolan, 'Skirting the Issue: Manet's Portrait of Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining', *Art Bulletin* 79, no. 4 (1997): 611–29.

<sup>29</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 265.

asserting that she is 'not black at all', but 'white', albeit a whiteness marked by what he claims are indisputable 'signs' of mixed-race identity.<sup>30</sup> For Prarond she is a 'mulatress, not very black, not very beautiful'; for Buisson, she has 'a yellow and dull complexion'.<sup>31</sup> As Pollock writes, 'Jeanne Duval figures not as the field of "blank darkness" of the full Africanist sign but as a hybridity that constantly aggravates. She cannot be fixed or firmly placed "elsewhere" yet these writers want her somehow to embody the sensuous, living sign of an exotic alterity.'<sup>32</sup> What fascinates Duval's male contemporaries is her racial ambiguity, but that very ambiguity resists their desires to categorise her. Thus the inherent contradictions, not only between different writers' descriptions, but even within those descriptions: Nadar's assertion that she is a 'genuine negress', then 'mulatto'; de Banville's description of her as '*fille de couleur*' but indisputably 'white'. What is remembered and recorded about Duval is precisely that which is most motivated by prejudice and misogyny. The obsession with her racial identity means that any *specific* identity – cultural heritage(s), character, personality, even looks – are subsumed under a morass of contradictory racial categorisations. The only certainty these accounts provide us with is that Duval was not – or at least not-quite – white.

Images of Duval, then, serve to render the historical woman *less* rather than more perceptible. We see only a shadowy presence behind an ambiguous signifier of darkness and exotic sexuality, and a beauty that has been transformed according to the desires of each of her beholders. That ghostliness and ambiguity is indeed directly reflected in Manet's

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<sup>30</sup> de Banville describes 'the pale white line on the nail which nothing effaces, and which is a distinctive sign' of mixed-race identity. Pollock, 267.

<sup>31</sup> Pollock, 268.

<sup>32</sup> Pollock, 267.

portrait of Duval, which contrasts the pallor of her skin and whiteness of her dress with a dehumanising blackening out of her eyes. Dolan relates this directly to Baudelaire's own preoccupation with black eyes in the 'Vénus noire' cycle, as well as his interest in black eye make-up in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*.<sup>33</sup> As Pollock points out, however, the eyes in this painting are an anomaly: 'Manet the painter is the master of the touch. He was good at eyes. Here is an aberration.'<sup>34</sup> She suggests that this is because Duval never posed for Manet in his studio and that he was working from memory or from a photograph.<sup>35</sup> This may indeed be true, but I want to argue for a further possibility. Baudelaire's poetry links Duval to the figure of the zombi, amongst other supernatural beings. Manet's painting, in its blackening out of Duval's eyes - as Pollock has persuasively argued - reflects the 'blank darkness' inherent to representations of the black woman in art. I want to be still more specific, however: the notion of the 'zombi' is directly relevant to 'Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining', regardless of whether Manet intended to embody that particular cultural reference. Viewing the painting alongside *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it becomes clear that the appropriation of Duval's image as 'blank darkness' is an example of what we could call 'zombification'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Therese Dolan, 'Manet, Baudelaire and Hugo in 1862', *Word & Image* 16, no. 2 (April 2000): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2000.10435679>.

<sup>34</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 275.

<sup>35</sup> Pollock, 276.

<sup>36</sup> The artist Maud Sulter directly addressed the objectification of Duval in her 2003 exhibition 'Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama'. Sulter's images resist and reclaim the hollowed-out, ghostly, identity of the black female muse, placing an image of Duval at the centre of canonical paintings such as Manet's 'Olympia' and Courbet's 'L'Atelier du peintre'. Most notably, though, Sulter does not attempt to present a biographical or historical reading of the woman, but scrutinises instead the function of the black muse within art in a much broader sense. Apart from claiming one photograph by Nadar as a possible portrait of Duval, Sulter does not try to reanimate Duval herself. Instead, the most powerful images in the exhibition present photographic self-portraits of Sulter herself that re-imagine canonical Baudelaire poems such as 'La Chevelure' and 'Les Bijoux'. The artist thus reanimates the black muse from within, in an act of artistic reclamation and agency. She challenges and refutes the process of what I call 'zombification'. Maud Sulter, *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003).

The erasure of Duval from history would make her a particularly apt subject for the process of what Erica Johnson has called ‘ghostwriting’. ‘Ghostwriting’ in many ways does the opposite of ‘zombification’: the ghostwriter abdicates their own authorship and is a conduit for another author’s voice.<sup>37</sup> In that sense, ghostwriting is conceptually related to translation, another form of writing that is crucial to Rhys’s work.<sup>38</sup> Rhys worked briefly as a ghostwriter, as does Sasha in *Good Morning Midnight*; Rhys’s own unfinished autobiography, *Smile, Please*, on the other hand, was ghostwritten by David Plante, who, as Erica Johnson has shown, manipulates Rhys’s material.<sup>39</sup> For Johnson, however, ‘ghostwriting’ takes on a different and more productive literary definition in the context of Caribbean writers such as Cliff, Condé and Brand: the fictional reconstruction of historical female figures whose lives have been ‘lost to colonial and historiographical erasure’.<sup>40</sup> Duval herself has been subject to many literary and biographical reconstructions, not all of which conform to ‘ghostwriting’ in Johnson’s sense, which is distinctive in that it ‘takes into consideration the very endeavour of representing subalternity.’<sup>41</sup> That is, ‘ghostwriting’ is acutely aware of what *cannot* be reconstructed, and indeed actively critiques the act of historical reconstruction. ‘Gaps and silences’ are emphasised as much as what can be

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<sup>37</sup> A common French word for ‘ghostwriter’ is ‘nègre’, revealing the complex racial power dynamics in conceptions of authorship and originality as well as the enduring social acceptance of racist language. Only very recently, in 2017, did the French Ministry of Culture issue a recommendation that the word be replaced with ‘prête-plume’. My thanks to Richard Hibbitt for alerting me to this.

