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SUFFERING AND SURVIVAL IN THE SHORT STORIES OF JEAN RHYNS

"I shall return again. I shall return
To laugh and love and watch with wonder-
-eyes...

I shall return. I shall return again
To ease my mind of long, long years of
pain".

(Claude McKay, I shall return)

West Indian literature is primarily a product of the twentieth century, and to a great extent it is expatriate in character. Kenneth Ramchand, who in his collection of critical essays The West Indian Novel and its Background is concerned with novels "written by people who were born or who grew up in the West Indies"¹, starts his Year by Year Bibliography with 1903 when Tom Redcam's Becka's Buckra Baby was published in Jamaica. Thomas Henry MacDermont (1870-1933) - Tom Redcam - is generally recognized as the father of West Indian literature. But already his contemporary, Claude McKay (1890 - 1948) left early for the United States opening the long list of later West Indian writers who were to leave their homeland to spend the rest of their lives abroad as "citizens of the world", such outstanding novelists as Jean Rhys and V.S. Naipaul among them. In some cases emigration caused some sort of paradox: in the 1930's Claude McKay became famous as a poet and novelist belonging more to the American tradition than to West Indian literature. Before 1966 when Jean Rhys's novel Wide Sargasso Sea appeared, the writer was regarded as a European novelist². Only recently has Rhys been restored to her unique rank among

twentieth century expatriate writers of Caribbean origin.

Jean Rhys - Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams - was born in Dominica, in the West Indies, in 1890. Her father, William Rhys Williams was a doctor and came to the Caribbean from Wales; her mother was a Creole. Jean Rhys came to London to be educated when she was sixteen but soon left school for the Academy of Dramatic Art in Gower Street, London. She worked in the chorus of a musical comedy for a time. Encouraged by Ford Madox Ford, Rhys started writing in the twenties. By 1939 she had published five novels³; later she wrote short stories, collected in two volumes - Tigers Are Better-Looking (1968) and Sleep It Off Lady (1976). Her best and most popular novel Wide Sargasso Sea was published in 1966. Jean Rhys died on May 14, 1979. Posthumously, her friend and editor, Diana Athill published the novelist's autobiography Smile Please.

Two main themes prevail in Rhys's works: the problem of a woman unable to face the cruel reality of common life is one and the other explores her Caribbean past. The uncertain situation of woman, her low position in society, her economic and social inferiority in relation to the strong and independent male constitutes the main theme of her early novels. Cheryl M.L. Dash gives the following characterisation of the woman-protagonist presented by Rhys: "In fact, the heroines are basically interchangeable: Julia (in After Leaving Mr MacKenzie), Anna (in Voyage in the Dark), Sasha (in Good Morning, Midnight) and Marya (in Quartet) are all one and the same person at various ages and in slightly differing situations"⁴. Petronella, Inez and a dozen others from her short stories fit the model as well, being unable to cope with difficulties and becoming victims of their shiftlessness and lack of strong will or morals.

Both Rhys's novels and short stories provide an interesting and faithful picture of the Caribbean. The writer is not able to free her mind from her memories and thus certain details and topics continually recur. Her autobiography, which reads like another collection of short stories, shows that her West Indian childhood formed the basis of Rhys's imaginative powers: the

early years spent on Bona Vista - the family estate; relationships with her friends and her mother who "at last spen almost a stranger", and her nanny Meta; the white and black communities existing side by side in one society; all these facts were used as material to create a broad and realistic panorama of Caribbean society.

Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys's last novel, appeared to be the first work to secure her position as one of the best Caribbean writers. The novel presents a wide range of problems typical of complex West Indian society, but at the same time it includes a variety of other topics which are not here discussed and which remove this novel from the scope of this paper. I intend to examine here the image of the Caribbean society, only as it is depicted in Jean Rhys's short stories. The reader finds a direct description of West Indian relationships in such stories as Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers, Fishy Waters, The Day They Burned the Books. It does not mean, however, that in such stories as The Bishop's Feast or Overture and Beginners, Please elements of Caribbean reality are not to be found - their being indirectly used does not diminish their importance for the generally presented picture. Life in voluntary exile did not suppress the writer's critical approach towards life in the West Indies. On the contrary, her experience as an expatriate seems to sharpen her view of the past, giving her the opportunity of a profound insight into the life of both society in the Caribbean and the West Indian colonials setting in England.

