WEEK-END IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE: JEAN RHYS, ADRIAN ALLINSON AND "TILL SEPTEMBER PETRONELLA"

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When "Till September Petronella" was first published in 1960 in the London Magazine Jean Rhys wrote to her daughter: "You will not like the story, I fear, it's an old one -- though not as I've dated it 1914 -- and not autobiography."¹

This of course confronts a central question about her work. It has always been clear that she was a highly autobiographical writer, perhaps, as Gabriele Annan wrote, "one of the most autobiographical novelists there has ever been."² "I have always used myself as subject and I was as truthful as I could be," she said once;³ and many times: "If you want to write the truth you must write about yourself ... I am the only real truth I know."⁴ As a result there has always been a strong tendency to identify her with her heroines, and to think of their combined careers as the life story of Jean Rhys. There is a good deal of justification for this, and it can be illuminating. Yet of course it cannot be exactly and easily right. Even what is intended as autobiography is chosen and shaped; Jean intended fiction, and her sense of form was paramount.⁵ And the main task of her life, to which she gave all her energy and most of her time, was writing: yet none of her heroines are writers. So of course her heroines are not herself, and their stories are not autobiography but fiction. And she always said that too.⁶

Now I think there is an answer to this dilemma. Part of it is complicated, because it has to do with her feelings about herself as a writer. These were too complicated to write about; so she didn't, and nor will I here. But the other part is quite simple. I think that all the central experiences around which Jean built her novels and stories were her own, and that she described them in her fiction as accurately as she could. I think that was the point of writing fiction for her, both its personal psychological point and its larger artistic point -- to answer Antoinette's question in Wide Sargasso Sea: "Such terrible things happen. Why? Why?" Jean's "fiction is about the terrible things that happened to her: rejection and hatred; imprisonment, madness and psychic death. To find out the truth about why they happened she had to be absolutely honest about them; so she tried to be.

Then around these experiences she constructed a shape: cutting everything that didn't "fit"; adding or changing minor characters, events or dialogue; inventing a beginning and an end, because of course the things that happen in life have no clear beginning or ending. "When you write about them, you have to give them a beginning, a middle, and an end," she said. "To give life shape -- that is what a writer does. That is what is difficult."⁷

That this was Jean's method of composition, and how it gave her fiction its terrifying character, can be explored to varying degrees in all her novels and stories. We know more of the autobiographical events from which some grew than others. Of the novels, it is Quartet about whose precipitating events we have the most independent information.⁸ Of the stories, it is "Petronella": for the events of that story were recorded by another participant, the painter Adrian Allinson, in his (unpublished) autobiography, Painter's Pilgrimage.⁹

Jean often spoke of having known Allinson and modelled for him,¹⁰ "He was exactly of my age; he'd studied at the Slade under Tonks and Steer, and would become a widely exhibited painter (not as famous today as contemporaries like Stanley Spencer, but with a solid growing reputation). "Petronella" was based on a holiday Jean spent with him and his friend Philip Heseltine, who became the composer Peter Warlock. Heseltine's fascinating and contradictory personality impressed many writers of the 'twenties and 'thirties.
Lawrence caricatured him as Halliday in *Women in Love*; Aldous Huxley put him into two novels, *Point Counter Point* (as Spandrell) and *Antic Hay* (dividing him between Gumbril and Coleman); Anthony Powell drew on him for Macintick in *A Dance to the Music of Time*; and Robertson Davies drew him in detail as Giles Reveistoke in *A Mixture of Fraities*. But Jean's portrait of him as Julian Oakes in "Petronella" was the earliest, for that summer holiday took place in 1915, when she and Allinson were 25, Heseltine not quite 21.

Now Jean told her friends from the beginning that "Julian Oakes" was based on Heseltine, "Andy Marston" on Allinson. But Chapter 21 of *Painter's Pilgrimage* tells us much more.

Allinson says that it was at a Chelsea studio party that he'd met "Ella, a fair young Englishwoman born in the West Indies." (Jean's real first name was Ella; she hated her middle name, Gwen, which her family had used, and called herself Ella until she became Jean Rhys). He was "instantly struck" by her "tender loveliness," and in May he began a painting of her "among the blossoming but soil-laden trees of Manchester Square." ("My dear Petronella," Marston's voice says in Jean's story, "I have an entirely new idea of you. I'm going to paint you out in the opulent square.") Then Philip Heseltine invited him to Gloucestershire, where Heseltine and his fiancée "Puma" Channing had taken a small bungalow outside Cheltenham. Allinson, "thinking to find there the ideal setting in which to paint Ella," asked her to join him.