<sup>38</sup> Juliette Taylor-Batty, “‘Everything’s Been Done before”: Jean Rhys, Translation, and the Politics of Originality’, *Modernist Cultures* 14, no. 4 (2019): 498–521.

<sup>39</sup> As Johnson shows, Plante’s role as ‘thief’ or manipulator of Rhys’s material, combined with his highly problematic anecdotal writings about her, forces Rhys into a subversive position of ‘auto-ghostwriting’ whereby she resists, subverts and distorts the ghostwriting process. Erica L. Johnson, ‘Auto-Ghostwriting *Smile, Please*: An Unfinished Autobiography’, *Biography* 29, no. 4 (2006): 563–83, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2007.0006>.

<sup>40</sup> Erica L Johnson, *Caribbean Ghostwriting* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, 16. Re-imaginings of Duval include: Richon, *Jeanne Duval Et Charles Baudelaire*. Angela Carter, ‘Black Venus’, in *Black Venus* (London: Picador, 1986), 7–24. James McManus, *Black Venus*. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 2015).

known, and the writers' subjects are portrayed 'not as "real" but as spectral'.<sup>42</sup> Although it is likely that Rhys would have responded critically to Baudelaire's representation of Jeanne Duval, she does not attempt any reconstruction of Duval herself (although her act of reclaiming the lost voice of the fictional Bertha Mason is of course an analogous process of resistance and critique). Instead, she draws on Baudelaire's representations of Duval, using them as the source for her representation of the male Rochester-figure.

### 'Vénus noire'

Duval appears in *Fleurs* in a number of guises. For Baudelaire, she is the source of an exotic sensual excess that takes the poet on imaginative travels. In 'Parfum exotique' the scent of her body transports him to:

Une île paresseuse où la nature donne  
Des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux;

[ 'An idle isle, where friendly nature brings / Singular trees, fruit that is savoury'<sup>43</sup> ]

Rhys's Rochester loves to bury his face in Antoinette's hair; in Baudelaire's 'La Chevelure', it

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<sup>42</sup> Johnson makes direct use here of Spivak's work on the problems of representing subalternity: 'Spivak indicates that literary representation, like colonial history, is also implicated in a larger discourse of representing colonial history. Any attempt to fill in historical lacunae, she points out, runs the same pattern of representation in which a "subject effect" replaces the missing subject (Spivak 1999, 12). The already absent subject of history is displaced again by the contemporary writer's attempt not to mark his or her absence, but to fill in the absence with a construction of the writer's own making.' *Caribbean Ghostwriting*, 16. Such a form of reconstruction, I would argue, risks itself becoming a form of 'zombification'.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

is the scent of Duval's long black hair which transports the poet's imagination to 'La langoureuse Asie et la brûlante Afrique', a vague and nonsensical tropical conflation of two continents within the body of the woman, where heightened senses lead to an intoxicating sensuality:

Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse  
Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé;  
Et un esprit subtil que le roulis caresse  
Saura vous retrouver, ô féconde paresse,  
Infinis bercements du loisir embaumé!

Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues,  
Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond;  
Sur les bords duvetés de vos mèches tordues,  
Je m'enivre ardemment des senteurs confondues  
De l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron. (50)

[I'll plunge my drunken head, dizzy with love / In this black sea where that one is confined; / My subtle soul that rolls in its caress / Will bring you back, o fertile indolence! / Infinite lulling, leisure steeped in balm! / Blue head of hair, tent of spread shadows, you / Give me the azure of the open sky; In downy wisps along your twisted locks / I'll gladly drug myself on mingled scents, / Essence of cocoa-oil, pitch

and musk.’<sup>44</sup>]

*This* is what Rhys is talking about when she uses the phrase ‘he magic with her’. Poems like ‘La Chevelure’ provide a source for the infatuation that Rochester has experienced towards Antoinette just before the events covered by *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Dark eyes and luxuriant black hair are central both to Baudelaire’s exoticising characterisation of Duval and to Rochester’s infatuation with Antoinette. Rochester expresses the desire to ‘bury my face in her hair as I used to do’, but her heavy hair with its ‘sweet heavy smell’ produces dreams of suffocation.<sup>45</sup> Her beautiful ‘Long, sad, dark alien eyes’ are also an unsettling marker of her racial ambiguity: ‘Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either.’ (56)

Antoinette is ostensibly white but suspected of being mixed race; Duval is mixed-race but extolled by Baudelaire for her ‘blackness’. Rhys was highly conscious of the racial ambiguity of Creole identity,<sup>46</sup> and draws on Baudelaire to examine the ambiguity of racial categorisation and the European association of the white Creole woman with ‘black’ sexuality. Christopher Miller has shown that nineteenth-century French characterisations of white and black Creoles collapse racial distinctions (including within Baudelaire’s own writing).<sup>47</sup> One source that Miller cites to demonstrate this is the *Larousse du XIXe siècle*,

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<sup>44</sup> Baudelaire, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2000), 113. Subsequent page references to the text will be presented in parentheses.

