"The appearance is against me; 
and I go unjustified, forever 
from your sight, 
how I have loved, you know; 
how yet I love, 
my only comfort is, I know myself."

Dryden

All for Love
Jean Rhys: *Smile, Please*

This chapter introduces Jean Rhys, a West-Indian author of this era, and her autobiography *Smile, Please*. In the world of twentieth-century fiction Jean Rhys is ranked with Naipaul, Rushdie and Gertrude Stein. The wanderer in her quest for identity and secure existence, she lived through a series of painful events. Her conventional spirit embodied in the modern form, made her a virtuoso of individual's troubled consciousness. She struggled for survival and won her share, 'earned' life and also death on her own. She fought the battle always, alone, seldom encouraged but never failed in efforts. Money and love, name and home, family and country, always evaded her but she continued her pursuit. Tempering her life and existence according to the surges of time, she was disappointed, frustrated and lost. But she never gave up. Jean's life-story is pathetic but an ideal of life-force that worked on two emulating principles. One was the border of compromise she always touched unwillingly and the other was sharply transcended lines of time and fate, that proved her courage and perseverance.

Despite her intense integrity of character, she suffered and endured the 'unfair' life in accusations, humiliation, and want of comfort. Jean's withering self is manifested not only in autobiography but also in her fiction; her writings demonstrate her attempt to create a 'shape' for the disordered past. *Smile Please* is a collection of autobiographical vignettes wherein she wanted to reveal her familiarity with the recondite form of life. She, extraordinarily, communicates the sense she experienced, actually. The childhood that antecedented a young rebellious woman and the youth that swayed a victimized helpless dependent, only to make her ultimately a genuine and gifted novelist, is the source of her making. She had known and written about how dependence on man, for emotional and economic survival, deprives woman of her self-esteem and creative worth. Her autobiographical fiction delineates the women, too delicate to be self-reliant. Her novels supplement the image of her wandering 'self', wandering in search of a name, a place, a person to belong to, forever. For, in life she always changed names, places and persons. No entity seemed to stick to her and nothing but void remained. To fill this void with a sense of contentment, she continued her act of writing.

Jean Rhys was her adopted name for writing fiction. Originally she was Christened Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams, the daughter of a Welsh doctor, William
Rees William, who held a government job in Dominica. Her mother Minna Lockhart, was a West-Indian Creole of Scottish and Irish origin. Ella Gwen was born on 24th August 1890 at Roseau, in Dominica; there is no confusion about her date of birth or origin, although some critics try to create it. Ten years before the new century she was born in 1890 and belonged to the Dominican family of Creole-Welsh couple, not particularly conscious of the conflict that such a family backdrop would create for their would-be-artist child. Ella Gwen had two elder brothers, Edward and Owen. She had two sisters the elder one named after her mother Minna, and the younger, Brenda. Rhys’ childhood is the only period of her life, spent in her family, and after her teenage she lived either with her aunts, relatives, or in some boarding house. When she was not yet twenty, her father passed away. This sudden death of her father brought an important turning-point in her life. Economically shattered, her mother could not provide her and she started her first job, to earn her livelihood and to learn the kinship between economy and existence. Her brief education at the Perse school, Cambridge, and her attempt of learning at the Academy of Dramatic Art, was not really helpful in bringing her any gains. Touring with a musical company of Our Miss Gibbs, she discovered the breach between appearance and reality, that she was never to escape throughout her life.

Rhys’ initial experiences in the world of theatrical presentation, are reflected in her fiction, especially Voyage In The Dark, and After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie. After her first love affair disillusioned her adolescent hopes and dreams, at the age of nearly twenty-two, she went for abortion. The loss of father, the loss of mother’s support and family-life, eventually led her to loss of motherhood. It was in this depression that Jean started writing her first diary, when she was living mainly on her first lover’s allowance. The chronology of loss and dislocating discoveries, introduced her to the only safe road to relief-the act of writing. In 1914, she joined a voluntary work at soldier’s canteen and continued it for three years till she met Jean Lenglet. Her marriage with this man, brought her to Paris, where a son was born to them in 1919, December. William Owen, the child of three weeks, died of pneumonia to add to Jean’s losses. Drifting with a man to share her hardships, in Viena and Budapest, she spent two and a half years. In 1922, the daughter, Maryvonne was born to her. It was also the same year 1922, that she met Ford Madox Ford, a friend of Joseph Conrad and a writer himself. Jean began to write short-stories, impressed by Ford’s talk on the art of writing. He proved, with the
changing times, to be an agent of intensely experienced psychological disturbances of Rhys, damning her in between the life within and without family. Carole Angier did not think it proper to include a photograph of Ford in Rhys’s biography wherein she offers that of every person, who in some way, played a role in Jean's life. For two years or more, Rhys had to stay with Ford and his psychic wife, in 1923-24, when her husband was imprisoned. Forced into an affair with Ford, Jean found herself trapped in strange conflicts that were to be expressed in her early novel *Quartet*. In 1924, Ford published her first story ‘*Vienne*’ in the *Transatlantic Review*. By 1925-26 she was already writing *Quartet*. Her first collection of stories *The Left Bank* was published in 1927; Jean returned to England, to meet yet another man—Leslie Tilden Smith who was to become her second husband. *Quartet* was published in 1928 with its earlier title ‘*Postures*’ and with that oft-quoted introduction by Ford. One after the another, her three novels were published in 1930’s and she had also begun to write short-stories, and autobiographical reminiscences. In 1932, she divorced her first husband, wearied of his indifference and lack of concern for her. While marrying Leslie Tilden Smith in 1934, she had already been in the world, she was to create, for the first version of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, called *Le Revenant*. It was almost after three decades, that Jean visited Dominica in 1936. She tried but could not escape the desire to drift back once again in the past. 1940’s she spent in Norfolk and London, writing short stories. In 1945, her second husband, Smith, died. The world of her ideas full of ‘distrust and fear’ was already an ordeal for her and she could not endure to be alone, at least physically. At the age of 56, she married Max Hamer, in 1947. The year that a nation like India received its ‘Independence’, Jean practically lost that independence for the fear of being lost. Marriage, surprisingly enough, was the only way for her conditioned mind, to hope for some solace and sense of involvement. In May 1949, she was condemned, by law, of assault and spent five days in the hospital wing of Holloway Prison. In November 1949, Selma Vaz Dias traced her for the first time. Rhys’ ordeal was not yet over. She suffered from a very strong sense of alienation, left on her own, with no friend to lean on. In 1950, her husband, Max Hamer was arrested for a case of cheque fraud. As he was in the prison of Maidstone, Jean lived in Maidstone for two years. In 1952, she returned to London and stayed there for next four years. The last shift of her life after her stay at Cornwall from 1956 to 60, was in October 1960 to Devon. It was Selma Vaz Dias again, who traced Jean in 1957, and performed *Good Morning Midnight* on B.B.C.
Radio. This was the program leading Francis Wyndham’s contact to Jean and Andre’ Deutsch’s bid for the option on Wide Sargasso Sea.

For six years up to 1966, Jean was working on Wide Sargasso Sea and working hard to put in, her real perceptions of racial, colonial, class and gender issues in it. By this time, the health of her husband was deteriorating. Jean herself suffered a heart attack in 1964. Death was not to relieve her till she would publish Wide Sargasso Sea and find herself on the canvas of real academic achievements, famed, named, identified, discovered and awarded as the winner. 1967 brought the W. H. Smith Annual Literary Award to her, not only a testimony of her merit as a novelist, but the recognition of her genius by the world that had evaded her so long, more than three quarters of her life. She deserved more in fact, than this recognition. All her novels were re-issued by Andre Deutsch and published in Penguin paperbacks. Her entry into the European books of classics was also her revival as a writer. Two more collections of her short stories appeared in 1976-78. In 1978, Jean received the CBE as one more award assuring her of justice, though delayed. March 1979 was the last fall of Rhys’s health and 14 May 1979, she breathed her last, ‘earning’ death, easier perhaps, than she had earned life, the life that was ‘an abject failure’ to others, as she thought.

The half-written autobiography of Rhys ‘Smile Please’ was published in 1979, with supplementing entries from her diary and notes by Andre’ Deutsch and Diana Athill. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly published her letters in 1984.

The winner of an award from the Royal Society of literature, Rhys, like most of the great figures of literary history, received universal acknowledgement of her merit as a writer, posthumously. Shuffling the existing ideas of white and black-racial status and shaking the walls of historical, socio-cultural, aesthetic, sexual and political in the colonial universe, Rhys disappeared and re-appeared on the screen of modern literature.

Jean Rhys’ autobiography Smile, Please is more a revival of memories lingering in her mind than a planned sequence of her life events. She records her past not only nostalgically but in a way to discover herself. Smile, Please is the revelation of her personality and events that contributed, to the making of her mind. Her story is in fact a saga of an isolated woman, groping for some emotional prop. All her experiences right from her childhood dreams and fears, fascination for books and England, to her relationships with parents and elderly aunts, men and women in her
life, are narrated in no unclear terms, for 'she wished to ‘tell the truth’ to those who misunderstood her. She felt hurt by what other people wrote or said about her. Autobiography, thus, was not an urge for speaking about herself, in Rhys; it was rather forced by the critical comments of people around. It is an effort, a psychological necessity to make her stand clear. Her autobiography, therefore is a factual movie of her life which she scripted as she lived it. It is not only the picture of her perceptions but the disclosure of the truth of her experiences - as she wanted to present. It is in her encounter with the realities of patriarchal society that her spirit as woman is manifested. The role of man in woman’s life as an exploiting force, exists on several levels and she has to depend on her own degree of tolerance for survival.

Among her works, Rhys' most striking contribution is the last of her novels *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Her career as a writer began with the short-stories, the fragments of her fragmented mind but her life completed with the full-fledged story in the novel-form *Wide Sargasso Sea*, storming and fragmenting the composite appearance of the Euro-American-British monarchy of ideas.

Her works include the following, all at once hitting the expectations of the 20th century readers:

- 1929 – *Quartet* - the first novel with its previous title *Postures* – published in 1928: it introduces Rhys’ style and is her first attempt of disguising the experience.
- 1930 – *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* - was republished by Andre’ Deutsch in 1969, it records Rhys’s haunting obsession with her first love affair, and the agony afterwards.
- 1934 – *Voyage In The Dark* - was also republished by Deutsch in 1967, it is based on Rhys’s first piece of sustained writing in the form of a personal diary.
- 1939 – *Good Morning, Midnight* - was republished in 1967, by Deutsch; it shows the growth in Rhys as a novelist.
- 1966 – *Wide Sargasso Sea* - a very deeply explored reversal of the Victorian story of Jane Eyre; the most complex among Rhys’s works, it jolted the European sensibility out of its complacent ideas.
• 1968 – *Tigers Are Better Looking* - collection of short stories, also includes some selections from *The Left Bank*.
• 1976 – *Sleep It Off Lady* - collection of short-stories, it proves the degree of Rhys's perceptive experience in the art of life.
• 1979 – *Smile, Please, An Unfinished Autobiography* : published posthumously by Andre' Deutsch; it is written by Rhys with a very strict sense of honesty.
• Rhys also translated two books from the French. One was *Perversity* by Francis Carco, in 1928, although it gave the name of translator Ford Madox Ford, the job was actually done by Rhys.
  
  The other was *Barred* by Edward de Neve, a pen-name of Jean Lenglet; this novel had the same plot as *Quartet*, and Rhys thought it 'fair' to translate it for the sake of publishing a fictionalized version of reality.

This chapter is divided in small sections with concentration on different dimensions of Jean Rhys as a woman, as a writer and an autobiographer. Like previous two chapters, it studies first, the childhood and the element of love connecting it to her identity, as marriage to her struggle for survival. After these earlier sections, however, the scheme has to vary slightly in case of Rhys, to suit the facts and findings related herein. A section in the middle of the chapter is devoted to the findings from her biography, mainly by Carole Angier and by other sources with casual relevant references. The next section deals with Rhys and her women in her novels and stories, to locate the blend between the two, with the concept of Rhys's fictive self. Then, like previous chapters again, Rhys's position as an autobiographer and as a woman writer is viewed with relevant explanations. In conclusion, the quest of Rhys for belonging and identity is stressed to sum up the observations on her life and works including autobiography and her image as a writer in the present century.