In "Till September Petronella" the central experience is the scene in which Julian, whom Petronella secretly desires, spits out rejection and hate at her like bile. "Can't you see she's fifth-rate?" he sneers at Marston. And to Petronella herself:

"You ghastly cross between a barmaid and a chorus-girl," he said; "You female spider," he said; "You've been laughing at him for weeks," he said, "jeering at him, sneering at him. Stopping him from working ... And then when I try to get him away from you, of course you follow him down here ..."

It is frightening and appalling. The mask of civilization has slipped, as it does from Uncle Bo's face in *Voyage in the Dark*, to reveal the cruel fangs beneath. It is an event so characteristic of Jean Rhys's world that it almost feels like a primeval myth, in which all the rejecting men - Walter, Heidler, Stephan, Mackenzie - are combined into one. Philip Heseltine was a strange and tormented man, often driven by his own black depressions to be capricious and cruel. But in the summer of 1915 he was still so young. Could any of this have happened?

Chapter 21 of *Painter's Pilgrimage* proves that it did. In it Adrian Allinson appears almost comically decent and bewitched; he gives few details, he condemns no one and explains nothing. But he couldn't forget the whole episode. Soon after he lost touch with both "Ella" and Heseltine: but a quarter of a century later it was still so powerfully with him that he gave it four pages of his autobiography. This is the core of what he says (with my emphases):

... it was definitely a case of "love in a cottage" for Philip and "Puma." But for me ... and Ella ... not so good. I had not taken the precaution of previously introducing her to my two friends, but had assumed that her beauty would serve as passport and that in most other respects she would "fit."

Alas and alack, Philip and "Puma" took so instantaneously and violent an aversion to Ella that they could not be even decently civil to the unoffending girl. I ought, of course, to have taken her back to London immediately but, obsessed with the thought of my picture, I hoped that the situation would improve.
The ensuing weeks were sheer hell ... Philip and "Puma" refused point blank even to eat in the same room with Ella ... Philip Heseltine (and "Puma" Channing) openly hated Jean; she didn't invent it. Perhaps there was a series of small explosions instead of one large one. But the "central experience," the hatred and humiliation suffered by the heroine, really happened to Jean.

Now, of course, the even more interesting question is what she did with it, to make it into her sharp and dangerous story. First, she sets it between passages of echoing emptiness and despair. The opening section sketches in an existence so lonely and precarious it is barely there, a "grey nightmare" like the streets Petronella endlessly walks. And the end, in which she lets herself be picked up by a chirpy, wary young man, "tastes of nothing, my dear ... nothing ...." No one helps her, and everyone abandons her: like the man in the audience when once (she remembers) she had her chance to take part in a play, but forgot her vital, meaningless line.

Next, Jean takes her central experience and tightens it like a loaded spring inside this seemingly empty object. She narrows the point of hate down to "the man, the male, the important person, the only person who matters" (to use words she gives Lois in Quartet). Frankie, Julian's girlfriend, betrays Petronella to Julian and eggs him on, but lets him attack Petronella alone. Instead, Jean uses Frankie to echo and express her own view of the world: that men hate women, but that women are even worse than men. These ideas obsessed her, and she often gave them to minor characters as well as to her heroines. In this way she made her meaning pervasive and inescapable, like a painter using a single colour, or a composer repeating the same melancholy or threatening chord.

These, then, are the main additions and inventions with which Jean moulded her experience into the new shape of her story: the beginning and ending; the character (or at least part of it) of the other girl. But adding and inventing were always the least of her techniques. Her chief technique was always the opposite one: cutting.

More and more, as she drove herself towards self-knowledge, I think she came to fear that the worst was true: that it was her fault; that cruelty and evil were also in her, and made people hate her. She wanted both to face this truth and to deny it: this was, I believe the tension which drove her both to write and to drink. She wrote to remember that evil was in her too; she drank to forget it. Even in her writing she could not always accept it. Sometimes even there she fell back on accusation of others, and special pleading for herself. But not often. Usually she chose a compromise - which was also her most consummate and characteristic literary technique: cutting down the brutal facts to a core of truth; and then not telling but merely suggesting.