<sup>46</sup> As Anna Snaith demonstrates, Rhys’s novel *Voyage in the Dark* reflects its author’s own acute awareness of ‘the fluidity of racial taxonomy when it came to the Creole’. *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 146.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 94. The term ‘Creole’ is particularly notable for the fluidity and ambiguity of its meaning over time. Judith Raiskin provides the following useful summary: ‘Beyond the most generic definition referring to colonial origin [...], “Creole” generally refers to those of (some) European descent born in European colonies or in

which dwells on 'les grands yeux spirituels des femmes *créoles* qu'on trouve le contraste si rare d'une douce langueur et d'une vivacité piquante. Elles sont surtout remarquables par la beauté de leur chevelure, qui est d'un noir incomparable' ['the large spiritual eyes of creole women, in which one finds a rare combination of soft languour and sharp vivacity. They are especially remarkable for their beautiful hair, which is of an incomparable blackness']. The *Larousse*, going on to compare black with white creoles, concludes that there is very little difference between them apart from the colour of their skin.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, in Britain, white Creoles were often ascribed the same prejudicial characteristics as black Caribbeans.<sup>49</sup> We do not know whether or not Duval was Creole, and in any case Baudelaire's representation of her, as I have already indicated, is indiscriminate in its geographical associations. The *Larousse* description of the white Creole woman, however, corresponds remarkably with both Baudelaire's characterisation of Duval and Rochester's perception of Antoinette, and it is highly likely that Rhys is directly using Baudelaire here. We find a comparable use of French literature elsewhere in Rhys's oeuvre, too: in *Voyage in the Dark*, the white Creole protagonist Anna Morgan - who is nicknamed 'the Hottentot' by the other chorus girls - reads Zola's *Nana*, a text in which transgressive sexuality carries Africanist associations.<sup>50</sup>

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independent territories that once were colonies. However, depending on the time and the place of its use, the term can signify full European ancestry (implying a claim of "unsullied" whiteness), mixed racial ancestry resulting from colonialism (usually implying some European ancestry mixed with African, Amerindian, or other so-called racial groups, depending on the location), or syncretic cultural and linguistic practices (such as "creole" music, food, or language). The conflicting meanings embedded in this term consequently cast the surrounding colonial vocabulary of nationality and racial identity into confusion as well.' *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Blank Darkness*, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Helen Carr, "'Intemperate and Unchaste': Jean Rhys and Caribbean Creole Identity', *Women: A Cultural Review* 14, no. 1 (January 2003): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0957404032000081692>.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 9, 12. For an astute analysis of Rhys's use of Zola in relation to the white Creole woman's association with 'black' sexuality see Snaith, *Modernist Voyages*, 145.

The transgressive sexuality of the white Creole woman is associated with ‘blackness’ by European society, but it is also a point of her own resistance to that society. Anna in *Voyage* remembers wanting to be black as a child, echoing Rhys’s own longings in *Smile Please*. In the short story ‘Let Them Call it Jazz’, Rhys recasts some of her own experiences of alienation in London suburbia through the defiant voice of a mixed-race Caribbean woman.<sup>51</sup> Baudelaire appropriates ‘blackness’ to challenge bourgeois society, and Rhys to some extent parallels this appropriative move, particularly in her earlier work.<sup>52</sup> Even in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys uses the ‘Vénus noire’ sequence of poems to address the white man’s racialised response to a *white* Creole woman. Still, Rhys does make us think critically about race, and although Kalliney has seen elements of problematic racial masquerade in Rhys’s early work, I ultimately agree with Anna Snaith’s conclusion that Rhys’s Creole position ‘produces an unevenness, or a constant shifting of racial affiliation’ and reflects a desire to ‘[destabilize...] the categories of racial difference themselves.’<sup>53</sup>

Though Rhys’s critique of Baudelaire is muted, it is still significant. As I will demonstrate in the next section, once we recognize the presence of Baudelaire in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we begin to see the ways that the novel critiques the zombification that is at the heart of modernist and primitivist appropriations of blackness.

### **Obeah and ‘bewitchings’**

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<sup>51</sup> Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, 27. Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Deutsch, 1979), 42. Jean Rhys, ‘Let Them Call It Jazz’, in *The Collected Short Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 158–75.

<sup>52</sup> Kalliney situates Rhys alongside other white modernist writers in this respect,

<sup>53</sup> Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters*, 229–33; Snaith, *Modernist Voyages*, 134–35.