In the world of Jean Rhys and her novels, the irony of twin forces, opposite but co-existing, is very obvious. She finds the female identity essentially dependent on economic and emotional position. The notion of love with money and the one without, varies the identity of woman. This is what the critics like Arnold Davidson term as 'Eros and Economics' in her psycho-biographical works. There are also the twin forces of sex and race, nativity and expatriatedness, male governance with
female anxiety, individual’s isolation and human relationships, and finally, the self that is amoral, apolitical, areligious and indifferent the culture that brands life with communal, social and other banners.

The conflict of self in the absence of family, community and any other agency supporting its existence, is as very predominant mark of Rhys’s perceptions, thematized almost everywhere in her writings. The backdrop of metropolitan settings for a homeless, wandering self, be it female, is provided by Rhys to emphasize the prevailing notions of modern life, as isolation, estrangement the paralyzing determinants of human contact in the form of language, class, race and gender, also nationality. One may find the negative implications of her exposures horrible and deeply disappointing but Rhys is both at once universal and subjective in her analytical realism. The psychological exposures in her writings reach out the explored regions of the unidentified, unjustified, unaccepted voices and snaps of individual’s existence. The greatness of Jean Rhys as a writer is in her tracing back the roots and seeds of all these dimensions and finding the relevance of those to the individual self.
5.1 Childhood and parents

Jean Rhys' autobiography can be conveniently divided into four phases as her life in childhood, her entry in young age and in theatre through the chorus line, her marital life and her life as a writer. With such divisions, one can explain how Rhys evolved from an isolated child to struggling youth and from an isolated woman to a widely known writer. It was only in the last years of her life that Rhys felt at home when she was honoured as a great novelist and her worth was acknowledged by the world that had been imposing troublesome conditions of existence on her.

Autobiography is a peculiar way of overcoming and expressing the discontent, restrictions and impositions of the society. With a sort of coherence, the form often indicates a deliberate recreation of life. It freezes the conflict of the author and offers him a chance to connect the life he lived, coolly to the historical facts he perceived. It not only equates the historical narratives but also quenches the authorial thirst for self-definition and self-expression. Individualistic in tone, it appears to be the record of one life but represents the group.

Paul John Eakin's observation on the borderline between autobiography and fiction is very useful for studying Rhys' autobiography, as it clarifies the preview; he notes that:

Historians and social scientists attempt to isolate the factual content of autobiography from its narrative matrix, while literary critics, seeking to promote the appreciation of autobiography as an imaginative art, have been willing to treat such texts as though they were indistinguishable from novels.  

To Eakin, autobiography is the art of self-invention. He argues that the autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content. It evolves through a continued process of self-discovery and self-creation. Rhy's autobiography, not to exclude her novels from the backdrop of it, evolves through this type of process. For the self that she discovers and creates is necessarily a fictive structure. In fact, the self around which Rhys has woven her life-story, using the threads of actual events and personal emotional truth of her mind, is not located unless one seeks it in her novels and stories, too.
Smile, Please, the title of Rhys’ autobiography is related to the unforgettable incident from her childhood, when a photographer uttered the phrase, to startle a six-year-old girl. Jean was anxious about her “white socks coming half way up my legs, and the black shiny shoes…” This little girl was not only startled when the photographer ‘dodged out from behind the dark cloth’ but was baffled and quivering, looking at her mother, at her own shabby dress and the photographer. Childhood, says Cockshut, is “often the most important time of all. Parents and siblings are often central, friends are sometimes important”. It is an obvious feature of all autobiographies. Usually the author begins with the memories of childhood, parents and siblings, friends in school-life. Rhys’ autobiography too, begins with the childhood incidents, one of which inspired her to entitle her narrative with the words of the photographer.

The accounts of childhood appropriates the peculiar theme of autobiography the theme of growing-up. For autobiographer, the inner development has its roots in outer events mainly from the childhood-life. the early years of life, till teenage, tend to be a kind of preface to the adult autobiographer’s mind. They show the formation of a temperament of the individual rather than any personal or public facts of life. Roy Pascal studies childhood as an important elements in autobiography. He points out that

There is a double selective principle, on the one hand what is remembered, on the other, what is considered of relevance to the later achievements.... .... Within the framework of childhood, however, recollection has a good chance of creating that concrete homogeneity of subject and object, of past and present, of mental image and external event, that makes good autobiography....

It is in childhood, that the knowledge of self begins when the child observes ‘other’ things and persons around. It is such observation that guides the child’s awareness of self and the world. The process of growth therefore takes form through the childhood observations till the consciousness of the child widens gradually to fix-up those observations in the compartments of memory.

Born to Dominican Creole mother and Welsh father, Rhys’s Creole heritage and experience as a white woman, among the black and as a Caribbean among the Europeans, influences her last works deeply. The first memory of the photographer’s face ‘dodging out from the black cloth’ was only the association of that ‘black’ cloth
by contrast, haunting her consciousness of whites among blacks and that 'black melancholy' she could never escape. Black race, however, remained always a point of attraction for her. In the later life when she experienced the evasive and silently manipulative white men, her liking for the openly rude and sturdy blacks especially black women, was revived. "Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad".5 Her first recollection of desertion, on her sixth birthday focuses her feeling of being terrified by the photographer. The incident is fictionalized in *Voyage In The Dark* her early novel, wherein the photographer fails to put the child into compliance even by the words 'Smile, Please'. 'Smile, Please' was the instruction of that photographer; while her mother bid, in her agitated voice, the girl smiled but that was not natural. She moved with uneasiness on her face and fear in her eyes, "Now, keep quite still", the mother said. But it was a failure. For "I tried but my arm shot up of its own accord". The mother was more annoyed now. "You must keep still";6 she said frowning. The photographer only said, "oh, what a pity she moved..." The mother's irritation now was harsh to the girl. "A big girl like you.... I an ashamed of you", she said.7 Jean Rhys, as a girl of six, was ashamed of herself for the first time because her mother was ashamed of her. She did not however, recall this irritation of her mother so strongly as she did, her own astonishment when she noticed the change in herself after three years:

It was about three years afterwards that.... I .... looked at the photograph attentively, realizing with dismay that I wasn't like it any longer. I remembered the dress....but the curls, the dimples surely belonged to somebody else. The eyes were a stranger's eyes. The forefinger of her right hand was raised as if in warning. She had moved after all. Why I didn't know, she wasn't me any longer.8

This was her first realization of 'time, change, and the longing for the past'. A nine-years' girl for the first time observed herself in the looking-glass and felt the despair of being different now from her past photographed image. She also compared herself with her brothers and sisters who "all had brown eyes and hair" while she alone, was fair with a pale skin and straight hair 'pulled severely...and tied with a black ribbon'. Her despair was for not remaining the same as before and for not being similar to the fellow beings. She was different, so painfully different in appearance that she disliked her name 'Gwendolen' which means 'white' in Welsh as she was told. She
disliked her dress ‘an ugly brown Holland dress’; she hated her very being “from my head to my black stockings which fell untidily round my ankles, I hated myself”.9

She was growing up and her self-knowledge had begun. The attempts of self-scrutiny were started by her early sense of tidiness, beauty and comfort. It was resulting in self-hatred by way of self-observation and comparison to others. This was not only the consciousness of dressing and appearance. It was also her girlish hesitation to be one with the group, make friends or be sociable. She found some friends “but I preferred being an outcast by myself”10 She deliberately moved with untidy ‘hair falling about my face and fingers stained with ink’. Her dress used to be spotted and creased and she did not show how much she bothered. It was only in the fear of her mother’s anger that she tried to look better before entering the house. Her relationship with her mother was taut that filled her with fear,

I was really rather miserable but took a defiant pride in looking worse everyday. However I always endeavoured to get into the house and tidy up a bit before my mother saw me. I was afraid of her.11

Estelle Jelinek perceives that most women autobiographers do not write about their “intense feeling of hate, love, fear, the disclosure.......or the detailing of painful psychological experiences”.12 Rhys’ autobiography is an exception to this generalization. She voices her intensity of feeling as hate and dislike, even self hatred, fear of her mother and the painful experience of her life. In the sixth chapter of her autobiography, entitled ‘My Mother’, she tells us as that she hated her mother’s photograph on horseback, for, she was young, slim and pretty in it,

I hated it. I resented knowing that she had once been very different from the plump, dark and only sometimes comfortable woman I know. I didn’t dare tear it up but I pushed it away to the back of the drawer. What wouldn’t I give to have it now?13

One reason of Jean’s childish dislike for her mother was her unfriendly nurse, Meta, who used to frighten her by narrating the horrors of natural and supernatural world. It was the “world of fear and distrust” that Meta had introduced to her and she painfully remained in that world till end. The world which was as horrible as she did experience in her ‘uncertain ties’ and paranoia of female consciousness. Her story began in perplexity and gloom, progressed to a troubled life and isolated mental state in extremely complex reality. The nightmarish babble of Meta and ‘the feel of her hard hand’ could never, be erased from Jean’s memory; It was one among the
memories of hysterically dreaded cockroaches, the blood sucking image of soucriants and centipedes. The childhood fears in turn resulted in Jean's fears of insecurity and need for protection afterwards. She had called Meta the 'Black Devil' and despite her attraction towards black women, she could never forgive Meta for the damage she had done to her delicate mind.

Jean remembers a few moments when her mother was 'comfortable woman'. She recalls the sweet fragrance of her 'low-cut evening dress' when she 'smelled so sweet', 'leaned over and kissed me' to say "Goodnight, sleep well". Till her younger 'new baby' was born, she paid much attention to Jean. Jean's desire to be the beloved child of her mother was so obvious and strong that she prayed to be black because her mother once said that the "black babies were prettier than the white ones".14 By the time, the next two babies were born, Jean found her mother drifting away' from her, and "when I tried to interest her, she was indifferent".15

Scharfman underlines the damage caused to Rhys by the "distant, inaccessible, depressed, rejecting mother, her desire for this present absent figure".16 Jean suffered this loss of relationship with her mother throughout her life. Her mother, Minna Lockhart Williams, was a third generation Dominican Creole woman. Her treatment of Jean was troubled and ambivalent, full of disinterest and indifference. Deborah Kelly Kloepfer observes that Rhys' fiction centred upon the theme of loss. Among other types, she includes the loss of parental backing especially by the absence of mother, father and support of family. She remarks:

Jean Rhys's fiction operates around an economy of loss,......carrying her women away towards a series of substitutions and displacements... demonstrating morbid dimensions...full of memories, dreams, gaps and breaking failures in the vacuum created by the absence of mother, father, warming family set-up.17

The novelist Rhys is essentially inseparable from the suffering Ella Gwendollen Williams Rees, the ignored child, the growing up lonely girl, the exploited young woman and the hypersensitive individual. Her novels and stories reflect no place for mother-figure-and offer no space to mother daughter relationship. In revenge to her own deeply felt rejection by the mother she wrote about daughters by rejecting the portrayal of mother. Yet, Wide Sargasso Sea, her most popular novel, has some space for the mother daughter link in the heroine Antoinette and her mother.
In her vague memories, Jean recalls one event of her mother’s crying to Mrs. Campbell, the coloured friend of her mother. She could not know why her mother was crying but it was a surprise to her:

I had never seen her cry. I could not imagine such a thing. I stared at her more in wonder than in pity but I did eventually gather that she was crying about money..... after a while....she was her usual self-contained, withdrawn self.\(^{18}\)

This was for the first time Jean realized her father’s ‘throwaway attitude’ as ‘a cover-up’ for anxiety of their stretching economic conditions. Rhys also recalls some moments when she was about to leave Dominica and her mother was “ill,...looked lonely, a stranger in strange house....lonely when she was never alone......lonely, patient, and resigned. Also obstinate....dignified”.\(^{19}\) She used to feel at ease only with her twin sister and had a silent reciprocity with her. Jean finds that it took her a slow process to wonder “less and less until at last she was almost a stranger”\(^{20}\) to her growing-up mind.