Painter's Pilgrimage helps us to see how she cuts the truth, yet so powerfully suggests it, in "Till September Petronella." So do two earlier versions of the story. One is in a notebook in the Jean Rhys collection at the University of Tulsa; the other is in Triple Sec, the very early diary/novel through which Jean's Paris friend Pearl Adam introduced her to Ford Madox Ford. Like Painter's Pilgrimage, both of these are unpublished; Triple Sec, which Jean claimed was rewritten by Mrs. Adam, has been kept by her executor but seen only by her closest circle, according to her wish. But now we can put these three manuscripts together - two of them never seen before by students of Jean Rhys: and a picture emerges of her method of composition that is clearer than any we have been able to have before.

First, she made self-defensive cuts: she left out the worst things she knew she should not have done.

Thus, in "Petronella" the heroine leaves as soon as the terrible scene with Julian is over. This was the dignified and sensible thing to do, and Jean knew it. But often she should not bring herself to do the dignified and sensible thing, especially if it meant...
leaving the company of people - even unwelcoming people - for the horror of solitude.33
So it was now.

"If Ella had been a professional model," Allinson wrote, "and our relationship on a purely business footing, no doubt her wounded feelings could have been salved with cash down and a ticket back to London. But as my guest she rightly insisted - with a streak of hard determination oddly at variance with her outer frailty - on taking full advantage of my offer of a holiday in the country, thus leaving me painfully suspended between conflicting loyalties ..."34

To Jean it probably felt more like desperation than determination. But she knew it was "hard," and also undignified. Allinson suggests that she stayed on, despite the conflict and tension, for at least two weeks.35 In her first account of these events, in Triple Sec, Jean cut this down to days;36 in the final version of "Petronella" she omitted it altogether.

The second cut is even more revealing. The real event happened in 1915, when the war had already been raging for a year: but Jean set her story in the summer of 1914. "July 28th, 1914" is of course a haunting, evocative date, with just the atmosphere of threatening death and destruction she wanted to convey. But she had another reason for choosing it too. Allinson and Heseltine were both conscientious objectors, and had also been declared medically unfit for active service.37 That is how they came to be civilians, on holiday in Gloucestershire, in 1915. Changing the year to 1914 allowed Jean to evoke the idea of war without having to offer this explanation. And that I think she was reluctant to do, because it was too close to the shameful thing she had done.

In Triple Sec the climactic quarrel begins as it does in the final version of "Petronella," with Forrester (as the Heseltine character was first called) accusing the heroine of making an artist suffer, of being cold and mercenary. But the Allinson character does not intervene and accuse Forrester of jealousy. He does not intervene at all; and the heroine is angry. Suddenly she speaks herself. "I find you both ridiculous," she says, "why aren't you at the war anyway?"38 (In the Tulsa notebook, she speaks even more harshly: "If you were a man you wouldn't be here you'd be fighting."39

Immediately she feels that this was "an indefensible thing to say."40 And of course it was. Allinson and Heseltine suffered a great deal of persecution for their refusal to fight; indeed they'd taken this holiday to get away from the "war fever" of London.41 But it is too late; the words have been spoken. Forrester goes white with rage and soon stalks out, taking his girlfriend with him.

Perhaps the "jealousy" quarrel took place as well; Allinson doesn't report it, but that could simply be because he was too gallant. But we know from him that something like this quarrel did. "Ella," he says, "as a Colonial was violently patriotic and pro-war"; and he lists this as one reason for the breakdown in her relationship with Philip and \( Puma.\)42

Now so far Jean's cutting of the facts has achieved an important artistic effect - the creation of a sympathetic heroine - but at the expense of the whole truth, and not in its service. If that were all she had done, her writing would not have "earned death" for her, as she hoped it would.43 But it was not all. She did also bravely and truthfully explore her own sins in her heroines. Here too she cut, here too she lied; but yet she told the truth. And this combination of evasion and honesty, of cowardice and courage, produced the inimitable atmosphere of a Jean Rhys story: the subtlety which states nothing but implies everything; the shiver of horror at something concealed just below the surface; and the mysterious sense of danger and excitement, which comes not so much from what is in the story as from the writer's terror while writing it, because it secretly offers her up to what she fears most, judgement and rejection.
In "Petronella" Jean subtly but steadily explores two of her own sins: self-obsession and cruelty. Adrian Allinson describes the former in Ella in a way which friends of Jean’s old age will recognize, although she was only 25:

“Ella’s conception of a nice holiday was to spend hours before a mirror combing out her lovely hair and playing with a make-up box filled with a variety of unguents, powders and lipsticks – a narcissistic indulgence with which I had all too little patience.”