Rochester's sensual intoxication with Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is intimately bound up with his perception of the colours, sounds and scents of the Caribbean. Rhys wrote to Wyndham of her struggles with this element of Part II. She realised that she needed to make the representation of Dominica more 'melodramatic' to reflect the European man's intoxication with the 'magic' and 'very disturbing beauty' of the place.<sup>54</sup> Rhys recalls hearing strangers describing Dominica as 'theatrical', 'mysterious', as '*dark* Dominica' – an exoticising perspective that she saw imposed by strangers on to the island and which was to her, as a Dominican, 'very odd'.<sup>55</sup> Baudelaire provides her with her source, as we can see, for example, in Rochester's powerfully exoticising responses to an 'alien' and disturbingly intense landscape:

Standing on the veranda I breathed the sweetness of the air. Cloves I could smell and cinnamon, roses and orange blossom. And an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before. (61)

We watched the sky and the distant sea on fire – all colours were in that fire and the huge clouds fringed and shot with flame. [...] I was waiting for the scent of the flowers by the river – they opened when darkness came and it came quickly. Not night or darkness as I knew it but night with blazing stars, an alien moon, night full of strange noises. (74)

He marvels at 'the sweetness of the air', the 'intoxicating freshness' of the scent of 'cloves ...

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<sup>54</sup> Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 262.

<sup>55</sup> Rhys, 277.

cinnamon, roses and orange blossom'; he is transfixed by the intense colours of the sunset, and unsettled by the powerful scent of the night-time flowers that, he comments elsewhere, makes him too giddy to speak (69). In passages such as these, the seductive sensuality of Baudelaire's decadent modernism is clearly a stylistic as well as thematic model for Rhys. But by placing such passages from Rochester's perspective, Rhys is able to distance herself from their ideological import. Dominica is perceived in terms of sensual overload, languor and intoxication, as well as a sense of unease at the 'alien' nature of the island and of Antoinette's beauty, a suspicion of having been 'bewitched' by it. Attempting to write to his father about the place, Rochester realises that his 'confused impressions' cannot be expressed in language: 'There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up.' (64)

This synaesthetic intensity again brings us back to Baudelaire, to the aesthetic credo articulated in 'Correspondances', and more directly, in the 'senteurs confondues' produced by Duval's hair in 'La Chevelure'. The woman in Baudelaire is intoxicating, and sex is often synaesthetically linked to the sensations produced by wine and drugs as well as powerful scents and vivid colours.<sup>56</sup> In 'Le serpent qui danse', the sensuous snake-like female sensuality is heightened by a kiss that is like drinking 'un vin de Bohême, / Amer et vainqueur' (58) ['a gypsy wine, / Bitter, subduing, tart,<sup>57</sup>]. Bitter wine is also central to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Alcohol - a particular preoccupation in Baudelaire - is a recurrent feature of Antoinette and Rochester's time together. In the 'Obeah night' scene of Part II, wine becomes directly linked to Rochester's fears of the effects of Antoinette's intoxicating sexual allure: he is literally 'bewitched' or 'poisoned' when he drinks the bitter-tasting glass of wine

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<sup>56</sup> In 'La Chevelure', for example, her perfumed hair is described as 'Un port retentissant où mon âme peut boire / A grands flots le parfum, le son et la couleur'. [A sounding harbour where my soul can drink / From great floods subtle tones, perfumes and hues'] Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Baudelaire, 59.

that is spiked with Christophine's love-potion.

Rochester, following the 'Obeah night', becomes embroiled in paranoid fantasies and fears about Caribbean culture and landscape and reads a definition of the zombi as 'a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead.' (88). Christophine, as a reputed Obeah-woman, becomes the object of his suspicion. The significance of Obeah and the related figure of the zombi to *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been much discussed by critics, particularly in relation to debates about the novel's engagement with questions of race and colonial politics.<sup>58</sup> Rochester's fears directly reflect repressive colonial responses to Caribbean cultural practices such as Obeah and Vodou, which demonised them to the extent of outlawing them completely.<sup>59</sup> (The Euro-American tradition of the terrifying blood-thirsty zombie has its roots in such justificatory sensationalising and exoticising accounts.)<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See especially: Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 43–47. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, 129–43. Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999), 157–71. Newman, *The Ballistic Bard*, 13–28. Carine M. Mardorossian, *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism*, *New World Studies* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 60–90.

<sup>59</sup> Diana Paton explores the changes to the law in relation to Obeah in the post-emancipation period. Obeah during slavery was usually treated as a capital offence. After slavery, new laws were passed to continue to suppress Obeah practice. Although initially less severe, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries there was 'a substantial expansion and harshening of obeah law'. Repressive laws were justified by beliefs such as those propagated by historian James Anthony Froude in 1888 which linked Obeah to child sacrifice and cannibalism. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World*, *Critical Perspectives on Empire* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 120, 129.

The imposition of 'The Obeah Act 1904' in the Leeward Islands Federation (of which Dominica was then a part) meant that all forms of Obeah practices were outlawed, and severe penalties were imposed. (See Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys*, 158–59.). Sue Thomas provides an illuminating analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in relation to the 1904 Act and the general 'moral panic' in Dominica around Obeah. As she writes, 'The measures against Obeah are represented in the press as part of a contest between two "moral constitutencies": the forces of civilization, humanity, real (as opposed to nominal) Christianity, education, and "right thinking" on the one hand and Obeah and humbug, "part of the creed of most Dominicans," on the other.' Obeah believers are described as 'ignorant, credulous, prone to base superstition and appeals to their lower instincts', while practitioners are described as 'dark, evil, barbarous'. Thomas, 160.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Yeates notes that the creation of the Euro-American zombie from Haitian folklore 'was due in large part to the US abandonment of Haiti in 1934, at which point there was a resurgence of accounts of Haitian culture that enforced notions of primitivism and barbarism. The void left by Euro-American influence in Haiti was portrayed frequently as a loss of benevolent, civilizing colonial rule.' "'The Unshriven Dead, Zombies on the Loose": African and Caribbean Religious Heritage in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 3 (2015): 529–30.

