

Cristina-Georgiana Voicu, *Exploring Cultural Identities in Jean Rhys' Fiction*, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, 2014.

Website: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/246960?format=G>

Jean Rhys is an author of intense interest and in *Exploring Cultural Identities in Jean Rhys' Fiction*, Cristina-Georgiana Voicu examines her oeuvre from a rigorous perspective grounded in contemporary critical theory. Jean Rhys (1890, island of Dominica – 1979, Exeter, United Kingdom), the offspring of a Welsh doctor and a third generation creole mother, had a tumultuous life marked by three mercurial marriages, periods of alcoholism, hand-to-mouth poverty, prostitution, and rage. Thought to be dead but merely living in obscurity, she was rediscovered when her masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was published in 1966. She was hailed as one of the finest and most original writers of the century.

Voicu applies critical concepts that embrace both the life and texts of Jean Rhys and analyze how both are extraordinarily interrelated. These include creolization, doubling, hybridity, alterity, colonialism, and fractal identities among others. Voicu posits that in order to understand the Caribbean self it is important to analyze Creolization between the Caribbean and Europe. "It is quite clear that the ambivalence of cultural identity in Rhys' novels is to be found in the cultural Creolization occurring among overlapping and conflicting Caribbean boundaries, histories and identities." She makes effective use of Seymour Chapman's diagram of narrative structure (*Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978) which begins with the real author and then the implied author and after a series of analytic steps emerges with the implied audience and finally the real audience. In the case of more conventional writers both the author and the fictional persona might be thought of as experiencing exile and return from exile. Voicu cogently describes how Rhys' fiction and reality both expose a homelessness existing between culture, between histories. Belonging nowhere. Voicu demonstrates that in the novels she analyzes the fractal identities are "broken, irregular, fragmented, grainy, ramified, strange, tangled, wrinkled." Voicu uses the concept of hybridity cogently both as the expression of simultaneous cultural identities and as the existential anxiety that arises from estrangement. For Voicu both Rhys' life and fiction contain "in nuce the idea of mixture, combination, fusion, mélange. The metaphor of hybridity, in which cultures are seen as 'floating together,' leads to the existence of a 'fluid identity.'" Moreover, Voicu analyzes the "relationship between cultural hybridity and alterity: the creation of a transcultural diasporic hybridity ('shifting homeland' and 'travelling identities'), from within the 'contact zone,' produced by the colonizing process... It is a view that deals with borders, the overlaps, and the in-between places, between two or

Symposion

more cultures." For the epigraph of her scholarly analysis she selects the perfect quote: "There is always the other side, always." — Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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