Now Jean does not ascribe this habit to Petronella, but she conveys her heroine’s self-involvement just the same. The way she chooses once again satisfies both her psychology and her artistry. She puts Petronella’s narcissism into a thought rather than an act: which both leaves her passive, and conveys the truth more subtly than the reality would have done. It happens during a conversation about the opera. Julian is whistling some music, and Petronella asks what it is. When Frankie answers “in a patronizing voice,” Petronella withdraws into narcissistic fantasy:

I had never been to any opera. All the same, I could imagine myself in a box, wearing a moonlight-blue dress and silver shoes, and when the lights went up everybody asking, “Who’s that lovely girl in that box?” But it must happen quickly or it will be too late...

Narcissism, however, is a relatively minor sin, and Jean only shows it this once. The main sin of Ella’s which she explores in Petronella is the other one: cruelty.

It is clear from Allinson’s account that Jean was at the very least hard to him. Painter’s Pilgrimage Ella is more in control and more exploitative than Allinson from the start. “She agreed to come,” he wrote, “but she left me in no doubt as to the purely platonic attitude I should continue to observe even at such close quarters.” At first he was only “enamoured of her beauty,” and agreed; but very soon “and in spite of her manifold drawbacks as a companion, I’m hanged if I did not fall in love with her.”

And now Ella took advantage of her power. In one of their arguments about the war she “went so far as to offer to become my mistress on condition that I ‘did my bit’ for King and Country.” Allinson was dark, ascetic, attractive to many women; but evidently not to Jean. In Triple Sec she describes a firm sexual rejection. (She calls her hero Suzy and the Allinson character Hebertson, but keeps Allinson’s and Hesseltine’s real Christian names, Adrian and “Phil.”)

That night Hebertson came into my room.
He said nothing, but breathed extremely hard and gazed at me.
I said at last, “Adrian dear, I love it here. Good night. I’m so tired.”
He said, “Oh Suzy” – And I, firmly: “Good night.”

Although Allinson was really robust and athletic, an accomplished skier and mountaineer, he suffered from a chronic gastric weakness (the reason for his mild unfitness). In Triple Sec Hebertson tells his friends “quite gravely” that “emotion always affected his stomach” – and Allinson himself wrote that it did, disastrous holiday: “The strain imposed by this emotional upheaval reduced me to a bad attack of gastritis.” Perhaps Suzy’s most heartless moment in her account of the events of “Petronella” is her reflection when at last Hebertson left the room: “He went off in such a hurry that I [wondered] before I slept if extreme emotion had the usual effect.”

Now once again Jean removes from Petronella the harsher treatment Ella gave Allinson, and “Suzy” gave “Hebertson.” But in her subtle, glancing way she conveys it all. Thus she removes from the bedroom scene the heavy breathing, the firm denial...
heartless joke; but quite enough is left.

"Are you tired?" Marston asked.
I was looking out of the bedroom window at some sheep feeding in
the field where the elm trees grew.
His mouth drooped, disappointed.

Frankie says, "You're staving Marston off, aren't you?", and when Marston quotes
Verlaine, Julian says "'Sans amour' is right," and stares at Petronella. Then Marston
recites again: "'But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet, Though we prayed you, Paid
you, brayed you in a mortar - for you could not, sweet'..."