But Vodou and Obeah are also, crucially, a point of powerful cultural resistance: Raiskin, for example, points to the importance of Vodou ceremonies to the Haitian War of Independence of 1791.<sup>61</sup> The figure of the zombi is particularly resonant in relation to the history of slavery: the zombi is effectively a form of death-in-life (or life-in-death) whereby a recently deceased (or drugged) body is revived to become a mindless, soulless automaton and slave to its new master. As Raiskin writes:

Metaphorically, the zombi can be seen to represent the condition of both the slave and the colony itself; like the colony, the zombi is a functioning economic body serving the demands of the master while its soul (or culture) has been stolen or forcibly put to sleep.<sup>62</sup>

Carine Mardorossian's reading of Obeah in *Wide Sargasso Sea* highlights the importance of 'opacity' in the novel's articulation of black cultural resistance. For Mardorossian, we cannot assume – as many critics have – a direct identification of Rhys with Antoinette's perspective. Instead, the novel 'compels us to read against the grain of Antoinette's narrative' as much as it does of Rochester's. The power of black cultural resistance in the novel is found in the 'complex and ambiguous interplay' of cultural practices such as Obeah 'with colonial discourses and strategies', particularly through a subversive 'inscrutability' and 'opacity'.<sup>63</sup> All we know about obeah in the novel is what we see from the perspective of white characters, whose prejudices cast it as a terrifying and mysterious cultural practice. But, crucially, the novel itself 'is not about obeah and what it does'. Instead, it is precisely the unknowability and '*unreadability*' of obeah 'that destabilizes the white rulers' worldview',

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<sup>61</sup> Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, 131.

<sup>62</sup> Raiskin, 132.

<sup>63</sup> Mardorossian, *Reclaiming Difference*, 61.

and the novel '[tells] us more about the Anglo-European stereotypical framework through which Afro-Caribbean traditions were given meaning in the nineteenth century than about the alternative Afro-Caribbean epistemology that the practice embodies.'<sup>64</sup> Rhys's Rochester figure is of course central to this: when he assumes that he has been poisoned, he characterises his own attraction to Antoinette and to the island as the result of a form of unnatural enchantment and entrapment.

Baudelaire is a key source for this European ideological construction of the Caribbean. His characterisation of the 'black' woman in *Fleurs* would have been a powerful resource for Rhys to draw upon in representing Rochester's particular combination of disgust and self-justifying desire. Duval's blackness is directly linked to her qualities of seduction and enchantment. She is explicitly associated with death and putrefaction ('Une Charogne', 'Je t'adore à l'égal...', 'Remords posthume'), and her huge dark eyes are the source of both seduction and suspicion. She is characterised as a number of powerful supernatural and mythological beings to evoke her seductive power: zombi, witch and demon ('*Sed non satiata*'), angel and sphinx ('Avec ses vêtements...'), snake ('Le Serpent qui danse'), vampire ('Le Vampire'), Beelzebub ('Le Possédé'), ghost ('Un fantôme'). Such Gothic imagery is used to justify the poet's anger and sado-masochistic impulses towards her as well as his passion. This is all highly relevant to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. By the time of the events recounted in the novel, Antoinette's 'magic' has become deeply unsettling and disturbing in a way that could be seen to draw upon Baudelaire's racialised depiction of Duval's sexuality. Rochester's fear of poisoning is also, specifically, a fear of the 'magical' practices of the Obeah-woman

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<sup>64</sup> Mardorossian, 77.

Christophine, a fact that creates a direct link in his imagination between Antoinette's sexual allure and black Caribbean cultural practices.

The poem '*Sed non satiata*' is especially important to *Wide Sargasso Sea* because it characterises Duval as a zombi. It is therefore central to Rhys's representation and critique of the white man's response to Obeah. The poem as a whole provides a typically stereotyping objectification of the black woman as both exotic and sexually available:

Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits,  
Au parfum mélangé de musc et de havane,  
Œuvre de quelque obi, le Faust de la savane,  
Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuits,

[...]

Tes yeux sont la citerne où boivent mes ennuis.

Par ces deux grands yeux noirs, soupiraux de ton âme,  
Ô démon sans pitié ! verse-moi moins de flamme ;  
Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t'embrasser neuf fois,

[ 'Singular goddess, brown as night, and wild, / Perfumed of fine tobacco smoke and musk, / Work of some Faust, some wizard of the dusk, / Ebony sorceress, black midnight's child, [...] My ennuis drink from cisterns of your eyes. / From these black orbits where the soul breathes through, / O heartless demon! pour a drink less hot; /

I'm not the Styx, nine times embracing you,<sup>65]</sup>

Duval's demonic insatiability is here associated with Obeah, the devil, and Faustian pacts. The poem lingers on her large black eyes as the source of her destructive power. '*Sed non satiata*' finds direct correspondence in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with Rochester's perception of Antoinette's sexuality in relation to Obeah. In Rhys, such supernatural sensuality is split between the characters of Christophine, whose 'magic' is the apparent cause of the 'Obeah night', and Antoinette herself, who is the source of the sexual attraction. In Rhys - as in Baudelaire - the woman's dark eyes are the markers of both supernatural practices and of racial otherness. For Rochester, Antoinette's dark eyes signal the possibility of mixed racial ancestry; after her madness, they become specifically associated with the figure of the zombi, part of a 'blank hating moonstruck face' (136). That 'blankness' is in turn directly associated with an 'unnatural' promiscuous sexuality that is reminiscent of Baudelaire's demonically insatiable Duval:

She thirsts for *anyone* – not for me ...