In her recollections about her father, Jean sounds more positively excited than about her mother. Her father was the son of Anglican clergyman and had run away to sea when he was about fourteen. Jean’s aunt Clarice, the sister of her father, told her how he was caught and taken back to rectory. He desired to spend his life on sea and was sent to the training ship \textit{Worcester}. After a job on the sailing ship, he went home unwillingly, since he did not like his father. Jean had seen her father standing in front of the old man’s photograph and cursing, shaking his fist. Her mother had told her about the favour her grandpa offered to her uncle while “he grudged every penny spent on Willie”. When her father decided to become a doctor, he received money from his mother and not father. Before starting his life in Dominica, he had served on ships as a doctor and as Jean proudly used to tell others, “had been to every country in the world”. When he joined the Government job in Dominica, he had fallen very ill and the twin sisters nursed him back to health, one of whom he married after his recovery. Aunt Clarice had described Jean’s father as a “sad man brooding over his exile” but Jean discovered that

He wasn’t a sad man. He was an active, outgoing man with many friends. He was sad when his mother died, so sad that his sadness filled the house...\(^{21}\)
In the memories of her father, Jean finds the memories of her aunts associated. Her account of childhood and early youth is disconnected because her memories are spasmodic. She is not concerned with the consistency of her narration of personal development but with a group of images, memories and moments. Her autobiography is not so synthesized in its introspective vision as one expects an autobiography to be. It is more a diary-like collection of past events she gathered in retracing her life. According to Roy Pascal the re-construction of past experiences involves the writer’s poetic talent in penetrating the reflection, crossing and mingling them to bring a sort of unity in the whole work. He believes that

Autobiography is an interplay, a collusion between past and present ... a handful of experiences on the grounds of memory ... acquire significance more in retrospect ...  

Jean Rhy's recollection of past demonstrates this poetic talent in her mingling of relevant associations through memory. Andre’ Maurois wrote that “memory is a great artist. For every man and for every woman, it makes the recollection of his, or her, life a work of art”, and the “autobiographer is obliged to omit ...... the commonplace of daily life”; he has to limit himself almost exclusively to salient memories of events and actions. In her late eighties while writing autobiography, after a very eventful and painful life, Jean Rhys was still freshly involved with reminiscences of the childhood, of nearly eighty years back into the past. She recalled that her father was specially gentle to her. It was he who stopped her morning plate of porridge because she disliked it and replaced it with the beaten up egg in hot milk with nutmeg. He also stopped her extra lessons in mathematics when he found her crying on that account. Jean remembered how warmly he walked with her, arm-in-arm up and down the veranda, and how she was happy in his company. She recalled that he was impressed by Buddhism, talking about the concept of 'Nirvana'. She had observed that he liked women and enjoyed his life or a part of it in his own way. About children he was not as anxious as her mother. Jean sums up her memories of her father analytically in her narration,

I probably romanticized my father, perhaps because I saw very little of him ........... I heard the other day that the Celtic cross my mother put up so proudly over his grave had been knocked down and his grave wasn’t marked any more. I hated whosoever had done this and thought “I can hate too.”
For a growing girl, the emotional support of mother and the economic backing of father counts a lot, and these two things Jean missed so badly that throughout her life ahead, she kept wandering in search of emotional and economic security.
5.2 Love and identity

For women love and identity are closely related. Women find identity in love and like to surrender it in love. Women writers, especially, always find themselves trapped in the dilemma of choice between the two. Most of them fall-in-love and invite the conflict of identity and many of them prefer identified existence and then lament for the absence of love. Somehow, it is very difficult for women in general and women writers in particular, to balance the two in their lives. Unfortunately marriage in almost all communities is significantly associated with sex instead of love. The society often fails to acknowledge the importance of love as well as identity in the values attached to marriage. It grants sex as a binding factor and women’s suffocation is rooted in such mistaken social associations. On the whole it is expected from women that they should sacrifice identity in marriage with or without love.

In the literary and aesthetic vision of women writers, love as well as identity has occupied considerable room, right from the beginnings of their writing. In the writing of twentieth century women, the two themes are interrelated so closely that the common object of both is male, in one way or the other. It is only in the beginning of twentieth century that women began to question the truths of their lives, especially those related to love and identity. The modern varieties of feminism in its philosophical, liberal, radical and socio-political forms, taught women to be aware, and alert. Along with the quest for truth and freedom, women writers also reflected their quest for pure love and self-evident identity. Among women autobiographers of mid-twentieth century, almost all talked explicitly about their notions and disillusionments about love and identity. Patricia Spacks commented that the private world of women seems to have only one viable possibility for freedom and it is through the act of writing. She points out the relationship between women writers and their lives by stating that “women dominate their own experience by imaging it, giving it form, writing about it.” Her point is very relevant to the elements as love and identity that women write about, deriving from their own personal experience in their lives.

In the life of Jean Rhys, she always found herself swinging between the two - love and identity. One or the other of the two was always wanting. The moment she was sure of possessing one, the other was already lost by her. Her search thereby was two-pointed vehicle moving her mind in one direction at one time and getting the
other to lose the first. In studying Jean Rhys, most of the critics find the questions of identity surfaced. Veronica Marie Gregg observes:

There seems to be a wide range of interpretive options for Jean Rhys writing: West Indian, Third world, British, Euro-American, European, Feminist, postcolonial, . . . . A psychobiography of the writer herself . . . . her peripatetic life, her being . . . . a writer who does not seem to fit anywhere . . . .

The loss of identity and of love are the most dominant features in the life of Jean Rhys herself and that of her heroines, living as women in the world of racial, sexual and post-colonial chaos. According to Gregg, it is the idea of 'Rhys-woman' a composite Jean Rhys heroine, theorized by Francis Wyndham, that indicates a deeper concern with identity. The hopeless, homeless and hard existence of Rhys's women, very much the representation of her own, is not simply the result of passivated self-destructive mind but also the love-lorn, emotionally drained and exploited remnant of socio-historical ethos.

In her autobiography, Smile Please, Jean Rhys records the first awareness that dawned upon her, within the family, of not being loved by her mother. She recalls an incident of a gift of twin-dolls, sent by her Irish granny, of which one was black and the other, fair. Jean wanted the black but was given the fair one. In the moment of anger and impulse she went to the garden and smashed the face of the fair doll with a big stone. This was her first gesture of self-destructive response to the want of love.

The second event Jean could not forget was in the convent when she wanted to talk to her neighbour, a beautiful black girl, and was humiliated with a look of hatred- 'impersonal, implacable hatred.' Her realization this time was also of her mixed breed along with the want of love, positive response and favour. She narrates:

I never tried to be friendly with any of the colored girls again . . . . They hate us. We are hated . . . . Side by side with my growing wariness of black people there was envy. I decided that they had a better time than we did, they laughed a lot though they seldom smiled . . . .

It was in her childhood observations that Jean's ambiguous attitude towards the blacks was rooted. Internally she felt a strange approval for their roughness, carelessness and outwardly she did realize her own failure to intimate with them. Her perception of her own identity was based on their responses and also on the white Europeans' responses including the English. On one hand she was fascinated by the
blacks, on the other she had a fantasy-feeling for Englishmen as the inhabitants of beautiful country that she had dream of through the books.

Love, for Jean Rhys, had always been a matter of impulse, running on the moments changing and recurring moments of life. She could distinguish love from admiration and liking as soon as she was in her adolescent years, reading Milton, Byron and French poets. She observed in her early youth, Miss Porter, a frequent visitor of the Church who was deceived in love by a young Englishman. She had not known her own aspirations at that time. Instead she had a ‘religions fit’ and wanted to become a nun.

I was fascinated by the service, the movements of the priest, the sound of Latin, the smell of incense. It wasn’t long before I decided firmly that I would become a Catholic and not only a Catholic but a nun... the bride of Christ, my place in heaven secure.  

But she was afraid of her mother’s probable reaction to such a decision, and ‘decided to wait and argue’ after growing-up ‘a little older.’ In her religions fit, she tried to exercise her faith in good work by helping the maidservant Victoria, who in turn, was suspicions and thankless.

She then tried to help a sick and old coloured lady by reading to her but came to know that she was not really happy in listening to her. Her parents did notice her religious fit but did not tease her, thinking “she will grow out of it”.

From her love for purity of human goodness, religious spirit of kindness she grew-up to love the Nature. When the family shifted from ‘wild beautiful Bona Vista’, her fathers small estate in the hills, she realized her happiness in the company of Nature. “I began to feel I loved the land and.... I would never forget it.... It was alive...something austere, sad, lost.... I wanted to identify myself with it, to lose myself in it”.  

The first seventeen years of her life Jean had spent in the beautiful tropical paradise of Dominica, and the rest of her life she suffered its loss. When she returned to Dominica, after a gap of more than thirty years, she felt deeply hurt to find it completely changed; even the roads she had walked alone, were missing in the thickly grown forest. Her ‘loved land’ was missing and she herself was lost in the urbanized metropolis, with no object of love left. In the loss of the loved land and relationships, she had lost her identity.
In Rhys’ fiction, the intricate bond between love and identity recurs showing her heroines lost, in search of both. Judy Simons comments:

Rhys’ protagonists are alone in an alien culture, seeking an appropriate voice in which to express the sense of self which becomes ever more elusive.....
.....serially abused and abandoned by men...by the nations....all their stories are the versions of Rhys’s own history...

Simons points out that the compelling inheritance of her Caribbean childhood, the inescapable force of that culture, her memories, dreams and contradictions are all mirrored in her fiction. A reconstruction of an insidious psychological and physical landscape is torn between the clash of Caribbean with European cultures. Hence, “the Jean Rhys who figures in.....veers erratically between her Dominican inheritance and the bohemian milieu...which together neglected her and harbored her talents”.

It was this bohemian way of life that caused all suffering in Jean Rhys.

The greatest issue troubling her mind, for Rhys, was of love and of identity. She missed love in the person and went to seek it in another and yet another. She changed her names and places for the sake of finding her true identity and went through a long journey of suffering and solitude. The switched identity-search in Gwen Williams, Ella Gray, Ella Lenglet, Jean Rhys and E. G. Hamer only resulted in the variants masking her ‘quest for selfhood’. Her quest for love landed her in the entanglement of sex without love. Her search for identity launched her always in an island where she could only find the chaotic conflicts of language, tradition, history, culture and nationality. Both love and identity eluded her, and she went on pursuing them despite her failures till end.

The first proposal of marriage Jean received was before she really came to feel and understand her own quest for love. It was solemnly rejected by her and she never thought of it again. At an early stage of her youth her desire was only to be a great actress. Before she could complete her learning at the academy of dramatic arts, in holidays she heard of her father’s death. She was staying with an uncle then, and her mother wrote that she could not afford to allow her to stay at the Academy and she must return to Dominica. Jean did not want to go back to Dominica for two reasons. One was the loss of her father and the other was her own feeling that ‘they did not want’ her back. This was an important turning point in her life, for, she had realized her need for being self-dependent, both in economic and by emotional way. She longed for love as a young artist, working for money and survival but she could
never manifest her desire and dream for love because of the anxieties of material sustenance. David Plante, the novelist friend of Jean and her admiring publisher critic later on, records her ambivalent self identity through a dialogue he had with her:

"Do you consider yourself a West-Indian?" she shrugged. "It was such a long time ago when I left". "So you don't think of yourself as a West-Indian writer?". Again she shrugged, but said nothing. "What about English? Do you consider yourself an English writer?". "No! I'm not, I am not! I'm not even English!". "What about a French writer?" I asked. Again she shrugged and said nothing. "You have no desire to go back to Dominica?". "Sometimes", she said.

Rhys as a writer belonged to no nation. Jean as a woman had no identity. She acknowledged her Creole identity in the oppressive and colonialist society of West-Indian backdrop, with her knowledge that "I don't belong anywhere, but I get very worked up about West Indies. I still care....." The question of identity had no satisfactory answer for Jean till end. In her life as a woman, however, she could be happy while-in-love, at least some memorable moments of her life. Carole Angier perceives that there was queer combination of old values and modern lucidity of disabused tone in Rhys. That was what made her love affair what Angier calls, 'love-hate-affair'. Angier comments:

She was entirely self-absorbed. She cut everything out of her writing but herself....became a near-recluse. In...these experiences....of love and rejection, hate and revenge, fatality and fear.