West Indian society today includes descendants of Europeans, of African slaves, of indentured labourers from India and other Asian countries, whose fathers came to the West Indies three centuries ago. But the soan of such a long period did not suppress the various antagonisms among the particular communities - the coloureds, the Creoles and the white Europeans. At the turn of the century (Rhys's short stories deal with the period of the end of the nineteenth century up to the 1920's) West Indian society was split up into multi-racial groups with strong oppositions between them, without a common history or some settled values and shared traditions. Yet, the white European

ruling class was not able to preserve its privileged position any longer. What were the reasons for the changes? From the historical point of view the planters were the first white settlers and until the Emancipation Act in 1838 they were the richest group in the islands. Afterwards they managed to keep first rank position for a time, but they began to lose it as cheap labour became more difficult to obtain. (See Wide Sargasso sea for illustration).

The loss of economic pre-eminence was the most significant but not the only reason for the loss of the privileged position in the multi-racial community. The peoples who inhabit the West Indies brought with them their beliefs, language, their social habits and traditions which caused and maintained deep differences in the society including economic dependence, cultural, political and religious divisions among the immigrants. These divisions were complicated by the separateness of the islands themselves, small as most of them are and scattered in a great expanse of sea. All these factors contributed to the profound alienation and racialism, bringing the whole situation to a point where removing barriers to communication between the coloured and the white communities was no longer possible.

Eventually the newcomers from Europe were given no chances to adapt to new conditions or to overcome unexpected difficulties. However great their efforts, they were condemned to inevitable failure, as it is portrayed in the story Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers. "The so-called 'Imperial Road' was meant to attract young Englishmen with capital who would buy and develop properties in the interior. This costly experiment has not been a success"⁵, The public authorities were not the only ones who arrived at such a pessimistic conclusion. Particular members of the society, as in this case represented by Dr Cox, shared a similar belief:

He was thinking of young Errington, of young Kellaway, who had both bought estates along the Imperial Road and worked hard. But they had given up after a year or two, sold their

land cheap and gone back to England. They could not stand the loneliness and melancholy of the forest⁶.

The name of the street 'Imperial Road' becomes an ironic element of the description as in reality it turned into the 'Narrow Path' for its inhabitants. Those who decided to stay had to experience hardships bringing them failure, and such broken and disappointed individuals people Rhys's short stories: "The strange man" - Mr Sawyer or "that horrible Ramage" represent that part of the society whom others referred to as "the crazy people" and who eventually were resented by both the members of the white society preserving the standards of conventional behaviour and adapted to the new culture, as well as by the despised coloureds.

An exact record of white society in the Caribbean is presented in the story The Day They Burned the Books. The narrator, a white girl of twelve tells about her friend Eddie, a Creole boy, and his mixed family. This is how she describes her friend's father, simultaneously characterizing the social class he belongs to:

His father, Mr Sawyer, was a strange man. Nobody could make out what he was doing in our part of the world at all. He was not a planter or a doctor or a lawyer or a banker. He didn't keep a store. He wasn't that was the point - a gentleman. We had several resident romantics who had fallen in love with the moon on the Caribbes - they were all gentlemen and quite unlike Mr Sawyer who hadn't an 'h' in his composition. Besides, he detested the moon and everything else about the Caribbean and he didn't mind telling you so⁷.

The society here presented is a complex one; the conventional gradation of posts is made apparently definite in it. Obviously, the white planters achieve the highest rank.

