

BOOKS RECEIVED

Margaret Cezair-Thompson *The True History of Paradise* New York: Dutton, 1999. This very readable and interesting first novel portrays Jamaica in 1981 through the experience of Jean Landing, and in the frame of the history of her complex, extended, multiethnic ancestry stretching back to the seventeenth century. The narrative moves back and forth in time, with multiple voices contributing. One of these is Rebecca Landing (1682-1751), whose memories of childhood have a strong affinity with Rhys's description of Coulibri's gardens in *Wide Sargasso-Sea*. (the passage is italicized in the text): "*I did not realize, at first, that I lived in a paradise as lovely as that one in the Bible. Flowers outbloomed the seasons; fruit ripened on the trees all year long...Like that legendary garden, ours had a Forbidden Tree.*" (p. 17). Rhys's text reads, "Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible- the tree of life grew there" (Norton, 19). Seba, Rebecca's nurse, in her frank threats of hellish punishments, recalls Rhys's Meta in *Smile Please*. Then Rebecca rides to the river, "*to a special pool where white, lanternlike flowers provided privacy and shelter*" (p. 18). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the bathing pool at Granbois, with its flowers which open at night, is an important locale. Rebecca visits her grandmother in Spanish Town, (at the beginning of Rhys's novel, there is a mention of the road between Spanish Town and Coulibri and Spanish Town becomes a trope of the outside world, where the doctor for Pierre comes from. A comment "*It was quite different with the Colored ladies*", *she said. My mother said...*" (p. 19; Colored not italicized in the text), reminds of Rhys's "The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother" (Norton p 17). Rebecca's fate recalls Antoinette's, "*At the age of seventeen, I was heiress to a great West India fortune. My husband, Sir William Landing, became a powerful man with the wealth I brought him*" p. 23. But unlike Rochester, Landing is grateful. Rebecca's paternal grandmother is a Spanish Jew, recalling Rhys's interest in her own great-grandmother, who might have been Spanish Cuban. Rebecca's family plantation is devastated by an earthquake and her father becomes distracted and strange, her mother seems to forget her daughter. The slaves laugh at Rebecca. She and her

mother go to England. There is talk there of obeah "*disgruntled slaves had worked obeah spells on my poor mother*" (p 22). Rebecca lives in England, where Mimba, given as a gift on her leaving Jamaica, is her servant and friend, reminiscent of Rhys's Christophine being given as a wedding gift to Annette by her husband. Rhys haunts this novel intensely. Later, in the voice of Jean Falkirk (1871-1936), the story is told of her daughter being tormented on her way home from school by children shouting "White Witch", and she herself is called "White cockroach" (pp. 168-170). This is so deliberate that it is worth speculating what Cezair-Thompson's project might have been: whatever it was, she distracts us from her own fiction back into Rhys's, perhaps with similar purpose to Rhys's in using *Jane Eyre*.

Peter Hulme *Remnants of Conquest: The Island Caribs and their Visitors, 1877-1998*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

This long awaited study of the textualisation and contextualisation of the Caribs of Dominica is extremely interesting throughout, and as with all of Peter Hulme's work, meticulously scholarly. This study provides important historical and cultural readings of aspects of Empire and its aftermath in the Caribbean. Hulme takes a cultural studies perspective on Rhys and related writers, exploring a number of related questions which he combines into what he calls the "touchstone" phrase, "visiting the Caribs". This is a companion volume to the anthology edited by Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead, *Wild Majesty* (1992). The anthology includes texts by Frederick Ober, Henry Hesketh Bell, Douglas Taylor, Jean Rhys and Patrick Leigh Fermor which become the foci of chapters in this new book, as Hulme explores succeeding phases of visits to the Caribs by outsiders, from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, who then wrote about them. It is all very relevant for any Rhys scholar because the book offers a series of Dominican frames of reference for Rhys's own piecemeal hints and longer portraits of the Caribs, which as Hulme argues persuasively, add up to a sustained, if often guarded, engagement with their role in Dominica as she read it. The chapter on Hesketh Bell contains a reference to *Voyage*, and is particularly good on the context of Bell's texts about obeah and the Caribs. Hulme is an excellent

cultural detective, mapping the ways in which outsiders engaged with the idea of the Caribs and wrote *about* them in the context of imperialism's gaze.