Rhys the writer did isolate herself not by shying away but by disillusionments she faced in love-relationships. Initially she had her first love-affair with an English gentleman, Lancelot Smith, who provided her a monthly sum nearly for six years or so, irregularly. She hated herself for accepting that help and hated the man for finding her in helpless condition. Lancelot Huge Smith was a conventional, respectable and secure member of the English establishment. Not exactly handsome but 'just right always', he was kind, elegant, jovial. He bought Jean lovely clothes and listened to her talk patiently. He made her laugh and made her feel less shy. Father, friend and lover in one, she found him a perfect match to her dream. Despite all her practical rejection of his money and all later on, he remained unforgettable for her. Anyhow, as soon as she met Jean Lenglet who proposed her for marriage, she wrote happily to this ardent lover that she will not need his help any more. Lancelot
Smith had somehow known Jean Lenglet previously and tried to warn Rhys not to plunge in marriage before knowing the man fully, whom he described not fit for her. But Jean was not prepared to accept any such advice in her happiness thinking that she was going to marry and live happily ever after. Marriage, she had taken it for granted, would be an unending bond of love. And so it proved during the beginning of her married life. She was happy and without anxiety, but only for a while. After her first baby died, she was alone and wandering once again homeless and sans a relationship, within two and a half years of her marriage. Her husband was in prison. The basic response to such conditions was a search for identity, shelter and home. It was Ford Madox Ford who gave her the identity of writer and the name Jean Rhys. She was happy, only for moments, once again thinking that she had found both love and identity. But, it was not so. She soon discovered her oppression by both Ford and his wife and had to escape. The next man was Leslie Smith, the literary agent who married her and published her stories. She was comfortable at least, if not in love, with him. But she could not forgive Lancelot, even Ford, for not allowing her the place she deserved in their lives. This is how her love affairs were to be love-hate-affairs in result. The death of her second husband Leslie landed her once more on the same road of homelessness and sans history to take refuge in. It was Max Hamer, the last of her husbands, who entered her life when she was in her mid-fifties, only to add to her suffering by his careless projects of business. He was also imprisoned like Jean Lenglet and Rhys could only pity herself for being placed in the frequenting episodes of isolation through both loss of love and loss of identity. For her, happiness was essentially related to sense of home as source of identity and love. It was the goal of all her voyages into the dark and despite every station of self-discovery, she remained a lone traveller, lost in the journey through the landscapes of mind.

To comment on Rhys' autobiography, the text being incomplete and fragmentary in structure, one has to keep in mind that her fiction and her other writings too, reflect very strongly the dominating influence of her experience of life as a woman and her ideas earned and expressed as a writer. As Bloom and Holder begin their essay with a general remark that

No woman is an island, nor is any woman's autobiography.....despite the fact that.....forms of personal narrative are ‘metaphors of the self’ or the unique record of a specific individual’s life and life-work, each autobiography or diary also has
characteristics which identify it with a genre or gender.\textsuperscript{35}

In case of women like Jean Rhys, the act of writing about life and life-work, becomes their identification not only with a genre or gender but with the very sense of being, the need for self emphasizing existence as both a woman and writer. She had known and declared:

I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure. It is that already to other people. But it could be abject failure to myself.\textsuperscript{36}

Rhys' need, thus, 'to tell the truth' through writing a self-narrative was also her need for identifying her love-life and her life in search for identity.
5.3 Marriages and survival

Marriage, as a conventional social institution, is accepted as the mandatory fact of life by both men and women. A gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage, married immediately after his wife died; Dr. Johnson said it was the triumph of hope over experience. Apart from the humour in the comment, it gives the truth of 'hope' winning over experience. Ironically, marriage has been the central source of hope and hopelessness both, in the lives of women. Most of women start dreaming of marriage from their girlhood, as their destination. Of course, there cannot be more lovely and charming communion than a good marriage but as La Rochefucauld said in Maxims, "There are some good marriages, but no delightful ones". Montaigne also remarked very aptly in Essays when he said that marriage is like a cage; one sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside desperate to get out.

Known as 'a necessary evil', marriage plays a very determinant role in the lives of women writers. Susan B. Antony stated in her speech, back in 1875, that marriage, to women, "must be a luxury, not a necessity; an incident of life, not all of it". For Jean Rhys, however, marriage was a necessity of life, in the form of an incident. When she was a growing-up adolescent, she often worried about her future especially in marriage:

In those days a girl was supposed to marry, it was your mission in life, you were a failure if you didn't. It was a terrible thing to be an old maid, on the shelf as they put it. The fact that I knew several old maids who seemed perfectly happy, indeed happier and livelier than the married women, didn't affect the question at all. I dreaded growing-up. I dreaded the time when I would have to worry about how many proposals I had, what if I didn't have a proposal? This was never told me but it was in every book I read, in peoples' faces and the way they talked.

Not a personal desire but a part of socially expection and event in woman's life, Jean felt anxious about the possibilities of marriage. But actually when she moved in the out-of-home circle of academy and theatre, she received a proposal earlier than her expectations. This was the first proposal in her life, for marriage,
which she rejected honestly sticking to her own dream to become a theatre actress.

She recalls:

the other man of group, to my great surprise, asked me to marry him. Having a proposal made me feel as if I had passed an examination. He wrote me a long letter which started by saying he noticed that my landlady bullied me and that I had better get away from her by marrying him.... He said that he was now twenty-one.....and....was anxious to meet my aunt...but I answered the letter solemnly that my only wish was to be a great actress...

Jean had no compulsion to marry in early age because of no familial pressures around her. Her father's death had resulted in her break-up from the mother, the siblings and her guardian aunts and uncles with whom she stayed, were not really concerned as much as to worry about her marriage. Unlike most of the girls who marry to fulfil their duties as daughters or pressurized by the family-oriented social norms, Jean did escape the so-called custom of arranged-marriage. Not that she wanted to remain single, but her priorities were different, at the moment. As Carolyn Heilbrun pointed out:

It appeared to the writers that marriage is essential more than for childbirth or sexual settlement, for the discovery of identity and for economic and social standing. It was this socio-economic confidence in marriage....oddly enough, the only reason for most women writers acceptance of getting married was not having any alternative choice as grown-up girls. Like death, it was received as an unavoidable event ahead in the path of life.

As a viable bond of relationship, in socio-cultural environment, marriage has always been presented as the nexus of woman's life, she may be a writer or whatever. Without any surety or sense of friendship between man and woman and a sense of love, it has been given the sanctity of religious and cultural ritual to be respected till death.

In studying women's autobiographies, the question of marriage, sex and self essentially determines the outlook of the writers. The making of adult self depends to some extent, on their childhood and youth but the growth of women from their youth to matured self is closely related to their experiences of love and marriage, their sex-life and domestic world. The husbands especially, play very decisive role in the
personal make up and self-narratives of women. Heilbrun generalizes that marriage is no less than death for women. It is a metaphorical death of woman’s previous identity, her individuality and her capability of taking decisions. The life of tranquility freedom and liberty ends in marriage but after it, woman enters the world of isolation, dependence and humiliation. It proves a sort of fatal punishment to woman for being what she is. Heilbrun sums up that marriage is a failed institution in which passion is not supported by friendship.\footnote{42}

Nevertheless, when we look at Jean Rhys’ life as woman, as presented in her autobiography and fiction, marriage appears to acquire some different shades. In her youth Jean was anxious but not willing to marry. Receiving a proposal was joy to her young mind but she was full of hopes in the theatrical line of academy and the touring companies of drama, so much so that she solemnly rejected the offer without a second thought. Her ambition was not yet crushed by failures or economic consciousness. In her twenties, Jean fell in love with Lancelot Smith. Carole Angier writes that Jean badly needed some emotional shelter at this stage of her life when she “felt excited, but never happy”. Angier in her biography of Jean Rhys explains:

> Half of her was like the other girls waiting, drifting, not even reading....but the other half of her remained alone; bored and lonely, a stranger looking on....what she had wanted...warmth, his arms around her, words of love.\footnote{43}

In such a phase, Jean’s affair was her ‘first grab’, her “first gamble on getting what she wanted out of life; it was also her first and greatest loss”.\footnote{44} It was the wealth and respectability of Lancelot Smith that caused failure in their love and gap although Jean was forced by her conditions to accept his financial backing for a few years. Marriage, for Jean was a cool breeze of hope after the suffocating self-hatred, caused by dependence on the lover. When her affair with Lancelot ended she wrote a poem “I didn’t know/ I didn’t know/ I didn’t know.” She had not known it was possible to suffer so much through love. She didn’t know, by then, that her frustration at this first failure in love will always be with her. When Jean Lenglet proposed to her for marriage she felt relieved. It was the relief not only of escaping Lancelot’s link through his allowance, but also of receiving a fresh hope as new beginning, once again. Lenglet was “much more like Ella herself, reckless and fun-loving, a middle-class rebel, whose more reasoned dissent from ‘respectable’ society would help her...\footnote{45} Lenglet was neither stiff nor cautious. A half French and half-
Dutch by birth, he was generous and romantic. Jean did not fall-in-love with him but she was impressed by him, and she liked his 'silent, quick eyes'. She felt this man can understand her and accepted his offer of marriage without hesitation.

Jean’s marriage was her hope for survival not only emotional but economic too. She told Lancelot about her marriage with acute pleasure and disbelieved his doubts about Lenglet’s secret job. “I like taking big risks”. She exclaimed. In her first marriage, Jean had two reasons to feel relieved. One was that she would leave England and would never come back. The other was her sense of triumph after the failure in her love-affair. She could feel that life was still waiting for her with some pleasures away from England. She married Jean Lenglet in 1919, in Holland and arrived in Paris. Jean was as happy as when she left Dominica for a new beginning. Now she had left England for the same. Angier perceives, “Ella thought, I’m alive... I’ve escaped....this is beautiful.... This is what I hoped for”. Unfortunately, her escape was to be momentary and she was arrested by troubles again, eventually. The hope of motherhood that she had lost once, was once again consoling her mind but only for a flash of that happiness for which she had longed. “Life was like that; here you are, it said, and then, immediately afterwards, where are you?”

29th December 1919, her baby was born. She named him William Owen. 19th January 1920 it died of pneumonia. Lenglet brought happiness, through money in her life. It was a spending phase, comments Angier. Jean had rings and flowers, dresses and compliments. She even moved in a car and looked in the glass and thought, “I have got what I wanted. I gambled when I married and I won”. Jean never asked her husband where the money came from. Marriage, as she had been thinking, was a source not so much of love and harmony as that of comfort, security and money. Simone de Beauvoir has a sharply feminist interpretation of marriage as a connection between male domination and economic class structure:

The richer the husband, the greater the dependence of wife, the more powerful he feels socially and economically....on the contrary, a common poverty makes the conjugal tie a reciprocal one.

Jean’s poverty before marriage had offered her isolation and sense of futility instead of reciprocal tie. She married taking ‘risk’ and ‘gambled’ but willingly, under no familial-social pressures. But even that willingness was conditioned by her fatherless and homeless existence hurled low by broken love affair and lack of economic source. Soon she found she was going to have another baby and with a
happy mind she 'plunged in a dream of maternity'. But her husband was charged and they had to run and hide for some days. Like hunted animals, they dodged across Prague and Warsaw, Paris and London, running away, wandering from place to place. By the end of 1922, she was back in Paris with her new-born baby whom she called Maryvonne. Lenglet was imprisoned and Jean was back in the grip of poverty. It was Mrs. George Adam, wife of the Times correspondent who made Jean offer her diary, liked it and edited it in the form she called Suzy Tells. She sent it to the novelist critic and editor of Transatlantic Review Ford Madox Ford. Ford saw the potential talent of individual writer in it and "changed Suzy Tells to Triple Sec and Ella Lenglet to Jean Rhys".51

Ford Madox Ford was responsible for bringing out the writer in Jean and for putting the woman in her, in trouble. It was on account of his 'terrible game' with Jean and her identity that she had to break her marriage. "Ford was pretending to be in love with Ella, but was really oiling his emotional and artistic machinery."52 Helpless and homeless, she stayed with Ford and his wife as long as she could. Finally she left Jean Lenglet with her daughter, left Ford with his wife and left Paris despite her decision of never to return to England. In 1928, it was Leslie Tilden Smith who persisted in publishing her novel Quartet. Angier depicts the control of time and conditions over Jean's life in her comment:

Jean had originally meant to return to Paris...... But she and Leslie began a '50-50 affair'; soon they were living together and finally they married. They liked each other. They were not in love.53

Leslie was a literary businessman and a self-controlled, well-spoken English gentleman. Jean found shelter once again in her second marriage and survived. But she longed for comfort, beauty and happiness. She missed her daughter who met her in summers. She found no relief in writing of the past that was tormenting her and she began to drink. Leslie tried to engage her in the act of writing and typed her scripts and published her writings. He handled her contacts and her money. He was patient and cooked and cleaned for her. The routine of household life that Jean hated, he performed easily without even her knowledge of his contribution. He took complete care of her and yet she was not really happy. His benign influence on her view of the world entered her work and her writings began to grow. She was less bitter and more detached in portrayal of her heroines now. She at least had the sense that she was not
fighting the battle alone. She wrote objectively, now, and sympathized with her men characters, too.