On the one hand, there are the planters creating the economic

base for those whom today we would call white-collar workers: doctors, lawyers, bankers as well as civil servants and teachers - people appointed by the government who occupy the next step on the social ladder. Such people as Mr Sawyer who can afford neither big money to invest in business in the island nor have made a brilliant career there come at the bottom. On the other hand there appears a group of individuals who live in the Caribbean area just for pleasure - "the resident romantics". Having some private income they can afford to stay in the Caribbean doing nothing useful - simply admiring nature.

Mr Sawyer represents the group of white immigrants who are completely disappointed with the West Indies. Coming from the lower middle class - he dropped his 'h' - he is not very sensitive to the natural beauty of the Caribbean. Moreover, he works as an agent of a small steamship company, and is not regarded as a gentleman in the eyes of public opinion, which is expressed by the narrator's voice. There is one more reason for his complete dissatisfaction: married a coloured woman. It did not matter that she was decent, respectable, educated and beautiful - all these advantages were nothing against the fact that her skin was not white. Being the wife of a white man she had to suffer humiliation and resentment from her husband. She had to bear his insults, his being rude to her and his drinking. The resentful and scornful attitude of her husband made her social position still lower. Thus she did not even try to love him.

The racial conflict trapped the lives of two unhappy individuals in a vicious circle: lack of social and economic success brings Sawyer to a state of self-pity. Deliberately building a wall of resentment around himself, he comes to the point where it is not possible for him to be understood by his nor be accepted by the society. Gradually he withdraws from social life, becoming a recluse. He finds satisfaction in books, brought for him from England. His wife despises the books, which are the means of her husband's escape and he in turn despises and blames her for his failure.

The books play an important symbolic role in the story. Surprisingly, Mr Sawyer does not admire the sea - an element of the local environment, but he accepts books - artificial products brought for him from England and symbolizing old values. The books may also symbolize Sawyer's passive attitude, his inability to create something new. Instead of starting a new life, he sticks to old forms and values which happen to be useless and harmful in his present position. His wife tries to fight against the evil caused by her husband but she fails - she is not able to teach her son to love the West Indies. The boy has already accepted his father's opinions, beliefs and animosities.

Marriage between a white European and a coloured girl is the subject of yet another story - Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers. Here, however, the conflict develops on two levels: between the married couple and between them and the local community. Getting married to a coloured meant that "the Ramage's were lost to the white society"; it did not mean, however, that society did not gossip about them. On the contrary, when Mrs Ramage goes away for a time, her mysterious disappearance causes serious trouble. This time the black community turns against Mr Ramage and he is accused of murdering his wife. After his death (he dies after an attack at his house) neither the blacks nor the whites accept him as a member of their community. "His death was really a blessing in disguise" said one lady. "He was evidently mad, poor man - sitting in the sun with no clothes on, much worse might have happened"⁸.

Because of his unconventional behaviour Ramage is rejected by the conservative community. All his actions are exaggerated, because he wants to keep his individual style: he wears a white suit while other men dress in dark trousers; ignoring all the invitations to dance, parties etc. he seems unsociable; he has come to the Caribbean in order to buy a small estate "as remote as possible". The only person he made friends with, Dr Cox, knows that one has to pay a high price - the price of being lonely and alienated - if one does not want to accept the rules

of the local community. But Ramage does not give up his plans. Alas, society propagating the myth of his insanity makes him the victim of their fossilised opinions.

Both in the story The Day They Burned the Books and in Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers society cannot forgive the newcomer his daring to marry a mulatto girl. In each case it manages to remain united against the condemned person. Its attitude is hostile and unquestionable - no doubt, everybody will vote "guilty". Everybody except the reader who feels sympathy rather than contempt in the case of Mr Ramage. To gain sympathetic feelings towards her protagonist Rhys present him through the eyes of two persons who like him: Dr Cox and his little daughter Rosalie. Similarly, Mr Sawyer is not the only scorned at, because the narrator condemns both Eddie's father and his mother. The narrator's attitude weakens the resentment against Mr Sawyer, making the reader feel pity instead.