It is very clear that Petronella is rejecting Marston. There is nothing wrong in
that, of course, though it does shed new light on the idea that it is always and only the
heroine who is rejected. But Jean goes further. She draws Marston as weak and sexually
vulnerable - and indeed it is clear from _Painter's Pilgrimage_ that as a young man,
especially during the war, Allinson felt physically odd, "a freak." Yet she makes it
clear that Petronella's rejection of him is careless and cruel. When he puts on "black
silk pyjamas, with a pattern of red and green dragons," his "sad face look[s]
extraordinary above this get-up" - and she and Frankie laugh at him. Petronella doesn't
say, as Julian meanly tells Marston, "that the only reason she has anything to do with you
is because she wants money," but she does say - and again immediately regrets it - that
"He makes me go cold." And when Marston abjectly apologises to an angry farmer,
Petronella hardly talks to him all the way home "because I was hating him."

But worst of all, of course, is an element Jean introduced into the final version of
the story, which neither _Painter's Pilgrimage_ nor her own earlier versions mentioned:
Petronella's desire for Marston's friend instead. Again no on would blame her for her
feeling; but again Jean is mercilessly clear about her behaviour. For Petronella allows
her preference to show: not to Julian himself, but to poor, sensitive, lovelorn Marston.
Already when she steps off the train she "looked along the platform, but Julian had not
come to meet me. There was only Marston..." She lets Marston kiss her only once, and
even then betrays him for Julian. Jean describes this in her inimitably simple,
terrifying way:

Julian lay on the sofa and I was looking at his face and hair when
Marston put his arms round me and kissed me. But I watched Julian and
listened to him whistling ...

That's all: she doesn't excuse or condemn, she merely describes her heroine. But
surely Petronella's behaviour is shocking: she absentely abandons her body to her eager,
awkward lover, while her eyes and ears devour his handsomer, wickeder, more powerful
friend.

Jean now dramatizes the destructiveness of this illicit attraction: she hints that
Julian secretly returns Petronella's desire, and places this, with great precision, at the
story's most dangerous peak - or abyss - of violence.

"Jealousy?" Julian said. "Jealousy!" He was unrecognizable. His
beautiful eyes were little, mean pits and you looked down them into
nothingness.
"Jealous of what?" he shrieked ...

Once again Jean merely drops this in, and doesn't draw it out in any way. But it is
there, together with the truth it confirms: Petronella is the powerful one, the sexually
attractive and sexually selfish one, in her relationship with Marston, just as much as
Julian is in his relationship with Frankie (whom he likes best, he jokes, under the
Jean calls out great pity for her heroine, with her empty life, her secret love, her battering by cruelty and contempt. But at the same time, through these brief, enigmatic, disturbing hints and suggestions, she conveys the other half of the truth as well: the half she would have liked to hide, even from herself, but which her honesty and her art drove her to reveal. It was very hard for her to do this - and so she did it only glancingly, and indirectly. But that way it had, in the end, a far more powerful effect than any spelt-out confession could have done.

"Petronella" is one of the best places in all Jean's work to study the methods and mechanics of this power. This is not only because of the almost unique opportunity to compare her fictional creation with someone else's non-fiction memory. It is also because the story is packed with examples of all her most characteristic techniques. There is not only the leaving-out and the leaving-to-suggestion which have already been explored. There is also another technique of "hiding" and indirectness, which is quintessentially - perhaps uniquely - Jean Rhys's, and of which in the forty pages of "Petronella" there are something like a half a dozen examples.

I've mentioned one already: Marston's alluding to Petronella's rejection only indirectly - not in his own voice, in his own words, but by quoting the poem "But for loving, why, you would not. Sweet ..." Jean often conveys individual truths through poems, songs and paintings within her work, just as she conveyed the larger truth through her own art as a whole. So far, of course, though she does it supremely well, she is doing nothing new. But she doesn't only convey themes and ideas this way: she also conveys feelings and actions indirectly through imagery, and especially through images of art. And that is unusual, and contributes to the special feeling of tension in her fiction: the tension between concealment and openness, cowardice and courage, weakness and strength.