In the times of II world war, Leslie joined the Air Force again, and Jean was left alone. He tried to change her but she did not. What she needed was not reform and simple care but permanent love. She had a breakdown and was so miserable that she quarrelled with everyone. Self-pity and isolation obsessed her with the hatred of the world and of herself. In 1944, in London with Leslie she was so troubled that illness frightened her as loneliness. In 1945, Leslie was suddenly in severe pain and Jean's running to fetch help was useless. Leslie died and she could not forgive him for leaving her alone. In *The Sound of The River*, a pathetic short-story about man and woman in a cottage beside the river, she narrates the experience of Leslie's death. She wrote, “I had all the time the feeling that Leslie had escaped – from me, from everyone and was free at last.....” 54 She realized his goodness after she had lost him.

She wanted to finish the novel Leslie had inspired her to write and wanted to 'stop everything' after that. As always, this time too, she survived because “someone came and rescued” her. Now she was reviled by Leslie’s cousin, Max Hamer. They had met during the war and Max had an admiration for her. Now they met again as Max was the executor of Leslie’s will. Jean was fifty-five and he was sixty-three. He was working as a solicitor and had a grown-up daughter. As soon as Max was divorced in 1947, he wanted to marry Jean and she agreed. Max loved Jean most unreservedly and she often said, in old age, that her third marriage was her happiest one. Max was an enthusiast, inventive and full of get-rich-quick schemes. 'Max is a very optimistic man', Jean wrote after their marriage, “he always has some music hall act or another which he imagines will get rid of all the sea of trouble.” 55 He was generous, sweet-natured and intelligent. He was careless about spending money and earning it.

Poverty again caught Jean within a short span after their marriage and both of them were quarrelling constantly and loudly. She appeared mad, outraged and hot-tempered to her neighbours who gossiped about their life. Till the death of Max in 1965, both of them lived suffering each other's poverty and presence. In his last years, Max was severely ill and Jean was cracked, moving him every now and then to different hospitals. After his death, she found it very difficult to evade the symptoms of breakdown. She occupied her mind either in reading and writing or in drinking. Struggling and ageing, she still survived ten and more years, without a relative or a
husband near her. The memories of Leslie and Max, helped her sustain and she did
write the whole past life in stories and novels, whenever she could. Marriage thus,
proved a source of survival, thrice, for Jean so much so that she reflects the bond
between husband and wife stronger than that of lover and beloved, in her fiction.
5.4 Through biographical frame

There is a set of distinguishing features between biography and autobiography but those features are structural and formal. In content, when one comes to study the biography and autobiography of the same person, apart from the stance of the first and third-person narrator, the only difference is of outlook affecting the presentation. In reference to Jean Rhys, one cannot overlook her biography, while studying her self through the autobiography, for the following reasons:

I. Jean Rhys’ autobiography is left incomplete and her complete life doesn’t picture in it.

II. Jean Rhys wrote *Smile, Please* in late age, at the end of her life, when she was ill and non-co-operating health affected both the memory and the continuity of her narration.

III. Written in sporadic fits of memory and contemplation, her autobiography combines the brevity of expression with insufficient details and portrayal of subjective growth with the distance of detached mind.

IV. Left half-written, with some additions from her notebooks and diary, the self-narrative doesn’t include the vision of her self after marriage and womanhood. By the time she comes to talk about her first love affair and sense of futility as a result of it, the story is closed.

V. Carole Angier’s biography *Jean Rhys* is not like other biographies because it blends the life of the writer with her work. Such empathizing with object by the biographer in her intimate narrative flow, relates Jean Rhys’s phases of life with the simultaneously illustrated stories of her novels. Angier proves how there existed a very close bond between the growth of Rhys’s own personality and the life leading her to that growth-as she reflected the same life in her fiction.

According to Andre Maurois, “however difficult biography may be, it merits the devotion of our toil and of our emotions.” 56 It is in biography that a historicized collection of events in the individual’s life, is focused. The biographer, like Angier for Rhys, becomes an agent informing and instructing with the eye of a judge interpreting and concluding. The biographer, in addition, has no consciousness that the autobiographer has due to his subjectivity. “Oh,” said Jane Carlyle, “if I might write my own biography ...... without reservation .......... it would be an invaluable document for my countrymen in more than one particular. But “decency forbids !” 57
The position of autobiographer, Carlyle conveys, is less comfortable and more reserved than that of a biographer. When it comes to the past, memory actually holds the key of autobiography. Memory as one of writer's tools, is the most unreliable since it inevitably recalls selectively. According to Stanley,

Memory's lane is a narrow, twisting and discontinuous route back through the broad plains of the past, leading to a self that by definition, we can never remember but only construct through the limited and partial evidence, available to us.....in half..................hints of memory, photographs, memorabilia, other peoples remembrances.\(^{58}\)

Stanley means to communicate that memory works as a link to tie the events together, and also the persons, feelings, impressions. "If you prize your memories," stated Dillard,"........ the act of writing about an experience takes so much longer and is so much more intense than the experience itself. You are left only with what you have written ........ you have cannibalized your remembered truth and replaced it with a new one."\(^ {59}\) In brief, truth is the central concern of both - biography and autobiography. Autobiography constantly returns to the elusive self, which is forever in the process of making since the self as a mysterious faculty involves the truth. Because of this co-relation of self & truth in autobiography Olney regarded the genre as the result of the 'lure of self'. It is of a recondite nature and has an endless charm venturing inward to the buried compartment of the unconscious. Jean Rhys's story of her contacts with world began in perplexity and sad isolation resulting in the stories and novels. It was only with the changed names of persons and places that she brought her unconscious perceptions to the surface. Her diaries were her source for writing fiction and she offered very thoughtful description of her experiences and memories in it. Carole Angier links Jean's life events and moments with a very minutely observed link between her perceptions and her creations. She narrates:

Jean's story is harrowing. She had given a supreme gift of knowing how to write; she had not been given the gift of knowing how to live ........ She didn’t want admiration as a writer. She wanted love and acceptance and belonging as a woman. She never found them, or if she did, they were shadowed by fear and soon over.\(^ {60}\)

Jean wanted to be a happy woman, safely placed in some home and not a room of a cheap hotel or lodge. She longed to live those pleasures of feminine world
that a woman finds worth-sacrifice within four domestic walls. The self that she
projected in her stories is not the self of a fighting feminist but of a woman who
wanted to live as a woman but was used at every step of her life. Angier observes the
frequent play of hope and frustration in Jean's life along with the close reading of her
personality:

Her nature was full of contradictions, and
weaknesses;...against all ... she never stopped
fighting, with extraordinary resilience and courage,
for nearly ninety years. She fought with wit and
self-mockery; she fought with moments of pleasures
and friendship; she fought above all, by writing.
Her life was unbearably sad: only her art was
triumphant.61

In fact, Jean herself resisted the idea of biography to be written on her life.
Angier's vision of Jean's life is not a biography in that traditional sense. Angier
follows Jean's search for self-knowledge, through the books she wrote about her life.
She follows Jean's early experiences that appear in the novels and stories she lived
before she created. Angier charts her later life too, which she recorded not in her
fiction but in her letters; Jean's constant fight against chronic, obsessive unhappiness
with the only weapon at her disposal. This weapon was her pen, her extraordinary
talent for writing. Arnold Davidson offers a very acute appreciation of Jean's image
as a writer and autobiographer. He comments in the beginning of his book on Rhys:

Rhys wrote out of her own experience, yet the
experience is not simply what happens to her but
what happened as she perceives it. The 'is' of fact
is from the first inextricably conjoined with the
fiction of 'seems'.62

It is in this sense that autobiography is considered, by the critics like Pascal,
Olney and Gusdorf, the record of its author's "life-illusion". This life-illusion of an
autobiographer is significant for him but underestimated by others. A need for
meaning works behind the whole plan of writing an autobiography. For Jean Rhys,
this meaning was essentially the subjective interpretation of her own life-experience
even when she wrote novels and stories. She could be content if she could feel her
self to be consistent, developed naturally and to have remained true to herself. How
difficult it is to be true, especially in the role of a writer, is perceived by André'
Maurois in his commentary on biography, and autobiography. He explains:

....both dreams and reality are lacking in our

narrative. For our days and nights consist of an
infinity of images and sensations and the infinite ex hypothesi inexhaustible. James Joyce writes eight hundred closely packed pages of his Ulysses in order to record a single day, and he is still far from making it complete. What are we to say of the autobiographer who compresses twenty thousand days of his life.....?63

The only solution is editing and selection and the key to such an art of editing lies in the author’s ‘life-illusion’. Davidson somewhere else, had remarked that “the real life of an imaginative writer is that life as the writer imagines it to be”.64 Rhys’s life as she perceived was a mixture of poverty and glamour, dispossession and belated acknowledgement of her merit as a writer, alienation and moments of romance as lived by woman. Her desire to be an ordinary, happy, passive and protected woman and her ideas of courage and courtesy clashed to result in her extreme perceptions of beauty and squalor, wealth and destitution. She hated arrogance and snobbery all through her life and was fascinated by the value of loyalty, even love of luxury. Angier briefly puts it when she says that Jean’s writings during the world-war period, “have the glamour and self-destructiveness of the twenties, the poverty and anxiety of the thirties”.65 She observed the world around her but reflected only what concerned her. She also distorted, to some extent, the world while revealing her own suffering, the intense loneliness that deprived her of the ordinary family life and common domestic pleasures. It is by keeping this subjectivity of Rhys in mind that Naipaul commented that Rhys was ahead of her times. He wrote:

Jean Rhys thirty or forty years ago, identified many of the themes that engage us today, isolation, an absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence, loss.66

The lack of human contact proved a sort of social and cultural exile for her. She found herself a displaced individual gripped by an inexplicable menacing feeling, consequently being a restless and unidentified wanderer. The comfort she sought in the negro folk-songs, dances, ‘voodoo’ or ‘obeah’, the lushful landscape of Caribbean islands, wild and sensual primitive passions of inner self and finally in the continuity of writing. It was the absence of cultural heritage, psychological and religious support that led her to involve with the available and retaliate the lost. Veena Jain brings out the strikingly perceptive fusion of gender issues with those of race in Rhys. She remarks:
The West-Indian setting...experience of an expatriate, an alien and white Creole woman links it to the motif of the oppressed, the slave and the female...for...the act of looking back...was an act of reliving her childhood, of visiting her birth place and showing the 'other side' to her twentieth century readers.67

Jean, as a West-Indian Creole woman rejected by the whites and spurned by the black natives, tried to surface the questions of 'identity' of an individual through her writings. She analysed the complex layers of linguistic, racial, gender-generated and class-controlled structures of human contact. A woman's writing inevitably reveals woman's quest and suffering that her isolated 'I' nurtures, to find the truth that connects her to the larger whole. As a young woman with complex emotional history and a difficult family situation, Jean could know that her life shall make sense when she escapes from the passive subjectivity. As an ecstatic writer, she wanted to work out a justification for her aspirations. The way to explore how she had become what she was, was traced by her in writing. She could fuse, creatively, the elements of her life and there emerged the integrated pattern of intensely individualized woman. It is this woman the critics like Francis Wyndham appreciated in the notion of a composite heroine 'the Rhys woman'. Jean's voyage from the personal to the historical through the art of writing, seems to be very closer to Sartre's idea of fusing subjectivity with the general:

My experiences are significant in as much as they may be similar to those of many people like myself.........I am not only concerned with the particular meaning of one life. I want to recall the rather curious revolution of a generation.68

Jean Rhys found the agonies of self-knowledge so heart-breaking that she could never give up her sense of persecution. Her representation of contemporary sensibility of feminine world also exposes the social climate. She wrote stories of exploited women, reflecting her own fruitless labouring in the world of inhibiting relationships. The woman in her was so much haunted by black moods and despondency that she was scared of even participating in the messy business of involvement. Her disappointments hardened her feminine consciousness to the extent of making her seem cynical, critical with self as well as the world she lived in. The only wisdom garnered by her experience was to survive intellectually through writing. Her ceaseless pursuit of perfection endowed her style as a writer with sense
of growth, never satisfied self. She finally taught herself the real beginning of
fulfilment and with a true perspective, brought her former stages of life into a new
coherence. Angier explains:

> From the beginning to the end, dependence was her
way of life. It did not bring her peace and happiness
she imagined; on the contrary, it failed her and
tormented her and she wrote about its torments. But
she never gave up her ideal of it....