She'll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving.) She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could. *Or could*. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. (135-6)

On one level, Rhys is responding to nineteenth-century theories of white Creole racial degeneracy that are embodied in *Jane Eyre*: as Sue Thomas has demonstrated,

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<sup>65</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 55. McGowan's translation replaces the term 'Obi' with 'wizard of the dusk'.

acclimatisation to the tropics was seen to produce particular physical characteristics (such as sallow skin and deepened eye sockets) and mental characteristics (moral and mental degeneracy, indolence, and excessive, licentious behaviour).<sup>66</sup> But for Rhys, Brontë's 'paper tiger monster' is not seductive. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, on the other hand, the woman's 'blackness' elicits a sado-masochistic sexual passion that is a fundamental source for Rhys, and that we find very clearly articulated in '*Sed non satiata*'. Baudelaire describes Duval as a zombi who has been created through the practice of Obeah ('Œuvre de quelque obi').<sup>67</sup> In both '*Sed non satiata*' and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the 'blank darkness' of the eyes is the clearest marker of possession and of sexual insatiability.<sup>68</sup>

Rhys is alert to the sexual power dynamics of the Rochester-Antoinette relationship, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* makes it clear that Rochester is the agent of zombification as well as its supposed victim: his 'hatred' turns Antoinette into a 'ghost', a 'doll' with 'Blank lovely eyes.'

(140) As Antoinette earlier challenges him when he renames her Bertha: 'You are trying to

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<sup>66</sup> Sue Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33–36.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher Miller suggests that Baudelaire's source of the word and concept 'obi' derives from the 1826 version of Hugo's novel about the Haitian slave revolt of 1791, *Bug-Jargal*. (*Blank Darkness*, 109–13). The complex power-dynamics of Baudelaire's poem come from this source: the woman is presented as a form of 'evil' black power that is 'subservient to a masculine master' - 'the *oeuvre* of an obi, a Faust, a man.' That '*oeuvre*' is also, of course, the poem itself; the woman thus 'becomes omnipotent and all-consuming only by virtue of being an *oeuvre*, both of the obi and of the poet.' (113–14). Miller does not engage with the specifics of Haitian Obeah, though: he focuses only on how it has been represented by Hugo and Baudelaire, and therefore does not directly engage with the figure of the zombi. Baudelaire represents Duval as both zombi and 'sorcière', and thereby gives her some agency in her insatiable lust. The representation of her elsewhere in *Fleurs* as a vampire compounds this ambiguity of possession and agency: she is a creature who has been created by some other 'maker', but who actively and maliciously perpetuates that evil. This is a conflation of European and Caribbean traditions, of the figure of the vampire (actively malicious and powerful), with the zombi (powerless and enslaved). It also reflects European prejudicial perceptions of Obeah practices as a terrifying, powerful form of 'witchcraft'.

<sup>68</sup> As a physical shell that has been taken over and controlled by another, the zombi's lack of identity or agency is particularly apparent in their face, especially their eyes. Thus, when Zora Neale Hurston encounters a woman she believes to be a zombi in Haiti, she describes the 'dreadful' sight of the woman's 'blank face' and 'dead eyes'. For Hurston this blankness is horrifying, but for the white European writer Baudelaire it appears as a 'blank darkness' that is seductive and demonic in equal parts. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 195.

make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too.' (121)

Reading Baudelaire in the light of Rhys, it becomes clear that the 'zombification' of the mixed-race woman in *Les Fleurs du mal* is produced by the poet-lover himself. In the final poem of the 'Vénus noire' sequence, 'Je te donne yes vers...', Baudelaire revisits the familiar poetic trope of immortalising the muse. The speaker hopes that the woman, already in life a shadowy presence 'comme une ombre à la trace éphémère' ['[like a] shadow, barely present to the eye'], might echo in the poet's nebulous memory of her: 'Ta mémoire, pareille aux fables incertaines, / [...] par un fraternel et mystique chaînon / Reste comme pendue à mes rimes hautaines' ['Your memory, like tales from ancient times, / Will [...] by a strange fraternal chain live here / As if suspended in my lofty rhymes.'<sup>69</sup>] Reading Baudelaire through Rhys, we can see that the poet here relegates Duval to being an empty 'shadowy' figure of 'blank darkness' that is reanimated through his own image and desires.