Thus here, for instance, the slightly comic pathos of Marston's rejected love for Petronella is summed up not just in the poem he quotes, with its lapse into absurdity, but in the picture which hangs at the entrance to his studio: "The Apotheosis of Lust." "I have to laugh when I think of that, for some reason," says Frankie. But most importantly, of course, Petronella's own feelings are confined to the same indirect, imaged expression. She never tells Julian of her love, or later of her anger and hate. Instead she writes him a love letter - in the Tulsa notebook version of the story, a love poem - which she hides and never sends. Then after their terrible quarrel she tears it into four pieces, spits on each piece, and flushes them down the lavatory ... She does not act openly; her love and her hate get no further outside her own head than onto a piece of paper. Jean does not even tell us directly what her heroine's feelings are. We only see the note she writes: "I love Julian." And its second line - "Julian, I kissed you once but you didn't know" - connects Petronella's love of Julian to a memory which Jean places beside the note, but otherwise leaves enigmatic and unexplained:

Once, left alone in a very ornate studio, I went up to a plaster cast - the head of a man, one of those Greek heads - and kissed it, because it was so beautiful. Its mouth felt warm, not cold. It was smiling. When I kissed it the room went dead silent and I was frightened.

That's all. She hasn't told us anything - just a seemingly random memory, in itself mysterious. Yet now we know how Petronella feels about Julian: she wants to kiss him because he is beautiful, but she is also afraid of him. There is something frightening about him, which reminds her of the statue ... In Wide Sargasso Sea Rochester reads the definition of a "zombi": "A zombi is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead." Petronella has felt the dead statue to be living; now, I think, she feels the living Julian to be dead. It's strange, and disturbing, and it gives the story its second characteristic Jean Rhys feeling - the menace of a different, hostile reality, just under the surface of people and things. It is also, in fact, extraordinarily accurate. Philip Heseltine's biographer describes him at just this
as "resembling curiously certain archaic Greek statues ..."\(^3\) And he was a disturbed and disturbing personality\(^4\) - a gentle, soft and diffident boy who assumed as he grew older an exaggerated hardness, a wildly drinking and wenching persona. This remaking of himself dislocated him, and made him prey to fits of depression, anger and cruelty. He experimented, too, with black magic; the name he took, "Warlock," means a male witch.

Later everyone felt something sinister and zombi-like about him.\(^5\) In 1915 - perhaps because she was trying to make herself hard too - Jean was being almost clairvoyant.

There are other examples of Petronella's feelings reaching us only through images. Her public humiliation by Julian has hurt her unimaginably: her hurt rises from every line of the story like mist, but she never mentions it, and never refers to Julian again. Instead she gives us two images. The first is of her own face in the mirror: she kisses it, in a sad attempt to give herself the love he denied her. But her breath makes her image cloud over, so that she almost disappears.\(^6\) She cannot, in other words, keep herself alive, visible, there. For that she needs someone else's love and approval: which is precisely what we have just seen her utterly fail to win.

Finally, Jean leaves Petronella, and us, with the image of another girl: the girl on the cover of the chocolate box, who should be as sweet as the chocolate beneath, but who has instead "a white, square, smug face that didn't go with her slanting eyes."\(^7\) Petronella leaves her on the train: "Somebody will find you, somebody will look after you, you rotten, sneering, stupid, tight-mouthed bitch," she thinks.\(^8\) Is the girl on the chocolate box the "respectable" woman whom people always look after, and who Jean and her heroines always felt was sneering at her? Or is she rather Petronella - and Jean - herself, or the part of her she would like to leave behind? For Jean too had slanting eyes: they were her most unusual and captivating feature. But she too could sneer. She had sneered, at both Allinson and Heseltine, for not fighting. That was why he hated and reviled her, instead of loving her, as surely she'd wanted him to. Of course she wished she could cut away the sneerer in her and leave it behind in the train; and of course she wanted to forget it had ever existed. It would be just like her - the part of her which remembered - to put this final truth in the story too; but to hide it inside a brief, secret, ambiguous image.

Jean Rhys knew everything about herself. She knew that she was not just a victim of other people's cruelty and rejection, but often cruel and rejecting herself. She couldn't admit this to her daughter - "not autobiography" - because she was too afraid she would not love her. She could not admit it to anyone, in her own voice, for the same reason. She could only admit it through a many-layered indirectness: in suggestion and imagery, embedded in fiction.

NOTES


5This was noted from the very beginning of her career - "What struck me ... was [her] singular instinct for form," said Ford Madox Ford - to the end: "She imagined a shape, and everything that fit into the shape she put in, everything that didn't she left out," said David Plante, who worked with her on Smile Please. (See Ford's Preface to The Left Bank, reprinted in Tigers Are Better-Looking, André Deutsch, London, 1968, p. 148; and Plante,
See for example "Every day is a new day," by Gini Stevens, Radio Times, 23-29 November 1974, p.6: "There is a distinction between what I write and the person I am," she says firmly. According to this article, what Jean especially disliked was that her heroines were seen as victims - and so she was seen as a victim too. She didn't like that, I will argue, because she knew it wasn't true. (See Note 8.)