Sometimes the racial prejudices stir some divisions within the white community itself, as depicted in Fishy Water. The story is partly written in the form of letters, exchanged among public and private persons. The other part of the plot is presented as a court report. Presented with different points of view, the reader is left to choose the attitude which suits him best. The form of a formal report - an effective structural trick in this case - strengthens the seriousness of Jimmy Longa's situation.

Jimmy Longa, another social cripple and a criminal in the opinion of some people, is not able to abide by rules governing society. The episode of physical abuse in the case of the black child ("he was found joking roughly with one of the many vagabond children who infest the streets of Roseu"⁹, as one of his defenders puts it mildly) becomes a pretext for revealing different attitudes - moral and political - of particular members of the white community when they have to face a case of racial injustice. "Who is this person who tries to stir up racial hatred whenever possible?"¹⁰ says one group; "making a scape-goat of an honest British workman (Jimmy Longa) is enough to make any decent person's gorge rise"¹¹ declares the other party

of the community. Finally, Jimmy Longa manages to avoid a serious punishment for his crime. He has bought his ticket to Southampton and must definitely leave the country.

Although Jimmy Longa lost his case in the court, it was Mr Penrice the girl's defender, who became the true loser. "The crowd was subdued and less talkative than usual as it left the court-room, but a group of roudies shouted at Mr Penrice as he came out. He took no notice of this demonstration but got into his waiting trap and drove off. A few stones were thrown after him"¹². Later on the hostile attitude towards the Penrice family strengthened. They were accused of sending the girl away to stop her from "talking". Finally, Penrice himself was accused of hurting the little child. "They're saying that you did it and pushed it off onto Jimmy Longa". To free himself from the dubious position he decided to leave Roseaz and the country.

Were it a white child, Jimmy Longa would not try to assault her; if he did he would be severely punished while Mr Penrice praised for his courage. But as it was a case of a coloured girl, racial prejudice got involved. However wicked and cruel, the white carpenter was considered better than a homeless and helpless but coloured little girl. "The hatred would be exactly the same in the (whole) country - suppressed, perhaps..." - said Mr Penrice. "...you find envy, malice, hatred everywhere. You can't escape" - argued his wife. Mr Penrice agreed but added: "Perhaps, but I'm sick of this particular brand"¹³. "This particular brand of hatred" - racial hatred, split the white community into pro- and con- groups, depriving it of any sense of justice and good will.

The picture of Caribbean society in Rhys's stories will not be complete if the reactions and attitudes of the coloured community are omitted. A coloured person is a compound of mixed nationalities ranging from nearly white to black. ("Coloured, we West Indians call the intermediate shades")¹⁴. The black) white distinction was so deeply rooted that the recognition of one being coloured became an inherent quality of mind. "She didn't look coloured but I knew at once that she was"¹⁵. Their

economic status also varied considerably - some were so rich that they could send their daughters to the convent school. As Jean Rhys reports in her autobiography the white girls were in a minority and attended the convent together with the Creole girls. But even in that little convent community the tiny drop of the "cursed blood" became a barrier not to be conquered, because hatred was a disease that poisoned both the white and the coloured. Jean Rhys gives such an account of her unsuccessful attempt to make friends with a beautiful Creole girl: "Finally,...she turned and looked at me. I knew irritation, bad temper, the 'oh, go away' look, this was different. This was hatred - impersonal, implacable hatred. ...I never tried to be friendly with any of the coloured girls again. I was polite and that was all. They hate us. We are hated"¹⁶. How deeply rooted must the hatred have been, if children were aware of the divisions into "them" and "us".

Sometimes however, the children united against the adults world of divisions and prejudices. The narrator of the story The Day They Burned the Books adopted her father's attitude; and he seemed exceptionally reasonable about prejudices and racialism. Fortunately, one's being white or coloured was not enough to destroy children's friendship.

