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The majority of Jean Rhys's short stories are set in three locations, France, England and Dominica. All three places were significant for Rhys and, as a result, figure prominently in her writing. Of the three locations, however, none was ever really 'home' to Rhys and much of her writing explores ideas of belonging and identity. France was definitely not 'home', but, ironically, it was there, and especially in Paris, that Rhys achieved a sense of belonging and this is reflected in her writing set there. Although born in Dominica where she was one of the white minority, and the descendant of a slave owning family, Rhys spent the major part of her life in England, but it is a country for which she held little affection and this is evident in her work. In an interview published in the year of her death, Rhys said of England:

England was terribly cold when I first came there. There was no central heating. There were fires, but they were always blocked by people trying to get warm. And I'd never get into the sacred circle. I was always outside, shivering. (Vreeland 221)

The "shivering" and "sacred circle" refer less to the actual heat and more to Rhys's reaction to the people and life in England. She confirms this in the same interview when she comments on the English and says, "I didn't find them terribly warm. I was so unhappy in England. I was delighted to get away" (Vreeland 222). Rhys's reaction to England was much the same as that of her protagonist, Selina Davis, in her short story "Let Them Call It Jazz". The short story which has Rhys's only first person mixed-race narrator, and one who speaks in dialect, has received much critical attention because it carefully documents the alienation of a young woman from the Caribbean living in England. Coral Ann Howells states that
Selina Davis's story is presented as emblematic of the immigrant woman's position in urban culture where every effort is made to marginalise and silence her. 
(Howells 127)

Another short story which is "emblematic of the immigrant woman's position in urban culture" and bears striking similarities to Rhys's "Let Them Call It Jazz" is "A Disguised Land" by the Guyanese writer Pauline Melville. It would seem highly likely that Melville was influenced in her writing of "A Disguised Land" by the work of her literary foremother, Jean Rhys. Both stories highlight racial and gender issues and detail the experiences of young women of colour and their alienation in London, a place they were sent to by their grandmothers, and both stories culminate in the imprisonment of the protagonists.

The hypocritical nature of the English is stressed in both stories. In "A Disguised Land", the protagonist, Winsome, is haunted by a repeated dream in which the pleasant and kind attitudes of the English are oddly out of step with their intentions in a manner suggestive of Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death, he kindly stopped for me":

She dreamed she was in England and that she had been sentenced to death....Small knots of white people stood chatting like parents after a school function. They were always extremely kind to her. In one of the dreams a man drew up beside her in his car. He put his head out of the window and said helpfully: 'Hop in and I'll give you a lift to the gallows'....'No, I jus' walk there. Tank you.' Her fear seemed inappropriate amongst such pleasantly relaxed people....A taboo caught her tongue and forbade her to say how she felt. (Melville 41)

In Jean Rhys's "Let Them Call It Jazz" Selina Davis is equally confused by the cruel comments disguised in kind tones uttered by her neighbour:

That evening the woman is by the hedge, and when I pass her she says in very sweet quiet voice, 'Must you stay? Can't you go?' (Rhys, Tigers 54)

Rhys and Melville emphasize, therefore, how malicious content, when disguised in polite tones, destabilizes their protagonists. In another incident English traditions and lack of comprehension are used to highlight Winsome's cultural displacement. Winsome is told by her friend Levi

'Yuh must watch yuhself in some of dem courts....They gat certain magic writings on the walls to do harm to black people.... Ancient spells fi mak us confuse when we stand in de dock deh.' (Melville 44)

Both stories accentuate racial and cultural distinctions and how they inhibit social communication and marginalize the protagonists. Selina and Winsome both end up in prison, Winsome through a life of petty crime and Selina for disturbing the peace and breaking a window, and both are silenced and abandoned by a judicial system which fails to recognize them. Rhys highlights Selina's impression of the court and its officials: "The magistrate is a little gentleman with a quiet voice, but I'm very suspicious of these quiet voices now" (Rhys, Tigers 60). And when asked if she has anything to say, Selina is unable to communicate in a manner acceptable to the legal establishment and is silenced like Winsome in her dream:

I want to say this in decent quiet voice. But I hear myself talking loud and I see my hands wave in the air. Too besides it's no use, they won't believe me, so I don't finish. I stop, and I feel the tears on my face. 'Prove it.' That's all they will say. They whisper, they whisper. They nod, they nod. (Rhys, Tigers 61)

Similarly, when Winsome is in court she too is detached from the process at hand and feels a sense of unreality.
People walked up to other people and whispered. This was a country full of whisperers. That was one of the odd things about England. Nothing was what it seemed... People concealed their intentions. (Melville 46)

In the courtroom both women feel disempowered and incapable of reacting and both are imprisoned and then hospitalized, Selina after fainting and Winsome when she goes into labour.

Once in prison, however, the two protagonists' instincts for survival are revealed and female resistance is depicted. This resistance is enabled after Winsome and Selina obtain affirmation from other women: for Selina another inmate sings the Holloway song and it reawakens her desire to live and for Winsome the black hospital cleaner talks of the strength of black women. However, both writers emphasize that although their marginalized heroines have manifested some resistance and an ability to survive, the system will continue to work against them. This is evident in the refusal to allow Selina to return to collect her powder compact when she leaves prison and later through the appropriation of her song. In "A Disguised Land", Winsome's newsworthiness is of limited interest and, after the initial screening, her story is eliminated from later news bulletins.

Interestingly, in her critique of "Let Them Call It Jazz", Coral Ann Howells concludes that "[i]t would seem that gender politics are more intricately registered in this story than racial politics, which work on a much simpler pattern of binary opposition" (Howells 128). Although gender politics and female resistance are fundamental to both stories, racial issues are the driving force. This is exemplified by the fact that location is particularly important for the protagonists and both metaphorically return to the Caribbean in search of warmth and support. Selina returns through her singing: "when I sing all the misery goes from my heart. Sometimes I make up songs... other times I sing the old ones like Tantalizin' or Don't Trouble Me Now" (Rhys, Tigers 49-50), the latter being a song that reminds Selina of her "grandmother for that is one of her songs" (Rhys, Tigers 58). And in "A Disguised land" the story ends with Winsome dreaming of her burial in a land which is 'unfamiliar', but which is reminiscent of the Jamaican landscape. It is these connections with another location that provide the impetus for the protagonists to recognize and subsequently collude with their marginalized positions. Selina's song may have been taken from her and she may no longer sing, but she realizes that its meaning has not been: "let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard" (Rhys, Tigers 67). Equally, Winsome's burial journey in her final dream suggests an acknowledgement of the reality of her situation and perhaps an acceptance of her earlier displacement to England from Jamaica.

Throughout Rhys's fiction, England and the English receive negative portrayals, Coral Ann Howells suggests that Rhys's "subversive critique of Englishness and imperialism" was "focused by her recognition of difference after her arrival in England" (Howells 20). The recognition of difference which results in cultural confusion is exemplified in "Let Them Call It Jazz" and as such reflects Rhys's own antipathy for England and the English. This antipathy may have developed from the romantic image of England as 'home' that Rhys implies permeated the Caribbean. This is demonstrated by the attitudes of the children in her short story "The Day they Burned the Books", whose images of England include "whitebait eaten to the sound of violins" (Rhys, Tigers 42).

'Home' as the Caribbean, is also fictionalized by Rhys in her short story "I Used To Live Here Once", a brief two page story which describes the narrator's return to her old home in the Caribbean. After describing the physical journey to her former home and
remarking on the fairness and European heritage of the playing children "as if the white blood is asserting itself against all odds" (Rhys, Sleep 176), thus emphasizing racial distinctions, the story culminates in the narrator's realization that she is a ghost. The careful, but critical, evaluation of the physical landscape, accentuates the narrator's sentimental response to her old home.

The road was much wider than [sic] it used to be but the work had been done carelessly. The felled trees had not been cleared away and the bushes looked trampled. (Rhys, Sleep 175)

This sentimentality compounds the impact of the story's denouement when the unnamed narrator is unseen and unheard by the children playing under the mango tree.