From Elizabeth Vreeland, "Jean Rhys," Paris Review, 21, Fall 1979, p. 225. Diana Athill, in her Introduction to Smile Please, sums up this relationship between Jean Rhys's life and work admirably:

All her writing, she used to say, started out from something that had happened, and her first concern was to get it down as accurately as possible. But ... 'a novel has to have a shape, and life doesn't have any.'... Then she would be compelled to leave out things that had happened, or to put things in to increase this or diminish that ... With Jean Rhys the process never took her a great distance from the experience - indeed, truth to its essence was vital to the therapeutic function of the work as well as to its value to other people - but it took her far enough to leave booby traps for the unwary.

Smile Please, pp. 9-10.

Part of my main thesis here - that Jean Rhys knew her own evil very well - was also first suggested to me by Diana Athill, to whom I am very grateful for this insight, and many others. "Jean got furious when she was called a victim," Diana Athill told an interviewer (Ruth Gorb, in the Hampstead & Highgate Express, 9 November 1984, p. 15). "She knew she was exploiting people."


Acknowledgement is due to the Trustees of Mollie Mitchell Smith for permission to quote from the typescript.

Adrian Allinson (1890-1959) studied at the Slade under Tonks and Steer. He was a member of the New English Art Club and exhibited widely. He produced caricatures, stage designs, posters and sculptures as well as his main body of work in painting. He is less well-known than contemporaries such as Gertler, Nevinson and Stanley Spencer, but his style is individual, and his reputation now solid and growing. There have been two recent exhibitions of his work, one at the Fine Art Society, 19 November - 7 December, 1984, and the other at the Michael Parkin Gallery, in December 1986.
Painter's Pilgrimage is, as I have noted, unpublished. A copy of it, annotated by the novelist Dorothy Richardson, is lodged in the Dorothy Richardson Collection of the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa.


12 I.A. Copley, "Warlock in Novels," date and place of publication unknown.

13 Allison doesn't give the year, but it can be established that it was 1915 from Cecil Gray, A Memoir of Philip Heseltine (Cape, 1934), pp. 100-103.

14 Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 149.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.


20 See Gray, op. cit., e.g. pp. 92, 128, 233, 235.

21 Painter's Pilgrimage was written in 1941. There is no sign in it, incidentally, that Allison ever knew that "Ella" became Jean Rhys. "Till September Petronella" was published in the London Magazine in January 1960, eleven months after his death.

22 Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 150. My emphases.

23 Though there is some evidence to the contrary, in the first version of "Petronella" (in Jean Rhys's archive, held by her executor.) The early versions of Jean's fictions were usually "a record of facts," as she said about the first drafts of Quartet (in L'Affaire Ford, an unpublished account in her archive). In this first version of "Petronella" there is also only one major "explosion," or attack on the heroine, though its subject is different from that in the final version. See above, pages 6 and 8, and Note 66.


26 Quartet, Penguin, p. 64.


28 See, for example, the painter's story and the conversation between René and Sasha in Good Morning, Midnight (pp. 81 and 131-2 of the Penguin edition); and Germaine Sullivan's remarks in Voyage in the Dark, p. 70 (again in the Penguin edition). Frankie in "Till September Petronella" is altogether strikingly similar to Germaine: both are in love with cruel, smug, successful men, and afraid of rejection by their families; both express their fear and resentment through a sharp but general satire of Englishmen, who really (they say) dislike women (see Voyage in the Dark, p. 70, and "Till September Petronella," p. 25). Perhaps there was a real girl who was the model for both Germaine and Frankie - and perhaps she was "Puma" Channing. But their main ideas are certainly Jean's. In both
these relationships - Germaine and Vincent, Frankie and Julian - she made the real men, I believe, as she saw them, but made the girls essentially into vehicles for her own ideas.

Though even here her inventions are based on her own experience: "Frankie" on herself; the beginning and ending on surrounding events in her life. At her lowest moments of feeling rejected and despised, Jean, like her heroines, let herself be picked up by men, partly to punish herself, partly to exploit them in return.