> ..... these experiences are what she wrote about
over and over again, seeing herself and them more
clearly each time...experiences of love and
rejection, hate and revenge, fatality and fear.69

Whenever she felt caged in the nightmare of accusation and judgment, Jean
drunk and “alternated between blankness and thoughts of suicide”. By the beginning
of 1950, she drank so much and ate so little that her hand shook uncontrollably and
she “slept all the time”. In Francis Wyndham’s words, “Jean who was a loving and
generous person, made up her mind to be selfish and cold. But of course this willed
transformation was never complete”.70

Shifting from Dominica to England, Jean had thought she had escaped the
Creole’s share of exile and alienation in West Indies. But England failed her hopes
and dreams. In her books and fantasied pictures she had seen England as the
heavenly land of love and chivalry, luxury and glory. In her actual stay in England
she found it cold, rude to her vulnerable womanhood and demoralizing for the poor
and the homeless. In her first affair she hoped to find the source for life that would
change but her lover too, failed her and she lost her faith in the possibility of
fulfilment. In this frustration of her ending love-affair she had a new hope of status
through marriage. Escaping the ‘horrors’ of London and moving to Holland and
Paris, she thought she had escaped the misery and anxiety of living in the shade of
death. But her first husband, destined it as was, failed her. She not only lost her baby
but also, in his absence, wandered again, alone and destitute, in search of life.
Entering into the life of Ford and into his house, she thought she had some support to
live. That was her beginning as a writer. Ford, too, failed her and she left Paris to try
to sell what she had written under his apprenticeship. Meeting Leslie and publishing
her writings was once again a new beginning for her. She was a writer now but the
absence of daughter and the haunting shadows of past did not allow her that
happiness she had been longing for.
Leslie did not fail her. But she failed him. She discerned that he loved her work and not herself. She did not stop drinking. She was desperate. He could only take care of Jean the writer. He could not revive her feminine existence as a woman, a wife and a mother. She was living in pieces, and she was obsessed with a sense of fragmentation. She also had a nervous breakdown for a while, like Laura, the heroine of her wartime story ‘I spy A Stranger’ whom people call “the crazy old foreigner” because she is full of obsessions, keeps a diary and the doctors refuse to certify her.

In writing the stories she was exploring her obsessions like wounds. People around her were insects and society was machine. Audrey, the heroine of The Insect World, sees people as insects. Inez in Outside The Machine sees them as parts of a machine, working smoothly and certainly. Teresa of A Solid House laughs at all wrong moments, with a laugh that “came from the depths of her a real devil of a laugh”. She was walking along the road that “leads to madness and death, they say”. Troubled by illness, dreams and forebodings, she was frightened. She was so low that controlling her demons, self-pity and paranoia, was nearly impossible for her. But she worked hard to turn the raw emotions into literature. Wild and obsessive, almost illegible emotions closer to delusion pushed her further in the continual efforts of writing. “So afraid....that I wrote and rewrote the life out of the things....” Leslie’s death failed her, once again. She lost hope and wrote to a friend, Peggy Kirkaldy that “I will go to pieces...alone”, and that she wanted to finish a book ‘partly because Leslie liked it’. Now she was sure that her life will end with no one to live with and no money to live by. But again, for the last time perhaps, she was rescued. This time it was max Hamer, Leslie’s cousin who married her to make her ‘happiest marriage’ as she often said. But her happiness was destined to an unexpected quick end and she became poorer, more prone to irritation and more vulnerable than before. There was no food in the house even when her daughter arrived after a long gap. Jean was in deep alley of depression, drinking heavily and hardly eating at all. The reasons were the same-loneliness, fear and lack of money. Max made no difference, staying away in the city with his unreliable friends. She could not write and could not stay normally cheerful. She slapped a man in the face and was found guilty. She was remanded in custody and spent five days in the hospital wing of Holloway prison. “If they treat you wrong over and over again, the hour strikes when you burst out”, she wrote in the story Let Them Call It Jazz. After the death of Max, Jean was the re-discovered writer whose search had started by the
advertisement ‘In the Quest of A Missing Author’ by Selma Vaz Dias. Jean wrote back to identify herself and finally the grand lady was triumphant in her long battle against poverty, illness, depression, isolation, dislocation and loss. It was in this last phase of long-pursued success that she confided in David Plante her desire of writing her life-story. More than the writer’s need for self-defence, it was an urge of the long-lost and late-found woman who wanted to “tell the truth”.
The difference between a novelist and an autobiographer is very obvious. The autobiographer creates the life story that he himself believes, as his own. Forrest Reid remarks that the novelist is conscious of his creative act:

“The primary impulse of the artist”, “springs...from his discontent and his art is a kind of crying for Elysium..... I may promise to present the real world and people..... but I know I cannot keep my promise”. 73

It is in this impossibility of attaining a synthesis of the inner life and the outward, that the novelist supersedes. That is why the novelists like Herbert Spencer believe that autobiography produces some ‘irremediable distortions’. André Maurois observes the complexities of the form minutely and explains:

There are deserts in every life and the desert must be depicted if we are to give a fair and complete idea of the country. It is true that these long periods of empty monotony sometimes throw up the colour of the livelier into greater relief. 74

The novelist has his own freedom of cutting the monotony and absurdity of truth but the autobiographer has to write with his malady. Concerned with the mode of individual consciousness, autobiography becomes a factually true evidence of the author’s personality. The moment a writer takes to write an autobiography, as Spengemann finds,

The distinction between fact and fiction, between autobiographical recollection and autobiographical invention, begins to blur. Not even lies or self-contradictions are untrue as long as they generate those ecstatic feelings which are the ground of true being and of sympathetic consanguinity. 75

In consideration of Jean Rhys’s autobiography and her novels, the line between the fact and fiction blurs especially in her protagonist whom the critics of Rhys agree to call the ‘Composite heroine’ or ‘Rhys Woman’. Most of the critics assume that Jean Rhys wrote about one woman that was herself, at “different stages” of life. They find a very obvious bond between Rhys’ heroines and her own personal make-up. They could not separate her writing from her life. Helan Carr commented that the ‘feminine distress’ of her heroines took on all attributes of Rhys. Francis
Wyndham put forward the notion of Rhys' composite heroine, leading inevitably to a conflation of heroine and author. Sue Roe observes:

Jean Rhys is a writer whose subject matter was the female imagination, and who wrote from entirely personal and subjective vision. Her work is evocative of the complex and troubling connections between sexuality, creativity and the power of sustained loss or grief, and as such her writing reflects her own process of self-discovery.76

Roe explains that Rhys's art of writing is a process of self-discovery. She considers Rhys's subjective realism as the source of her fictional reflections of passion and desire, anger and protest in her women. Helen Carr, seems to stress the autobiographical dimension in Rhys's fiction. She brings out that Rhys, "like Sylvia Plath,...uses her life experiences; the pain, the rawness and the wounds as the material from which she writes her stories".77 Arnold Davidson begins his study of Rhys's novels by studying her autobiography first. He justifies this way of Rhys' criticism by stating that

every autobiography is...a partial fictionalization of the remembered past. But the problem is compounded for an autobiographer such as Rhys who has already so thoroughly fictionalized so much of her past.78

To exactly locate the fictive self of Jean Rhys in the novels she wrote, and the women she wrote about, one can follow a thematic view of her life and creativity in parallel explanations. One by one, it is appropriate to study the themes as love and money, anger and protest, womanhood and insanity, isolation and identity, race and nationality in her creative writings as well as life.

1) Love and money:

The life of Jean Rhys was tragic most of the times because of double poverty. One economic and the other of love. She never received both at a time. Love and money were incompatible forces leading her to troubles like isolation and entanglement, passivity and mad rage, quest for peace and want of luxury. Rhys's women are arrested by the mechanism of sex and money in the society of men-where she finds herself a 'doormat' in the world of 'boots'. The violence that her protagonists suffer and the exploitation they face, manipulated like puppets, creates Rhys's mockery of social hypocrisy. She ridicules, in her subtle style, the culture that makes women sacrifice their body for the sake of money, social protection and
survival. The conditions that result in men’s incomprehension of women in the world of love, sex and relationships, Rhys finds, are largely determined by money or financial status. As individuals her women maintain their livelihood and sustainance at the price of social respectability and reality. The basic response to such conditions is a search for security, a quest for home, a question of self-discovery and survival. It is for this dimension that Rhys is often placed among the expatriate writers committed to physically and spiritually homeless existence; she is considered to be one among the twentieth century masters like Lawrence, Joyce, Conrad, Beckett and Eliot.

Rhys started earning money before she fell-in-love in her early youth. The reason was her father’s death and her mother’s economic anxiety. She tried to persist in her desire to be a performer in the touring theatrical company. At nineteen when she entered into her first love-affair with an older man, she had not imagined the consequent drop-out from it and the ending in payments sent to her through an intermediary. As an autobiographer, retrospectively she could comprehend the complexity of that stage:

it seems to me now that the whole business of money and sex is mixed up with something very primitive and deep. When you take money directly from someone you love it becomes not money but a symbol. The bond is now there... It is at once humiliating and exciting.79

When she broke-away from that first love-affair, Jean wrote a single-line, thrice, in the form of a poem. “I didn’t know”. She did not know this would be the end. She had never known such would be the misery of loneliness and melancholy shattering her composite self. She had never imagined such would be the pain of dependence and involvement. Arnold Davidson finely explains the predicament through his Marxist vision of Jean’s trapped self between ‘eros’ and economics’. He remarks:

...the genesis of question that continue to occupy Rhys.... What, she asks....is the relationship between eros and economics, and more specifically how does the capitalization of beauty along with the stereotyped sex roles of Western society....impel women to embrace their own ‘commodityness’?80

Davidson finds that Jean Rhys’s effort of anatomizing her own self results in the anatomizing of society, of human relationships, of the plight of women in the
world of men. According to Dr. Girdhari, “the author’s own experiences form the
nexus of the lives of the characters”, created by Rhys and “Male domination is
somehow linked with financial dependence”, that makes the Rhys’s women helpless
and passive.81

Jean passed her early womanhood in depressing industrial towns, eating
boiled onion supers, sleeping in cold shabby rooms and escaping the quarrelsome
landladies. She had no prospects because she had neither love nor money to live by.
The result of her first affair ‘a regular cheque sent through a lawyer and requiring the
acknowledgement of receipt’ was not a symbol of love. Davidson comments that the
question Rhys raises as a writer is

given the values of the time, what is the essential
difference between a prostitute and a princess
elevated to her new status by a storybook marriage?
And if there is no essential difference, then, what
does the manifest social difference signify?82

Like Jean’s own plight for earning her survival, all her heroines suffer the
same plight of money in their lives. Marya, in Quartet marries in the hope of
economic protection, due to lack of her own employment, and later on surrenders to
the whimsical Heidler couple in the cruel game for the sake of economic support
only. Anna, in Voyage In The Dark is prompted by her creature comforts into her
voyage ending in the dark world making all sorts of compromises. Julia in After
Leaving Mr. Mackenzie is played with like a helpless puppet, left finally ‘hurt’ and
‘alone’ because she was in ‘middle-class, no money’ position, devoid of even “remote
family recognition” as Staley describes. In Staley’s view, Julia is incapable and
broken down in her efforts “to find any meaningful human bond” because she is lost
in the world “whose highest value is protection not love”.83 Her life had been “a
round of men....a desperate attempt at some kind of rebirth,....some sign of concern
or hope”.84

Sasha in Good Morning Midnight is shunting back and froth between in her
involvements with two Russians, their painter friend and the gigolo, and her condition
is subtly demonstrated by Rhys in her first consumer question; should she buy a
painting or a night with Rene’ the gigolo. She also finds the question of identity
connected with her dilemma : “Who are you, anyway ? Who’s your father and have
you got any money ? And if not, why not ?”85
The problem of existence is a prime question, for the heroines of Rhys, resulting in a number of conditions like loss of dignity and protection, isolation and exile, emotional and economic depression, lack of moral or human support and also the question of identity, nationality and survival. Rhys was herself careless about money despite her recurring anxiety for economic security. All her women do spend a lot of money when they have it and most of the times when they lack it their only choice is to be unhappy. Louis in *Quartet* speaks for the truth Rhys observed, when she says, "It's appalling...to think of the difference that money makes to a woman's life". Rhys painfully concluded that "poverty, is the cause of many compromises".

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys observes the same relationship of eros and economic from a double viewpoint. The husband Rochester, in the novel, feels the same 'commodityness' and this is Rhys's vision of the other side of the picture:

...the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks...

John Baylay once commented that a love affair "brings man-woman unnaturally together" while marriage keeps them "right and dignified distance apart". In Jean Rhys' life and fiction, however, both love and marriage, seem to be contaminated by the animal instinct for survival, for which money is the only solution. The ideal of togetherness in love is shattered by the money-minded moves and the ideal of marital bliss is destroyed by the 'moneyed' or moneyless compromises imposed upon the couple.