"My mother won't take any notice of her (Eddie's mother). I said. Though I was not at all sure."
"Why not? Because she's...because she isn't white? Well, I knew the answer to that one. Whenever the subject was brought up - people's relations and whether they had a drop of coloured blood or whether they hadn't - my father would grow impatient and interrupt. "Who's white" he would say.

"Damned few".

So I said, "Who's white? Damned few"¹⁷.

Although the children were already aware of racialism, their minds were not infested by hatred and contempt for their coloured friends.

As the "damned few" never learned to accept the West Indies as their home so the coloured community never lost its hostility towards the white Europeans, who did not appreciate and understand their way of life. The white group, living in a borrowed culture, did not try to form roots in the new soil, hence temporariness was the main feature of their activities. Even when the early planters found in sugar a crop which made them rich, their wealth served only to enable them to return to England. Moreover, the European population of the West Indies always refused to be identified as "West Indian" and never ceased to long for England. Those who had to settle clung with determination to the mother country, cherishing her picture in their minds and passing on their "British dream" to their children for whom England - "the home" - seemed to be all "strawberries and daffodils". Thus the new generations born in the Caribbean became victims of their parents' ambitions. The parents felt alienated and unhappy because they had to live in the adopted homeland which could become a real homeland for their children. The children were sent away from the West Indies, usually to England, but ironically, that "good old England" was never accepted as a homeland by the newcomers, who were to taste the bitterness of exile there. They were not allowed to regard West Indian culture and its way of life, while the Europeans treated them as "horrid colonials", forgetting their British origins. Eventually instead of one, there were two unhappy, lost and disillusioned generations - the parents and their children.

One of the forms of fulfilling the "dream of return" was sending children to schools in England. The heroine in the story Overture and Beginners, Please is torn up between her past memories and the novelty of her present conditions. But learning to ride a bicycle or experiencing the phenomenon of snow and ice is not enough to suppress the wildly colourful picture of her "home" in the West Indies. Hence, the English landscape seems to her dull and gloomy. "The sky was the colour of no hopes, but they don't notice it, they are used to it,

they except me to grow used to it"¹⁸. The constantly repeated word "they" - in contrast to "I" - shows that the girl felt a stranger there, lonely and alienated. "Despair, grey-yellow like the sky. I stayed by the window in the cold thinking 'What is going to become of me? Why am I here at all'"¹⁹.

Her stay in England profoundly affected the protagonist's character, the transformation never being of a positive kind. Loosening of the family ties, lack of any stable financial support, as well as loneliness, deprived the protagonist of self-confidence and trust in other people. Such notions as honour, reliability or morals got devalued. The characters, all of them women, are good examples of how exile distorts personality. In fact, the distortion of an individual's character is the key notion to Rhys's stories in general. In the Caribbean stories she traces the moral twists in the male protagonist while the stories taking place in England, such as Till September Petronella, Outside the Machine or Mannequin portray the "fall" of a female protagonist.

In the case of Jean Rhys's heroines the reader feels that they all grow from a common pattern - share the same initial characteristic. Rose, 12, and Miss Verney over 70, grow from the same "deep structure". The figure of the protagonist constitutes a connection between the separate stories which may be regarded as a step by step analysis of the intellectual and psychological development of the person. Although presented in a different external reality and at various, more or less valid moments of their life, the protagonists (who often do not even reveal their names) appear as just different facets of the basic character. The heroine's development follows four steps: childhood in the Caribbean Islands and love initiation is depicted in such stories as Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers, Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose, Mixing Coctails. Rosalie, aged 7, and Phoebe, aged 12, accept a very similar attitude towards the "male world". The little girls seem to express extremely adult-like opinions. Rosalie is very critical about the white women she and her sister meet, and Phoebe feels that Captain Cardew

should not touch her breasts. Moreover, she is able to feel jealousy and hate towards Edith, his wife. The next time the reader meets her she turns into the narrator of the story Mixing Coctails, who is about to leave for England.