### **'Le Revenant'**

'*Sed non satiata*' presents the woman as zombi; another poem, 'Le Revenant', provides Rhys with an image of the man as both zombi and zombifying force. Indeed, this poem is central to the events of Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Antoinette, distraught at Rochester's sudden coldness towards her, begs Christophine to prepare an Obeah love potion for her to give to Rochester. This episode cements Rochester's hatred towards Antoinette and his resolve to incarcerate her in England. In both Baudelaire and Rhys, love and sensual pleasure turn into an angry, sado-masochistic love that demonises the racially and

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<sup>69</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 81.

culturally-othered woman. Rhys, struggling with this scene, composed a poem entitled 'Obeah Night' in which Rochester becomes possessed by 'Angry Love Himself / Blind fierce avenging Love'.<sup>70</sup> There are powerful correspondences between 'Obeah Night', the corresponding scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and 'Le Revenant', which is worth quoting here in full:

### **Le Revenant**

Comme les anges à l'oeil fauve,  
Je reviendrai dans ton alcove  
Et vers toi glisserai sans bruit  
Avec les ombres de la nuit;

Et je te donnerai, ma brune,  
Des baisers froids comme la lune  
Et des caresses de serpent  
Autour d'une fosse rampant.

Quand viendra le matin livide,  
Tu trouveras ma place vide,  
Où jusqu'au soir il fera froid.

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<sup>70</sup> Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 264–66.

Comme d'autres par la tendresse,  
Sur ta vie et sur ta jeunesse,  
Moi, je veux régner par l'effroi.

[Like angels who have bestial eyes  
I'll come again to your alcove  
And glide in silence to your side  
In shadows of the night, my love;

And I will give to my dark mate  
Cold kisses, frigid as the moon,  
And I'll caress you like a snake  
That slides and writhes around a tomb.

When the livid morning breaks  
You will find no one in my place,  
And feel a chill till night is near.

Some others by their tenderness  
May try to guide your youthfulness,  
Myself, I want to rule by fear.<sup>71</sup>]

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<sup>71</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 131–33.

Baudelaire imagines the male lover as a vengeful 'revenant' figure who comes to his lover at night with a destructive, violent, deathly cold passion. Morning light brings not warmth and sunshine but the pallor of fear and a deathly coldness that will persist throughout the day.<sup>72</sup>

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the intoxicating effect of the potion on Rochester is not 'love', however, but an anger that is vividly intimated within the novel as a night of sexual violence against Antoinette. Rochester's subsequent suspicion that he has been 'poisoned' cements his hatred towards Antoinette and he resolves to incarcerate her in England.

The events of this 'obeah night' and its consequences directly reflect Baudelaire's poem. Antoinette and Rochester say goodnight to each other, and she comments that 'Your mouth is colder than my hands' (112), echoing Baudelaire's evocation of 'Des baisers froids comme la lune'. She asks him to come back to her, and he re-enters her room, echoing the act of returning within 'Le Revenant'. They talk of ghosts:

She poured wine into two glasses and handed me one but I swear it was before I drank that I longed to bury my face in her hair as I used to do. I said, we are letting ghosts trouble us. Why shouldn't we be happy?' She said, 'Christophine knows about ghosts too, but that is not what she calls them.' She need not have done what she did to me. I will always swear that, she need not have done it. When she handed me the glass she was smiling. I remember saying in a voice that was not like my own that it was too light. I remember putting out the candles on the table near the bed and

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<sup>72</sup> The word 'revenant' in French means, literally, one who returns, and can refer to supernatural beings such as zombies as well as ghosts. Baudelaire's poem is not specifically about a zombi (and indeed, the title of the poem is most commonly translated as 'The Ghost') but Baudelaire does allude to Obeah practice elsewhere in his poetry, as we have seen.

that is all I remember. All I will remember of the night. (113)

The room is 'full of shadows'; Rochester makes it even darker ('Avec les ombres de la nuit'). He recalls burying his face in her hair, reminiscent of 'La Chevelure'. Rhys tells Diana Athill that Rochester uses the idea of Obeah 'poisoning' as justification for his violent desire and to 'excuse his cruelty'.<sup>73</sup> The association of wine with desire, poisoning and oblivion directly recalls the 'Vénus noire' poems, where the poet's desire for Duval is specifically presented as a form of intoxication: in 'La Chevelure', his mind is 'amoureuse d'ivresse', and in *Sed non satiata* 'l'élixir de ta bouche' is preferable to wine or opium. In 'Le Serpent qui danse', watching her move is like drinking 'un vin de Bohême, / Amer et vainqueur', a bitterness that is recalled in the bitter taste that Christophine's love-potion gives to the wine (114).

Baudelaire's intoxication with Duval also brings oblivion: in 'Le Lethé', the river of forgetfulness flows in Duval's kiss, and nepenthe is sucked from her breasts. In Rhys, that oblivion is directly related to Obeah (the 'ghosts' they discuss are specifically Christophine's type of ghosts, that is, zombis). Rochester starts to become the zombi or revenant: his voice is 'not like [his] own' – as if he has become possessed – and the rest is oblivion. The night itself is not represented by Rhys, but the account of the following morning continues to echo 'Le Revenant'. Baudelaire's lines 'Quand viendra le matin livide, / Tu trouveras ma place vide', strongly suggest sexual violence: the word 'livide' denotes both deathly pallor – hence a cold, pale morning light – and the blue-black colour of bruises ('livid' in the English sense). Rhys's Rochester, likewise, awakens in the 'cold light' and observes the sleeping

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<sup>73</sup> Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, 269.

Antoinette with acute hatred. He rushes to abandon her before she wakes up:

She may wake at any moment, I told myself. I must be quick. Her torn shift was on the floor, I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl. (114)

The 'torn shift ... on the floor' and his use of the sheet as a pall over a 'dead girl' clearly indicates the violence of the night.