The location of the Caribbean for this story and the narrator's obvious exclusion confirm Rhys's own feelings about the place. In 1979 she said "I went back to the West Indies and I hated it" (Vreeland 236) which can be understood as her own feelings of unbelonging when she did return. Paradoxically, in letters written from the Caribbean at the time of her return Rhys's evinced other sentiments:

I'm awfully jealous of this place...I can't imagine anybody writing about it, daring to, without loving it - or living here twenty years, or being born here. And anyway I don't want strangers to love it except very few whom I'd choose - most sentimental. (Rhys, Letters 29)

It is exactly this contradictory aspect of her reactions and feelings for Dominica, hence the Caribbean, that predominates in Rhys's writing located there and, as such, her writing serves to highlight the complex position of the white creole-cum-colonial-cum-expatriate.

Coral Ann Howells sums up "I Used To Live Here Once" in her statement that the narrator has become "a woman blanked out and repositioned outside the space which was formerly her own" (Howells 148). For the narrator the space that was no longer her own was the actual physical space described, a metaphorical depiction perhaps of Rhys's memories for a place that was no longer her own and had, in fact, never really been by virtue of her relationship to it as a white Creole. The Caribbean was for Rhys a place where she could never truly feel at home and, although she did not have the same disdain for it as England, she felt something of an outsider. Her relationship with the Caribbean she conveys through the narrator of "I Used To Live Here Once" who lovingly negotiates the stepping stones to cross the river and reach 'home', only to find herself excluded once there. Like Winsome's dream in "A Disguised Land" death in "I Used To Live Here Once" is used as a metaphor for alienation. Carol Morrell in her article "The World of Jean Rhys's Short Stories" suggests that

The stepping stones across the river, variously safe and treacherous, represent a dangerous passage through life. It is as if the character has died in that life and is crossing the eternal river searching for her lost heaven. (Morrell 100)

And she goes on to say of the rejected narrator and her creator:

If this was the heaven she had struggled and travelled to reach again, she has just been cast out by the angels, doomed to remain in the limbo of death in life she has known. (Morrell 101)

Paris, however, was a location that Rhys depicted with less confusion or animosity. When considering Paris and her departure from England Rhys said:
I was delighted to get away from England. I like Paris. I made friends. Whenever I had some money, I'd shoot back to Paris. Paris sort of lifted you up. It's pink, you know, not blue or yellow; there's nothing like it anywhere else. (Vreeland 234)

Unlike in England, or for that matter Dominica, Rhys did feel comfortable in France and ironically in her short story "Mannequin" Rhys's English protagonist, Anna, achieves a sense of belonging more than any of the characters in her fiction. "Mannequin" is essentially up-beat for Rhys, and although a cynical depiction of the commodification of woman is recorded, the protagonist is less alienated from her environment than most of Rhys's female characters. Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm register this point in their study of Jean Rhys's shorter fiction:

"Mannequin" is less about escape than belonging, and this makes it stand out in Rhys's fiction. Anna finds a place, finds companions, and finds a role. At the end of the story, however temporarily, she belongs and has stopped being an outsider. (Malcolm 22)

"Mannequin" details the first day of a model in a Paris fashion house. The young Englishwoman, Anna, "was fragile, like a delicate child, her arms pathetically thin" and it is "to her legs that she owed this dazzling, this incredible opportunity" (Rhys, Tigers 160). She is expected to assume the role of "jeune fille" (Rhys, Tigers 161) and all the other models in the House have a "type" (Rhys, Tigers 163) to which they vehemently adhere.