Coming to England marks the next step of the protagonist's development. Such stories as the above mentioned as well as Before the Deluge, or Hunger show the changes - all the ups and downs of her lonely life in England. After leaving school, after unsuccessful attempts to become an actress and working as a chorus girl, the protagonist, called Anna this time, (in Mannequin) starts the career of a mannequin girl. It is no longer that innocent Phobe (a name typical for pastoral stories); Anna knows what it means to be humiliated and tired. In the story Hunger the protagonist, who may be Anna a year older, (the story is written in the form of an interior monologue and the reader is not given the narrator's name) has to admit her failure although she tries to defend herself: "I despise utterly, my futile struggles of the last two years. ...I have been a mannequin. I have been... no: not what you think..." But she realizes that she has wasted her life: "As it is, I have struggled on, not cleverly. Almost against my own will. Don't I belong to the land of Lost Causes...England..." And finally she ceases to fight, accepting her unstable position of a call-girl or escort - "If I had a glass of wine I would drink to that: the best of toasts: To a Lost Cause: To All Lost Causes..."²⁰.

While the children, presented by Rhys, give the impression of "little women" who passionately reveal the self-discoveries of their souls, the adult women usually seem childish, lost and helpless. They are not able to decide for themselves, creating a feeling of transience and lack of self-certainty. They have learned to find somebody - a "male" somebody - who "will find you, ...look after you, you rotten, sneering, stupid tight-mouthed bitch"²¹. A belief absorbed in her growing up that men were more important than women, and that her validation as a woman came from being attractive and desirable to men, dominates

the protagonist's mind, depriving her of the ability to exist by herself. Simultaneously, she cannot get rid of the fear that men have the power to take away her sense of being acceptable.

The third group of stories, including such pieces as The Sound of the River, The Lotus, Vienne, Kikimora show the protagonist as a married woman or rather temporarily settled with a man who supports her. Yet, whatever her name, no changes in the protagonist's character are traceable. She seems to stop growing at 25 or 30, incapable of any further development. Her personality is deprived of any will of self-power, any desire to become independent, to forget the past, unhappy experiences. Then she has to live alone again. The period when her friend dies or leaves her alone is depicted in the story Who Knows What's Up in the Attic? The protagonist lives a life full of memories; she has arrived at a point when she is able to examine her past without passion or despair. She has even developed some kind of philosophical attitude towards life - she is aware that her life has not been a success: "Why shouldn't I walk out of this place, so dependent on the weather, so meanly built, for poor people. Just four small rooms and an attic. Like my life: ...And who knows what's up in the attic? Not I for one. I wouldn't dare look"²². Again she is not bold enough to face future reality.

Although the heroines do not often act morally and the reader suspects that their social position is often ambiguous, he is not able to condemn them; despite all their shortcomings they win some sympathy. One feels: they are not that bad, after all. They are naive but never wicked - on the contrary, everybody may harm them. Had they lived under different conditions they would have been decent, respectable girls. As a writer, Rhys skilfully works on creating in the reader a special sympathy syndrome. Getting insight into the protagonist's consciousness - the external world is usually presented through the eyes of the main heroine - the reader is at the same time forced to accept her point of view, often identifying with her.

Rhys's method of "laconic implications" - a method of

indirect brisk descriptions connected with implied statements - makes a particularly successful means of presenting the protagonist in a sympathetic way. Gradually, the narrator develops in the reader his sympathy syndrome. A hint skilfully dropped in the context, a description of somebody's smile, a look or a remark on the protagonist's naivety make the reader hesitate: "is Petronella a prostitute, or isn't she?; shall I criticize Madame Fifi, or not; and what about her acquaintance Roseau - what is that girl doing in that dirty hotel?" The writer herself, keeping some distance, forces the reader to make judgements of his own.