Perhaps the most compelling correspondence between Baudelaire's poem and Rhys's novel, however, is found in the way Rochester's rage and desire for revenge after the 'obeah night' echoes the 'Revenant's' imposition of a deathly coldness or death-in-life upon the lover:

... If I was bound for hell let it be hell. No more false heavens. No more damned magic. You hate me and I hate you. We'll see who hates best. But first, first I will destroy your hatred. Now. My hate is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing.

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. (140)

Baudelaire's 'revenant' attacks his lover through coldness and fear. Rhys's Rochester literally imprisons Antoinette in a cold dark attic in England. Rhys takes Baudelaire further, however: Rochester, in a state of possession or zombification, in turn enacts his revenge upon Antoinette by 'forcing' her 'hatred', her 'beauty', and ultimately her sanity, out of her body, effectively turning *her* into the 'revenant' or zombi. The anger expressed in 'Le Revenant'

reflects the ways that the 'Vénus noire' poems commit the woman to a demonised 'undead' state, vaguely articulated in images of vampires, ghosts and revenants that in turn justify the poet's violence towards her. Baudelaire characterises Duval as 'oeuvre de quelque Obi', but, like Rochester, his is the real zombifying force. Rhys, in her use of 'Le Revenant', turns Baudelaire against himself, appropriating his own poem in such a way as to expose the 'zombification' that is apparent in his 'Vénus noire' poems.

Rhys had a sense of being 'haunted' by Brontë.<sup>74</sup> In the context of intertextuality, what are the implications of Rhys's use of a literary predecessor in relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea's* use of Obeah as a creative and cultural point of resistance? For Judie Newman, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* intertextual relationship to *Jane Eyre* can be considered a form of 'zombification' in that Rhys is 'taking over another woman's book', 'writing with Brontë's ghost at her elbow, a ghost powerless to intervene, but susceptible to economic exploitation'.<sup>75</sup> Certainly, Newman's reading illuminates the ways that both novels present a strange dynamic of mutual hauntings whereby the reader 'has a sense of illegitimately crossing the boundaries between texts'.<sup>76</sup> Reading Rhys in the light of Baudelaire, however, reveals another dimension of zombification as technique and as trope: the poem 'Le Revenant' provides a source for Rhys's representation of the white European man as both zombi and zombifying power. Rhys's novel, then, emerges as a critique of zombification as well as an act of intertextual zombification itself.

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<sup>74</sup> Writing to Francis Wyndham in 1959, Rhys ponders her difficulties in bring *Wide Sargasso Sea* to fruition: 'Sometimes I have wondered if Miss Brontë does not *want* her book tampered with! [...] Superstition? – But so many things have got in my way.' Rhys, 175.

<sup>75</sup> Newman, *The Ballistic Bard*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Newman, 22.

'Ghostwriting', for Johnson, is a way of writing about historical 'ghosts': women whose subaltern status means that their stories have been silenced or ignored. In the context of Baudelaire, Jeanne Duval would be the most obvious candidate for 'ghostwriting', but Rhys chooses to use his texts somewhat differently: rather than reviving Duval, she writes Baudelaire's male modernist and decadent perspective into *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Part II has been read as showing some 'sympathy' for the male perspective, but when we read Rhys through Baudelaire, it becomes apparent that she is doing something different: she shows us the various stages that lead to the white male European 'zombification' of the Caribbean woman. The destructive impulse in Baudelaire's 'Le Revenant' is the culmination of two earlier stages: exoticising infatuation (as in 'La Chevelure') and ambivalent gothicising desire (as in '*Sed non satiata*'). Rhys therefore makes apparent the violence not only in Rochester's 'angry love', but in artistic representations of the Caribbean woman more broadly. Viewed through the lens of Rhys's novel, we can see how Manet, by blackening out Duval's eyes in 'Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining', empties them of subjectivity, turning her into an empty-eyed 'zombi'; likewise, we can see how Baudelaire's poetry, in its glancing reference to Obeah alongside other gothicised imagery, reduces the muse to a figure who is effectively possessed by the author. Recent Rhys criticism has worked to challenge the pervasive critical split between the 'modernist' Rhys of the 1920s and 1930s and the 'postcolonial' Rhys of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.<sup>77</sup> When we acknowledge the significance of Baudelaire to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can see still more clearly the intersections of modernist and postcolonial

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<sup>77</sup> Two important recent collections of critical essays on Rhys both focus in their introductions on the powerful liminality of Rhys's work and its transcendence of critical categories. Both argue that she is important to modernist, postcolonial, Caribbean and feminist studies, and challenge the tendency to compartmentalise her work. This was also one of the stated aims of a recent conference on Rhys at the Sorbonne University, Paris in June 2018. Mary Wilson and Kerry L. Johnson, eds., *Rhys Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, eds., *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

perspectives and techniques in the novel. Rhys uses Baudelaire’s modernist exoticising aesthetic and harnesses the power and sensuality of his language, but she simultaneously subjects the ideologies embodied in his modernism to a postcolonial critique, reconfiguring the lineaments of modernism from a Caribbean perspective. In this article I have focused mainly on illustrating the significance of Baudelaire to Rhys. That significance, however, is reciprocal. It is inconceivable to read *Jane Eyre* without *Wide Sargasso Sea* in mind; we should now use Rhys as a critical lens through which to read Baudelaire.

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