II) Anger and protest:

Jean Rhys's women demonstrate the darkness of melancholy that they derive from the constitution of the writer herself. Helpless, passivated, chronically submissive observers of life, they are the 'difficult women'. Their conduct is characterized by the incongruity of ethical consciousness and the inappropriateness of their psychological balance. David Plante quotes that Rhys firmly believed that "a woman without a man is nothing" and that she was weary of books and men to the extent of confiding in him, "I want out. I never wanted to be a writer. Never. I couldn't help it". Even the desire for writing autobiography, was what she could not help. She wrote it because "everything they say about me is wrong. I want to tell the truth".
For Jean Rhys, writing was a way of protest. It was the only medium she could release her anger and protest. Her intense desire to write autobiography was both a need for self-defence and the gesture of her protest, against what others said about her. K. Wheeler maintains that Jean Rhys, like her characters...had to create herself, and she is also the primary audience of her self-creation. She observes:

for Jean Rhys, writing was a means....by which one's self...............became............a different self and experience...transformed......because, it can be relationship with other things....suggesting that woman sees her life not as reality, but as a dramatization....being observed by someone else....life becomes a fiction, a process of creating a self and author, actor, and audience are all one role simultaneously.92

Rhys was never involved in the politics of her native land, Dominica. Paralleled with Joseph Conrad and Hemingway for her modernist experimental style of writing and psychological explorations, she centered her themes around “isolation, absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence and loss”.93 The metropolitan wanderer in the cities like Paris and London, she wrote about women who are made up of the fragments of her own self. Like Rhys herself, Julia slaps Mr. Mackenzie and his lawyer in the face and hurls the cheque at him in protest. Like Rhys herself, Marya hated the ‘game’ of love-knowing the pretension in it, and yet sporadically loved Mr. Heidler, the prototype of Ford Madox Ford. Like Rhys, she married in the hope of happy and secured life and like Rhys, she was out of it in the moments of impulse. Her anger and protest is the same anger with which Rhys created Quartet as a gesture of her protest against Mr. Ford and his absurd game.

Like Rhys, her heroines felt a strong passion for luxury and comforts of life; like her, they were fascinated by black entity and culture, with their attraction for ‘gaiety’ and fearless existence. Like her they are fragile, beautiful, with their ‘piled-up scented hair’, moody and impulsive, passive and dependent. In her heroines, Jean arrested not only the essence of her own life, but also the typical female self. It was the burden of dependence that she found so hard to shed, and her women too, find it impossible to get rid of that. Like her, they are self-absorbed, bitter, “accommodating sufferers” who “knowingly participate in their victimization”.94 They are easily vulnerable women in the dark and indifferent world of sexual politics and class “malignancy of the faceless and nameless oppressors”.95
Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* represents best the torn self of Jean Rhys. Her childhood memories, the historical racial conflicts, her compromised marriage and momentary illusion of love, her gradual sinking into depression, superstition and finally through madness up to death, all are the phases that Rhys had been through. Anger and protest in Rhys is especially symbolized in Marya and Antoinette the two reflecting acutely the form of Rhys’ own anger and protest.

III ) Womanhood and insanity:

In her fiction, Rhys pursues the theme of rejected womanhood. She portrays the fate of woman trapped in the male-oriented Victorian ethics, oppressed, subjugated and goaded finally to insanity. The theme of alienation and rejection is very closely rooted in womanhood since it is typically feminine set of qualifies that negatively surface in her writings; the qualities like dependence, passivity, blindness in creed, vulnerability and childlike fear creating paranoia. Judy Simons observes that

> From Suzy in the early story *Triple Sec* (1927) to Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Rhys’s protagonists are alone in an alien culture, seeking an appropriate voice in which to express the sense of self which becomes ever more elusive.96

In her exiled life, Rhys carved out a well-defining female space for herself. She could get rid of the dark, scaring, overpowering shadows of alien culture and patriarchal oppression only through her writings. Reflecting what she experienced in life, through stories and novels was the path towards maintaining sanity, for her. The world around, and the tragic fate which was maddening her self, was thrown by her into the inkpot. Like Virginia Woolf’s ideal, Rhys had taken up the inkpot and flung it upon the ‘ideal-images’ of woman as ‘angle-in-the-house’. Mona Fayad explains the struggle of Rhys’ heroine for representation, as she studies *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

> ....the possibility of establishing a narrative with woman as subject....does not begin with an assertion of ‘I’ that differentiates itself from the other. Instead, that self is presented as objectified by society....a female in a patriarchal society.97

Fayad’s study of the presentation of girlhood and womanhood by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* explains the author’s quest and predicament as woman; she finds that the self-denying girls who are allowed the looking glass, carry us back to ‘angle-in-the-house’. “Rhys reinforces this attitude with the intrusion of the Bishop who
patriarchally dictates what is ‘proper’ for woman in monastry”. Her white protagonists are passive victims of social injustice, and her black wise women like Christopine, teach their intuitive practicality by admonishing the delicate women, “Get up girl, and dress yourself. Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world.” But Rhys herself, has no such practical sense while she lived through her tragic episodes of life. She accepted the act of writing although ‘dangerous’ but she was not an adept in the art of living those dark moments she recorded so artfully in her novels. Lucy Wilson estimates:

But Rhys herself ....was coerced into self-betrayal. In a dialogue with herself, Rhys describes her writing as ‘dangerous’ because of the madness that others perceive in her.

Implicitly political, Rhys, intuited that her thoughts and writings were ‘dangerous’ to the establishment. As a woman, she had seen how difficult it was to survive in a hostile world. Living in 1930’s and touring with third-rate drama companies, girls fell easy prey to men holding slightest power. Anna’s justification that she will do “anything for good clothes, anything for clothes” proves the fate of woman alone in a foreign land, without financial support. Orphaned and exiled, the materialistic society finds such women free but not secure, beautiful but not rich, “accommodating sufferers”.

Antoinette’s insanity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as Emery explains, is the product of socio-cultural denial of woman’s self. She comments that it allows her to act where she actually is,.....in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that dissolves Victorian distinctions between public and private experience, legitimate and illegitimate sexuality, madness and reason, primitive and civilized behaviour, fiction and fact.

IV) Isolation and identity:

Rhys’s writings are marked by a brutal honesty that she employs for exposing the entire fabric of socio-moral and cultural ethos. It is in the inevitable destiny of this ethos that Rhys finds herself and her women placed, displaced and misplaced frequently. They are isolated and live unidentified in the world of fear and uncertain ties....Rhys depicts the isolation and paranoia of feminine consciousness, the hopeless and the lost women who yearn for a straw to stick on to. But
eventually, they crumble down in their attempt to survive.\textsuperscript{102}

Isolation of individual is one of Rhys's central thematic concerns. Both men and women seem to be completely broken down, without a meaningful bond in their lives. “The barriers, erected by their private selves, in different ways, for different reasons are too painfully strong...” to offer them any sense of solace.\textsuperscript{103} A very powerful symbol in novels, is the ‘room’ that demonstrates the powerless women hunting for food, clothes, shelter in city-streets polluted by so called modernized and urbanized culture. Wanting the sources of mental and physical sustenance, sans education and family, her protagonists have no prestige, no income, no identity and no home. They seem to be irrational in their creed and feel disoriented hysterically. Their hardships prevent their spontaneity and their experiences increase their bitterness. Room stands for their closed minds, and the walls they need for self-protection:

\begin{quote}
the recurrence of room reinforces..... the paradoxical function of protecting as well as destroying compassion and empathy. In this context, the room is a means of rendering oneself insensitive to the inevitability of suffering.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

Room shows the isolation of homeless women and clothing manifests symbolically the need-based patterns of human relations, of individual and social bonds. Travelling from one town to another, shifting from one room to other, Jean was herself a followed up victim of destitution, isolation and hopeless survival. In her novels, a room, is all that her heroines have. It is only in the last novel \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} that the implications of room change drastically. For Bertha Mason, the insane wife of Rochester, room is the place where she is locked up to live in her own world of dreams, illusions, screams and flames. Room in \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} becomes the place for self-destructive existence rather than self-preservative survival.

The question of identity for Rhys, was realized in her middle-age and before her revival as a writer, she had started perceiving the sense of nativity, of Creole origin and her West-Indian spirit. The faceless and nameless oppressors located sporadically in black or British banners, were now broadened in Victorian, European and Patriarchal stamps. She was now mellow with the variation of colonial, racial, postcolonial dimensions to reflect in her writing. Leonard John states that
The Dominican lady, with her extraordinary gift of astonishing, painful, claustrophobic, utterly convincing. Expression of sensibility that seems to have informed the sensibilities of later writers.  

In the sense of futility and compulsion, she lived the life in rooms and streets. Her women, too aimlessly tread the path of life with their scarred psyche and their deep suffering that can only paralyse. She had always known that “there was nothing I could not do, nothing I could not become” and yet, her tragic sense she could never alter.  

V) Race and nationality:  

Rhys as a writer delves deep into the world of personal relations, female predicament, individual suffering and subjective issues; she also at the same time, maintains the alertness to reveal the historical consciousness, socio-cultural concerns and moral, racial, national and sexual complications rooted in the community she lived. Her impersonality fused with indifference creates an illusion of subjectivity that ranks her with Flaubert, Eliot and Virginia Woolf.  

Rhys suffered the hatred of blacks. She portrays the conflicting pressures on the white minority by the newly-liberated blacks. She was troubled by the memories of the past suffering caused by racial crossings in Dominica; Sue Roe exactly points out the link of Rhys’ nostalgic pain when she states:  

Shock polarizes; so does nostalgia. Being black is fluid and yet rooted. at once autonomous and interacting. Jean Rhys’s own recollections of her Caribbean past, like Anna Morgan’s, release a voice of sadness and regret, a warm engagement with ingenuous feeling.  

Rhys’ fascination for being black, in a strange way counter-accounts for her rejection by the white British and European community. On one hand she felt the strong hatred that the blacks demonstrated; on the other, she pitied herself for the loss of nationality, belonging and nativity. According to Maria Olaussen, Rhys, extraordinary, shows her implicit consciousness of larger political context. She comments:  

....Rhys’ exploration of the construction of her own racial identity into a larger political context. the meaning of who she is as a white West-Indian woman, cannot be understood separately from the way this identity has been
In the view of Olaussen, Rhys' construction of blackness is an escape from her white femininity. Right from her childhood preference for a black doll over a white one, she had indicated the "sense of kinship with her black compatriots"\(^{109}\). When Europe was her home, Rhys could not escape from West Indies that was a part of her literary consciousness, her sense of rootedness and her painful quest for belonging. The ache of exile marks her women, drifting in the world of racial tensions with their nationless identity. In the metropolitan rooms of cheap hotels, they long for the landscape of their past and withdraw in nostalgia. In the country of their childhood and past islands, they find the roads missing, and cannot bear to see the change that time has brought. C. Vijayshree notices the wider implications of Rhys, manifested in her women:

Rhys.....achieves a transforming invasion and rupture, releases the repressed, edges the canonical with the subversive, the patriarchal with the feminine, the imperialist with the anti-colonialist and successfully clears a space from where all forms of hegemony and domination may be confronted and contested.\(^{110}\)

In re-writing the story of Bronte's dehumanized victim Bertha Mason, Rhys not only voiced the Creole woman's self-discovery but also spelled out a targeted textual revolution with clarity and details of the historical forces that shaped the life and experience of Bertha. Her concern with the antecedents of Bertha's insanity, was Rhys' feeling of the need for justifying an individual's sanity; "She must be at least plausible with a past....the reason why he thinks she is mad and why of course she goes mad"\(^{111}\). A white Creole woman's exile in an alien land and her quest for belonging keeps her swaying between race and nationality as questions she seeks to answer. The themes of rejection, alienation, displacement, isolation and loss of identity, security and human touch creep in to contribute together to Rhys's world of tragic realism.
5.6 Autobiographer and the autobiographical

Jean Rhys passed the last phase of her life in Devonshire. "She found pleasures in memories, as an old woman might have done. Her mind was a confusion of memory and imagination". Desirous of write an autobiography at the age of eighty-nine, Rhys was not really a self-absorbed passive woman that once she had been. Her will to write an autobiography was her need for uttering the truth that she had known; perhaps it was only herself who had known that truth. For many writers, the simple equation of past self and the present one is concerned with the evaluation of gains and losses. Autobiography for such writers seems, to be a process of calculation of eventual past according to the present form of their existence. They either complain about their agonies or glorify their lucky chances of happiness in life. In the words of Roy Pascal,

> the deepest purpose of autobiography is the account of a life as a projection of the real self the self that lies deeper than personality....(and) it may be prompted primarily by a personal need.....for confession or clarity..... a personal pressure.......113

Pascal's principle is applicable to Rhys's act of writing autobiography. She wanted to project her real self 'deeper than her personality' since she was hurt to know that "everything they say about me is wrong. I want to tell the truth". She was not able to hold pen for long and her hand trembled. It was David Plante who agreed to serve "as her amanuensis". But the autobiography was destined to remain incomplete. Davidson remarks that the original aim of it was “to put the record straight” but “the author provides no clear, coherent account of the most disordered time of her chaotic existence” and one has to read her fiction to perceive her complete self-narration. Davidson further comments:

> ....instead of clarifying distinctions between the author’s life and her biographically based stories and novels, *Smile, Please* only further confuses the fictional with the factual.....we already know the basic details of the writer’s past and.....how Rhys viewed that past......the “real life of an imaginative writer is that life as the writer imagines it to be...."114

Davidson explains the necessity of reading Rhys’ complete work and supplementing her image as a writer with the connection between her autobiography
and her writings, autobiographical in essence. He believes that Rhys wrote out of her own experience but the experience is not simply what happened to her but even what she perceived as happenings in her life.