Rhys gives a considerable attention to the choice and use of language. Her protagonists are usually simple girls (Petronella, for instance, has never been to the opera) and they think in simple English, or the reader has this impression. The use of French words may imply that the girls mix with a cosmopolitan society which is more or less educated, and which consists of artists. At the same time Rhys avoids elaborate explanations or descriptions which break up the narrative flow - usually in the form of an interior monologue. In fact, the narration flows so smoothly that it does not matter that the plot takes place in the protagonist's mind. This structural trick plays an important role in the characterization of the protagonist: Rhys's women are dreamers, they continually seek to escape reality. Real events mix in their consciousness with the past. And in the case of her protagonists the "tell me how you think and I tell you what you are" principle, the deliberate use of the modified interior monologue, becomes a valid structural device.

Jean Rhys has as Ford puts it "very remarkable technical gifts", "instinct for form...possessed by singularly few writers of English and by almost no English women writers". "Her sketches begin exactly where they should and end exactly when their job is done"²³. Her plots are usually very elaborate including various motives and a gallery of characters. In the story Kikimora, for example, three main characters and a cat are introduced, while Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers presents a host

of characters, none of them redundant. She also experiments with plot and composition. In the case of Kikimora both the elements of structure are identical, but in other cases (Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers) introduction of narrative dislocations is one factor which keeps the reader alert. In the story just mentioned the factual span of time included in the story is very short - it is the afternoon of All Souls' Day, a day after Mr Ramage's death. The time of composition however, includes the whole period of Ramage's stay in the West Indies.

The last factor contributing to the characterization of the protagonist is the way she reacts to external circumstances - nature, especially. In the description of nature colour plays the most important role, either contributing the background for revealing their feelings or constituting a means of direct characterization. Take for instance the protagonist from the story Overture and Beginners, Please who is deeply sensitive to nature. Natural elements are used here as symbols through which the girl's mood is exposed. In fact, her depression coinciding with the quiet English landscape in winter, allows her no objective opinion. England, as seen through the eyes of the main character who is the narrator, seems gloomy, grey being the dominating feature of its landscape. "Euston Road, Hamstead Road, Camden Town - ...I hated these streets, which were like a grey nightmare in the sun"²⁴. (Till September Patronella). While travelling through the country, another girl finds it "pretty, but bare". Hence, grey becomes the symbol of the protagonist's loneliness and unhappiness at first, and later it also symbolizes old age, physical ugliness: "I'll dye it (hair) black, red, any colour you like but I'll never let it go grey, I hate grey too much"²⁵.

In contrast to London, England, the West Indies seem to be an outburst of wild colours. A hint of a mango tree, a flower or the blue sea, found here and there in the descriptions makes them laconic but simultaneously the reader feels that these elements are deliberately introduced to show that nature is inseparable from the existence of an average man in the West

Indies. While in England "everything looks weary", in the West Indies everything bears a touch of the sun - "the days are bright", and "yellow dancing patches of sunlight" are seen everywhere. The shadow lines are sharply marked giving the impression of wildness and mystery. Eventually such colours as red, green or blue, appearing in the description of a scene taking place in England, will inevitably bring associations with the Caribbean, as in the case of the picture from the story Kiki-mora. Elsa is very proud of her picture which is entitled "Paradise". The painting is an apparent kitsch, but it is a precious possession for Elsa who associates it with the paradise of her childhood (which was presumably spent in the West Indies). The scene in the painting includes all the symbolic elements generally associated with the Caribbean: "A naked man was riding into a dark, blue sea. There was a sky to match, palm trees, a whale in one corner and a butterfly in the other"²⁶.

Jean Rhys is an accurate observer of the outside world as well as its internalized, psychological reflection. Her stories abound in local circumstances; she is always careful to establish the time and exact location of the described events. A calendar standing somewhere on the mantelpiece and pointing to July 28, 1914, the date on a letter written in "189-" or such title as Night out 1925 firmly place the stories in a contemporary reality.

The stories portray a detailed picture of London - especially the Notting Hill and Marble Arch area with its small dirty hotels and bedsitting rooms marked with traces left by all the previous inhabitants, coming from Paris or the West Indies. Ford M. Ford, her first critic, remarks in the Preface to her stories: "I should like to call attention to her profound knowledge of the life of the Left Bank - of many of the Left Banks of the world"²⁷. "The Left Bank" - the title of the first collection of her short stories has become a symbol of the specific world Jean Rhys describes.