See the "Ropemakers Diary" in Smile Please, p. 173, where she accuses herself of many mortal sins: "Pride, anger, lust, drunkenness??, despair, presumption (hubris), sloth, selfishness, vanity ..." Then she adds a list of venial sins:

- Spite
- Malice
- Envy
- Avarice
- Stupidity
- Caution
- Cruelty
- Gluttony

I cannot any longer accept this.
Do you mean that you are guiltless of the venial sins?
Well. Guiltless!

In the "Green Exercise Book," Item I:1, pp. 18-20.

This happened, for example, in 1926, when she stayed on in the South of France after a falling-out with her hostess; and probably in 1945, when she stayed with her brother and his wife after the death of her second husband. (See L'Affaire Ford, the unpublished account in her archive, p. 6, and her letter to Peggy Kirkaldy from her brother's home in October 1945: "They are terrified poor dears that I will sit down on them for good ..." [Letters, p. 39].) (There is a handwritten draft of L'Affaire Ford at the back of the "Green Exercise Book" in Tulsa.)

Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 151.

"The ensuing weeks were sheer hell" - Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 150. In "Till September to escape war fever, see Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 149 and Gray, p. 103.

Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 112: "Not incarceration but social ostracism was my lot."
The gutter press published pictures of Allinson, with captions "to the effect that this sort of exterior, though objectionable, was just permissible in peacetime; we were now in war" (Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 123). When he took his army medical exam, he relates, he shaved his beard and wore somber, ordinary clothes. But even naked he was asked by the medical officer, "Are you a poet?" Allinson said he was a painter; "Same thing, same thing," snapped the officer (Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 124). Concerning departure from London to escape war fever, see Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 149 and Gray, p. 103.

Painter's Pilgrimage, p. 151.

See the "Ropemakers Diary," Smile Please, p. 163.
Surely this really happened. In *Triple Sec* Jean wrote that he made "the sweetest truest sound" (p. 181) - and Philip-Heseltine was well-known as a wonderful whistler (see Gray, p. 64). He composed by whistling at the piano (see I.A. Copley, *The Music of Peter Warlock*, Dennis Dobson, 1979, p. 17).

He became a skiing champion and a mountaineer (see *Painter's Pilgrimage*, Chapters 29 and 30), and was already a great walker and motorcyclist. This didn't suit Jean, whose frailty and chronic fatigue were - fascinatingly - already as firmly fixed as her passion for make-up: "By way of enjoying the countryside, a gentle ten-minutes' totter down the lane seemed the limit to which her slender legs could carry her. My proposals of tough walks among the hills, bethes in the streams or jaunts further afield on my motor-cycle with her riding pillion, alike filled Ella with horror." (*Painter's Pilgrimage*, p. 151.)
people who didn't approve of her habits — as Allinson's own case proves.

68 Ibid., p. 23.
69 Ibid., p. 16.
70 In the "Green Exercise Book," Jean Rhys Collection, I:1, University of Tulsa, p. 20.
71 Tigers Are Better-Looking, p. 18.
72 Wide Sargasso Sea, p. 88.
73 Gray, p. 125.
75 See Gray, p. 256.
76 Tigers Are Better-Looking, pp. 32-33. The image of the mirror was a very common and important one for Jean. See for example Voyage in the Dark, p. 72, when on their brief holiday with Vincent and Germaine, Walter tells Anna he is about to go away: "I didn't say anything. I put my face nearer the glass. Like when you're a kid and you put your face very near to the glass and make faces at yourself." This is, of course, yet another parallel between this part of Voyage in the Dark and "Petronella" which suggests that they were based on similar — or perhaps the same — event and feelings. A final (and interesting) parallel is that the name Jean gave to the Heseltine character in "Till September Petronella," Julian, was the real name of the man upon whom she based "Vincent in Voyage in the Dark.

77 Tigers Are Better-Looking, p. 33.
78 Ibid.

I would like to thank Michael Holroyd, for helping me to find a copy of Painter's Pilgrimage; and, as always, Francis Wyndham, for his unfailing support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The preceding article appeared previously, in slightly different form and without notes, in London Magazine, edited by Alan Ross, vol. 27 no. 3, June 1987, pp. 32-46, and is reprinted with the kind permission of the editor.

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