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## THE UNPAINTED PASTEL PORTRAIT

Elaine Campbell

The issue of *Kunapipi* published shortly after Jean Rhys's death and dedicated to her memory (volume one, number two, 1979) contains an account of my visit to Jean's cottage in Cheritan Fitzpaine during the autumn before her death. Entitled "From Dominica to Devonshire," the essay relates Jean's great interest in my descriptions of Dominica, which I had recently visited from my home in Tortola. The essay also recounts some of the other topics of our conversation, and it discusses aspects of Jean's life in Devonshire that influenced her writing. In the essay, however, I conscientiously avoided describing Jean herself because I felt that such a description was inappropriate material to be addressed by a literary critic.

About that time, there had appeared a spate of magazine and journal articles about Jean, almost all of which devoted space to descriptions of Jean's clothing, her cosmetics, or her physical condition. There seemed to be an almost predictable quality about these interview reports. It was as if Jean's writing were too ephemeral to provide sufficient subject matter for a sustained literary analysis, as if Jean's appearance were introduced to round out the essay.

That I did not describe how Jean appeared on the October afternoon of my visit is not to say that I wasn't tempted to do so. I wrote two or three paragraphs in an attempt to capture the air she projected. I scratched them out for the reason already stated, but thought that I'd like some day to record some of my impressions. And I decided then that I would title my impressions "The Unpainted Pastel Portrait."

Why "pastel"? Because "pastel" somehow conveys the medium in which Jean was never painted and in which she should have been painted. With the frivolity of the makeup-and-wig articles on one hand and the acerbity of the Rhys-as-modernist appraisals on the other, there appeared to be no middle ground. Pastel was the medium that was overlooked in her renditions. What prevailed were stark black and white pen-and-ink word sketches of her as a modernist or the rather lurid red and green oil word paintings of her as a gothic novelist.

Perhaps the old age in which I discovered Jean explained my perception of her as the subject of a portrait done in pastels. And perhaps the color value of pastel was suggested by the afternoon light in her living room or by the pale turquoise cotton dress that she was wearing. That the turquoise dress topped a pastel multi-colored flowered underdress, creating a very old West Indian effect, did not escape my notice. But perhaps that effect would only be noted by someone drenched in West Indian culture.

Photography, not pen and ink or oils or pastels, was the medium that we talked about during my visit, and, as I said in that earlier essay, Jean was distressed by recent photographs of her. She expressed her special dismay over the black and white photograph on the dustjacket of *Sleep It Off, Lady*, the picture of her featuring a combative pose and "that frightful hat." I resolved at that moment that if I ever wrote Jean's biography, I would hire an artist to draw a beautiful chalky picture of her with her marcel-waved white hair (I didn't know, nor would I have cared, that it was a wig) and her pretty pale turquoise and flowered dresses.

Cheriton Fitzpaine,  
Devon.

21st August, 1978.

Dear Mrs. Campbell,

To get to this place you need a ticket from Paddington station to Exeter. At Exeter station you can get a taxi that will bring you here. There are signposts along the road in case the driver doesn't know the way to Cheriton Fitzpaine.

Arrived at Cheriton Fitzpaine, with your back to The Half Moon pub go straight along and you will come to my bungalow, there is a large rather shabby brown caravan outside.

I'll be very pleased if you can come and please tell your Becky that I didn't mean to be taken quite so seriously.

I've got a chaise longue now and I recline on it, uncomfortable but regal.

Yours sincerely,

John R. Fitzpaine

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Seated on her chaise (she was arranged in advance of my entering the cottage so that I wouldn't witness her awkward movement from one room to another), she denied the hurt of a misshapen body - the legacy of her old age. How dreadful for one who all her life had so loved chic people, beautiful clothing, good wine, and sophisticated cities, for one who had been loved by many men for her own beauty, to be reduced to a deformed old woman. But how valiantly she struggled against that deformity with her weapons of mascara, wig, and concealing dresses. She undoubtedly would have liked to have been one of those lean old women with regal upright posture. But the ironies of old age were of epic proportions to her.

I hadn't realized how very frail she was. The youthful tone of her notes to me belied any notion of deformity. I read her plea for a change of scene, her references to illness as part of the posture of helplessness she projected throughout her fiction. The reality of her helplessness was a shock.

I had come with a mission - two, really. One was to request that Jean write a foreword for the papercover reprint of Phyllis Allfrey's West Indian novel *The Orchid House*. The other was to encourage Jean to undertake a new West Indian novel. My first mission had a chance of success. Jean expressed genuine interest in the project and she started the motions: requesting a copy of *The Orchid House* to reread, writing a letter to Phyllis.

But the second mission was doomed. I realized that as soon as I saw how frail Jean had become. There wasn't sufficient stamina left for undertaking a new novel. Nevertheless, I broached the subject: "Now that your autobiography is finished, do write a West Indian novel." I was thinking, of course, about something as wonderful as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She replied, rather abruptly, "I've already done so." She was also thinking about *Wide Sargasso Sea*. And she too recognized that there was neither time nor strength left for another West Indian novel. That recognition, surely, was even more painful than the burden of a wretched body.

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JEAN RHYS: L'AUTO-CENSURE CREATRICE  
ANALYSE DES VERSIONS SUCCESSIVES DE LA NOUVELLE "RAPUNZEL, RAPUNZEL"

Delphine Chartier

L'écrivain de la sensibilité et non de l'abstrait qu'est Jean Rhys a trop souvent, de ce fait même, vu ses oeuvres perçues par l'ensemble de la critique sur le mode primaire de la confession simple et du lyrisme douloureux. Or, s'il est vrai que la romancière part en effet de l'expérience personnelle et de l'observation du moi dans le processus créatif - elle qui confiait à Hannah Carter, "If you want to write the truth, you *must* write about yourself. It must go out from yourself. I don't see what else you can do. I am the only real truth I know,"<sup>1</sup> - il n'en reste pas moins que son souci majeur réside en la mise en forme du vécu, d'un vécu anarchique dépourvu de structures: "I like shape very much - and again a novel has to have shape, and life doesn't have any." Comment parvient-elle donc à se détacher de ce vécu pour passer du registre de l'autobiographique brut à celui de la création littéraire formalisée, tel est l'objet de cette étude.

Nous avons, pour éclairer cette modification, tenté d'étudier les transformations d'une nouvelle en cours d'élaboration dont restent plusieurs