Louis James writes of the fashion house that it is:

a world of reflections and contrasts—the front of the salons where the parades take place, bright and wonderfully decorated; while behind there is a desolate warren of corridors and staircases where Anna despairs of finding her way. (James 22)

However, unlike in Rhys's novel Good Morning, Midnight in which Sasha Jensen is overcome by the labyrinthine aspect of the fashion house, Anna does find her way and becomes an accepted member of the community. Louis James points out that by the end of the day, although exhausted, when Anna, walks out down the Paris street with a new poise we realise that her initiation has been not only into fashion modelling but into the world of Paris for which the salon is one focus. (James 22)

The fashion house, therefore, becomes a metaphor for Paris and France and Anna's assimilation into that country and its culture. The integration, however, is more linked to Anna's feeling of belonging which results from wearing the right clothes, having a job and assuming a role, thus it is a conditional and restricted status.

It is worth noting also that in this optimistic story set in a preferred location, Rhys cannot resist the temptation to include a critical evaluation of England and its fashion houses in the lunchtime conversation between the models:

She began to tell Anna the history of her adventures in the city of coldness, dark and fogs....She had gone to a job as a mannequin in Bond Street and the villainous proprietor of the shop having tried to make love to her and she being rigidly virtuous, she had left. And another job, Anna must figure to herself, had been impossible to get, for she, Babette, was too small and slim for the Anglo-Saxon idea of a mannequin. (Rhys, Tigers 164)

Not only does Rhys criticize the physical aspect of London, she also condemns the moral and aesthetic standards of the English.

For all Anna's enthusiasm, Rhys does hint that the sense of belonging may be short lived as suggested in Jean Rhys: A Study of the Short Fiction:
Anna's belonging involves complicity in an institution which, although run by a woman, sets women against women and fixes the mannequins in limited and particular roles....And in the end, it is all as fragile as flowers on a city street. (Malcolm 27)

Irrespective of the suggestion of transience, the story unlike any other by Rhys locates the heroine positively. The fact that the story is essentially hopeful can be summed up by Rhys's comment "I like Paris", and although Rhys contrasts the seamier aspects of the fashion house with the elegance and illusory front of shop atmosphere, she condones it. This endorsement can be linked to the location of the story, Paris, and Rhys's own feelings for the city. Equally, for Rhys, Paris was a place that was undeniably foreign and where there were no prior expectations of what constituted membership, hence inclusion. However, at the end of her life when Rhys was asked if she might return to Paris Rhys said "I'll never go back now. I went back to the West Indies and I hated it. No, I think 'Never Go Back' is a good motto" (Vreeland 236).

The contemporary Caribbean poet, Olive Senior, in her poem "Meditation on Red" considers Rhys's inability to find a home and pays homage to Rhys as a writer and to her displaced heroines:

But I'll
be able to
find my way
home again
for that craft
you launched
is so seaworthy
tighter
than you'd ever been
dark voyagers
like me
can feel free
to sail.
That fire
you lit
our beacon
to safe harbour
in the islands. (Senior 51-52)

Ironically, while a sense of belonging always eluded Jean Rhys, and subsequently many of her characters, she, through her writing, has provided a strong foundation from which to depart and return for other Caribbean women writers.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE


NOTES


3 Published in *Sleep It Off Lady* in 1976.

4. First published in 1927 in *The Left Bank and Other Stories*.

RÉSUMÉS

Jean Rhys est née à la Dominique et a vécu par la suite à Londres et à Paris. Dans son oeuvre, elle s'est servi des trois lieux pour sonder les notions de l'"autre" et de l'aliénation. Le statut d'"autre" - femme, expatrié ou personne de couleur - et un processus de désaffection intensifié par le lieu sont des composants typiques de l'oeuvre de Jean Rhys. Ces propos sont étudiés dans
les trois nouvelles "Let Them Call It Jazz", "I Used To Live Here Once" et "Mannequin", situées respectivement à Londres, dans l'île d'origine de la protagoniste et à Paris et ayant pour sujets l'aliénation d'une jeune femme aux origines ethniques multiples, le douloureux retour aux sources d'une expatriée et la transformation en femme-marchandise d'une jeune anglaise loin de chez elle.

AUTEURS

THORUNN LONSDALE

Fait des recherches sur l'oeuvre de Jean Rhys à Queen Mary et Westfield College, Université de Londres.