Jean Rhys belongs to that group of modern writers whose work had to wait for a rediscovery for a long time. But in the late

1960's, after receiving the Smith Literary Award she won a wider literary recognition. Thomas F. Staley, in his recently published study of Rhys's work, comments on her popularity saying that "In England, she became for a brief time a minor cult figure, posing for fashion shots in the mass media; in America, she has been featured in 'W', the chic production of Women's Wear Daily, and Ms"²⁸. Republication of her novels by Andre Deutsch added to the critical recognition of her art. A Alvarez in the New York Times Book Review from March 17, 1974 paid this tribute to her artistic achievements: "She is quite simply the best living English novelist... There is no one else now writing who combines such emotional penetration and formal artistry or approaches her unemphatic, unblinking truthfulness ... the voice she created... is oddly youthful: light, clear, alert, casual and disabused, and uniquely concerned in simply telling the truth". Her work should be regarded as a serious and unique contribution to modern literature of the twentieth century.

NOTES

- ¹ Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and its Background, (London, Faber and Faber, 1972) p.3
- ² See the discussion in Luise James, Sun Fire - Painted Fire: Jean Rhys as a Caribbean Novelist, Ariel vol.8, no.3 (July, 1977) pp.111-112
- ³ These are: Postures (1928), (republished in 1969 as Quartet); After Leaving Mr MacKenzie (1930); Voyage In the Dark (1934); Good Morning, Midnight (1939)
- ⁴ M.L. Dash, Jean Rhys, in Bruce King (ed.) West Indian Literature, (Mc-millan Press, 1979) p.197
- ⁵ Sleep It Off Lady, (Andre Deutsch, 1976) p.19. Subsequent references follow this edition
- ⁶ Ibid., p.14
- ⁷ Tigers Are Better-Looking, (Andre Deutsch, 1968) p.40. Subsequent references follow this edition
- ⁸ Sleep It Off Lady, p.21
- ⁹ Ibid., p.45

- 10 Ibid., p.46
- 11 Ibidem
- 12 Ibid., p.59
- 13 Ibid.,p.62
- 14 Again the 'Antilles, in coll. Tigers Are Better-Looking, p.177
- 15 Jaen Rhys, Smile Please, (Andre Deutsch,1979) p.49
- 16 Ibid., p.49
- 17 Tigers Are Better-Looking,p.46
- 18 Sleep It Off Lady,p.70
- 19 Ibidem
- 20 Tigers Are Better-Looking,pp.182-183
- 21 Till September Petronella, in coll. Tigers Are Better-Looking, p.33
- 22 Sleep It Off Lady, p.155
- 23 Ford M.Ford, Preface to a Selection of Stories from the Left Bank in coll. Tigers Are Better-Looking, p.148
- 24 Ibid.,p.12
- 25 Ibidem
- 26 Sleep It Off Lady, p.96
- 27 Tigers Are Better-Looking,p.148
- 28 T.F.Staley, Jean Rhys A Critical Study, (The Macmillan Press LTD, 1979) p.ix

CIERPIENIE I PRZETRWANIE W KRÓTKICH OPOWIADANIACH
JEAN RHYS

Streszczenie

Jean Rhys, autorka pochodząca z Indii Zachodnich, zajmuje się w swoich krótkich opowiadaniach, jak i powieściach problematyką związaną z istotą cierpienia i przetrwania. Problematyka ta przedstawiona jest na tle społeczności zachodnio-indyjskiej uwarunkowanej wpływami historycznymi. Niektóre opowiadania opisują społeczność zachodnio-indyjską zamieszkującą Londyn i wszystkie problemy związane ze zderzeniem dwóch kultur. Prace Jean Rhys mogą być uważane za niezwykle cenny i oryginalny wkład we współczesną literaturę anglojęzyczną.