In his chapter on Rhys, Hulme remarks that her attitude to the Caribs is different from that of many other visitors, most especially because she was a Dominican. He engages in speculation about the reason for Antoinette's indirectness about the history of Massacre, the village in Dominica which figures in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the place where Thomas "Indian" Warner was killed along with his Carib followers by a force led by his younger English half-brother Philip. Did Antoinette not want her husband to know the story of the violence between half-siblings? Did this have a parallel with the story of Daniel and Antoinette? Is this why Daniel tells Antoinette's husband he is called Esau, (the first son)? Hulme points out that Antoinette uses the Carib name "ajoupa" for the summer house at Granbois. Then he explores the interconnecting references to the Caribs in Rhys's other texts, ("Temps Perdi", *Voyage in the Dark*, "The Imperial Road", *Wide Sargasso Sea*). Again speculating on possible connections between *Voyage* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (Hulme acknowledges that this is courting the literary critic's warning that the text is what it is and nothing more), he asks whether Mailotte Boyd, mentioned in *Voyage in the Dark*, is Daniel Cosway's mother; (his father would be Antoinette's father), and whether Tia is half-sister to Daniel (Mailotte being the name of Christophine's friend). This seems to me by far least important of the connections Hulme explores between Rhys and the Caribs in Dominica, because it adds nothing of importance to the texture of the novels, (Rhys understood that a hint is often more useful than a statement, and Hulme's reading, focused so much on the Caribs, sometimes loses sight of the delicacy of Rhys's lean fictions and the effect of her refusal to include definitive information about many characters and details of plot). But that slight reservation aside, this chapter is a really useful frame for thinking about the complexity of Rhys's cultural identity.

Elaine Savory

Alexis Lykiard *Jean Rhys Revisited* Exeter, Devon: Stride Publications, 2000.

Lykiard is a prolific writer, with nine novels, a dozen volumes of poetry, four major translations and a number of edited books to his credit. This memoir, (and arguably social history, biography, autobiography and literary criticism), of the writing life and Jean Rhys comes with a comment from Rhys's editor, friend and long-time literary executor, Francis Wyndham, on the cover, "a most distinguished and original and rewarding work". Lykiard knew Rhys for ten years, (1969-1979). They met when he was a young writer of 29, and she was 79, but their common bond as writers made the age difference disappear, Lykiard says, (it is also very clear from other accounts, such as Jan van Hours' "The Hole in the Curtain" (in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. Frickey), that Rhys in old age loved the admiration and attention of young male writers. She employed David Plante as helper in compiling *Smile Please* (posthumously published in 1979). But Lykiard, Greek-born, had something extra to offer as common experience with Rhys: a sense of being an outsider in England, with a writing name for his new culture which separated him from the person he had been in childhood.

Lykiard's strategy in this uneven book is to interweave his own journey as a struggling writer with his assessments of Rhys, as artist, as quirky woman, as his friend. He is protective, rightly attacking the opportunism of David Plante's outrageous portrait of Rhys in *Difficult Women*, "distinctly peevisish, mainly unpleasant...mean, cruel if clever travesty..." (pp 32-3.) He cites a fictionalized version of Rhys in the "otherwise metreticious novel" *Unrepentant Women*, by Judith Burnley, as one he recognized: "enormous eyes, a pale if somewhat watery blue", with something about the set of them and the way she sometimes looked, "which made me wonder if she had mixed blood?" (p. 43). Such questions would have given Rhys a rueful smile, he believes. The book is often garrulous and sometimes awkward in its emotional tone, as well as at times tedious in its insistence on the closeness of the relationship between Lykiard and Rhys, and there are places where

the version Lykiard gives of something seems very out of order, (as when he suggests that there were only positives in the relationship with Ford Madox Ford). But its real interest lies in the way Rhys influenced and befriended Lykiard to the point that he cannot tell his own story without telling hers. He includes a number of important photographs of Rhys and others, and in his sustained enthusiasm for her, testifies against the portrait which has haunted so many fictional and biographical vignettes of Rhys, from Ford on, as difficult, tempestuous, unpredictable and unable to sustain friendship long. He can fall victim to the temptation of telling tales, as in the description of his first sight of her, ("my heroine, my cynosure"), "an old woman, frail and hunched...moving at utmost slowness...She had the rickety gait of some pantomime crone, half-hobbling, half-reeling...One hand held a carrier bag bulging with empty bottles, the other gripped a walking stick." (p. 228). But in the end he does remember the strange alchemy of writing which makes the ordinary body a writer inhabits unnecessary in relation to the text, and that salvages this book from the trivial and commonplace.

Caroline Rody *The Daughter's Return: African -American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

This thematic study of "a romance...of a returning daughter and a figure I call the mother of history" (3), includes a chapter on Rhys, in which Rody reads *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the context of what she configures as a "horizontality" of a "trans-ethnic" connection between women writers of the African diaspora. It is very difficult at this point to come up with an original textual reading of this novel, given the intense scrutiny it has received over the past almost forty years since its appearance in 1966, and Rody does not quite manage anything new, though her reading is sclarly and sensitive. This kind of feminist thematic study always runs the risk of essentialising and even being reductive, but Rody's work is even so a useful beginning for those who want to think about Rhys's place in the Caribbean women writer canon. I wished that she had included Brathwaite's construction of Rhys's Antoinette as Miranda in her mention of *The Tempest* in the context of postcolonial revisionings

of European canonical texts. But her side about Rhys in another chapter is really interesting, as when she suggests (p 193) that Antoinette/Bertha is perhaps "the "ancestor", in the sense of the chronology of authors, not characters, "not only of Cliff's Clare Savage, but also of Conde's Tituba."