The position of Rhys as an autobiographer is ambiguous because she is autobiographical in her position as a writer and because she did not escape her colonial, racial, feminine and moral consciousness in her both positions. On one hand she is so self-absorbed that her experience creeps in the creative writings either through her self as fictive reflection in her women or through the ethos she builds for her stories in other characters, setting, situations, even language. In short, it is very tough craftsman’s task to discern the thin and vague line dividing Rhys the storyteller from Rhys the autobiographer. By the time she came to write her autobiography she had grown suspicious and fatigued of motives and ways of the world:

now I an almost as wary of books as of people. They are capable of pushing you into the limbo of the forgotten. They can tell lies and vulgar, trivial lies…and make you doubt not only your memory, but yours senses.115

In her long battle as an expatriate writer and a Creole woman exposed to the world of chaotic relationships, Rhys directed her writing through the personal and subjective history to the socio-historical ideas, situations and actions. Her effort to objectify and provide context, order, shape and validate to her experience resulted in her fiction fused with self knowledge of the writer. “I feel so fiercely…..” she claimed, “No one knows anything but himself or herself”.116

It is an inherent generic feature of autobiography that it questions and answers the range of truth that the author as a matured person perceives. Pascal states that a youngman’s autobiography lacks authenticity and commitment to truth of life. The autobiographer needs to have ‘lived a long life’ and his self narrative needs to be a product of maturity. In the same scrutiny of the form, Pascal also brings out the problem of recollection, active functioning of memory in late age, by the autobiographer. He remarks that autobiographers usually indicate a certain hesitancy or renunciation in regard to the task of grasping the whole range of experience and development…..the historical consciousness that the time described has now altered….gone beyond recall.117
Many writers betray a distrust of continuous narrative and are content with the impressionistic sketches, as truer to their mode of experience. Jean Rhys is one of them. She had the feeling, as an autobiographer, and as a novelist too, that the time she describes is lost. She also had the conscious sense of representation in her work. Her object was twofold. On one hand she wanted to tell the truth to others. On the other hand, she wanted to assure herself that her truth was accepted as truth in public mind too. She was not seeking a necessarily moral or social acceptability but simply a grasp of herself as a known self and of her life as a whole. Phyllis Rose, reading Rhys’ autobiography, complains that Rhys had strange reservations. She comments that her fiction is “narrow, complaining, her heroines tiresomely self-pitying and vain”.118 Sue Roe answers that Rhys’s writings represent a particular kind of psychological quest. The quest is dependent on the passivity, the ‘de-motivation’ of her heroines. Roe analyses:

Jean Rhys herself...... great loss and her loss permeates, suffuses and sustains her writing, her writing practice and her fictions....119

At the cost of prestige and public image, the autobiographer sets out to expose the private truth and the inner world of emotions. In case of Rhys, the irony of belief and doubt interferes with her story telling art as well as self-narration. The critics like Marcelle Bernstein receive her writings on the face-value of her expression and fail to perceive the depth and intensity of her subjective exposures:

her life seems to have been a drifting, haphazard, emotional affair......Married three times she describes herself as “passive”...... The women in her books are mirrors in which she examines herself minutely......120

Bernstein’s comment ignores the sentence she herself quotes from Rhys, “I am not very much a chooser. I’m much more a being chosen. I really don’t know why I have had such a restless existence”.121 Jean was indeed ‘being chosen’ by time, by men who played their roles in her life as lovers and husbands and by passivity that made her restless, yet helpless. She was too soft, sad and uncertain and the only thing that she could do was writing, “brooding over her haphazard existence that lacked ‘solidity’ and ‘the necessary fixed background’”.122 She wrote in the midst of black moods, melancholy and loneliness that carried her away from all ties of the world. She told David Plante, “Nothing ever justifies what you have to do to write, to
go on writing. But you do, you must, go on. You hear a voice that says, ‘write this’ and you must write it to stop the voice.” Rhys went to silence this inner voice of conscience.

Poverty was a root cause of Rhys’ tragic episodes in life but she was agonized more by the want of emotional bond, secure love and pure relationships. The narrowness and lack of depth in the world maddened her and the superficial, hollow snobbery outraged her. Carole Angier understands this when she explains:

she longed for someone entirely secure, yet entirely sensitive; someone utterly respectable and safe, yet able to understand her lonely, fearful, rebellious nature........

Jean’s position as an autobiographer is slightly weak on account of the following limitations she could not evade:

I) Incompleteness:

As it is, autobiography is a genre destined to remain incomplete. Jean Rhys’ Smile, Please was left half-written and incompleteness of self-narration formed her limitation as an autobiographer. For, before she could arrive in her youth in retrospective narration, Jean fell with severe heartpain. Andre’ Deutsch, her publisher edited her diary and included in the text of Smile, Please. The primary interest of an autobiography is invariably the writer’s self. In this sense Smile, Please does not appear a self-indulgent portrait. It personalizes the history of its author’s life but it also historicizes the personal. As an artist Jean never compromised and as a woman, she could never evade the compromises. Smile, Please is a story of her compromises as each of her novels and stories. In all her writings she wrote about her lifelong feelings of alienation from both the societies she was swaying between the Dominican and the Anglo-European. As a white colonial native she was identified as British but the sense of ‘racial’ purity in the Caribbean community was a vexing issue.

II) Impressionistic Style:

Rhys had learned from Ford Madox Ford, the idiom to render her ideas in modern style in the fictional forms. She had known how personal experience could be transmuted into the subject matter of art. Her instinctive sense of form, uniformity and originality places her among the modern giants of her times. Her associative narration of ideas rather than the linear one, makes her writing impressionistic.
Smile, Please she wanted to ‘put the record straight’ but the second half of her life, after she had left West Indies, is fragmented and missing. As Davidson observes:

....the author provides no clear, coherent account of the most disordered time of her chaotic existence, and the temptation still remains to read her life according to the circumstances of her different protagonists and vice-versa.¹²５

according to Davidson Smile, Please only “confuses the fictional with the factual”, because of Rhys’s impressionistic style of writing, and “fragmentary....nature of this memoir makes it an appropriate introduction to Rhys’s impressionistic art”. It was, perhaps, Rhys the novelist who created the autobiography in her own style.

III) Consciousness of Motive:

Rhys’ autobiography is her insistent affirmation of self at the expense of past. Her life had been a story of “the predominance of loss” and ‘prevalence of longing’:

The larger world was becoming less accommodating.....charged with.....fear and distrust....she encounters the obverse of prejudice, an ‘impersonal implacable’ animosity that proves, to the child,......“we are hated”.¹²６

Rhys’s motive behind writing Smile, Please was to ‘tell the truth’, that people would never know unless she tells it. In an interview she claimed, “If you want to write the truth, you must write about yourself.....I am the only truth I know”.¹²７

The hard and bohemian life that she lived made her conscious of the public-opinion. She was conscious, as an autobiographer, of her motive of ‘defending’ herself and proving how everything ‘they say’ about her “was wrong”.

IV) Age And Memory:

Smile, Please as an autobiography suffers a drawback of memory failing due to the author’s age. Davidson explains:

Rhys’s last act both to vindicate her ‘abject’ life and merit release from it, was the writing of Smile, Please. It is not inappropriate that she died in the middle of that task, nor is it surprising that intimations of mortality run through the autobiography that describes most fully the writer’s childhood and then deals in a distinctly cursory fashion with the different set backs she suffered as an adult.¹²８
At many points she does not recall the details and confesses that she has forgotten. Apart from that, the affair with Ford is not even mentioned in *Smile Please*, as it had left a bitter feeling in her memory. She maintained that “all of a writer that matters is in the book or books. It is idiotic to be curious about the person” and Davidson believes that she is “at least partially right”.129

V) Gap in Authorship:

Lost in the world of poor relationships and moneyless wandering, Rhys had a gap in her creative career before she was re-discovered by Selma Vaz Dias. She was missing in the ‘odd circle’ of alcohol and melancholy, poverty and want of love. In her letter to Selma she wrote:

.....try not to be so sad. Can’t you think that it is the price of feeling anything at all, or living, or acting, or being yourself even it’s the shadow of light as it were, this black melancholy or the other way round.130

Jean suffered what the feminist critic, Sandra Gilbert labels “the author’s mirroring her own anxiety and rage, the female schizophrenia of authorship”.131 That gap in her authorship proved the feeling of time having no sense, and she was ‘sick of being sad’, of knowing the ‘craziness of existence’ and ‘futility of all things’. The replay of past compromises for monetary considerations, was haunting her mind and she was trying to drown her insecurity in over drinking, only to herself. “She transformed”, as a writer, “the dismal disasters of chaotic, disordered life into perennial classics.....sad, solitary, cut off from mainstream forms the crux of society and her very failure is a representative symbol for the world we inhabit”.132

Rhys lived like a ‘driftwood at the mercy of winds and waves’ with no choice of direction. The winds of emotion ad the waves of depression carried her from one loss to another. It was the loss of father that resulted in her loss of family. The loss of home led her to the loss of virginity. The loss of lover resulted in the loss of faith in pure relationships. The loss of motherhood became the cause of the loss of protection. After marriage the simultaneous loss of husband, shelter and daughter threw her in the deep valley of isolation. The loss of happiness and of hope made her ignore herself although she remarried twice. The loss of harmony and sense of communion in relationships goaded her into the loss of rationality and she ended as a lost, self-destructive alcoholic, with nothing else to do than writing till death.
Fame as a writer came rather late to Rhys but she was never hasty about it. She felt peaceful and contented in the last years of life. It was only after the second marriage that she had started her literary career. She wrote novels and stories and also translated from French. Rhys' achievement as writer is in her total devotion to truth and her commitment to honesty of expression. In her early youth, starting her search for source of livelihood, in the limited group of chorus-line, she had always remained 'apart', lonely and 'frightened of her loneliness'. Poverty as the cause of 'many compromises' had taught her the lessons of 'fear and distrust' left in her life by Meta, her cynical nurse. With all her sense of insecurity and helplessness, she spent her life in the world of theatre where the environment was not congenial to her spirit. It was a painted cloth, to her surprise. Coming out from such an artificial world of make up and anxiety, she found some refuse in a love affair that could only sustain her for a short while. To escape, again, from the failure and compulsion of that depressing bond, she married Jean Lenglet and entered another circle of vicious relationships. Her association with Ford brought her into the literary circle of the day and she was ready to suffer the superimposed gap between creativity and fame. She was published and known as a writer, again lost and again found, finally to be awarded and rewarded for her long pursued hardwork and painful in efforts.

Shumaker isolates the subjects that generate the revelation of deep feelings but which the autobiographers omit from their life-accounts. He states that the exclusion of siblings, children, mates and romantic attachments, is a common feature of autobiographies. Jelinek supports him and explains:

.....most autobiographers are achievers with self-sustaining ego-systems,........few autobiographers write about their children... women are more likely to include them..... the emotional and physical needs...... are essential aspects of their life-studies....

Jean Rhys' autobiography includes some details of her parents, her aunts and servants of the family as the nurse, Meta. She does not record any memories of her brothers and sisters except a few moments that caused her mother's attention to divert to her younger sister. Spengemann argues that autobiography can do without "a consistent chronical account of biographical facts but cannot, without
the assumption of an absolute unconditioned self" that transcends to justify all conditioned experience.\textsuperscript{134} The central concern of autobiography is the realization and explanation of self. Without the consciousness of self one cannot write about it. In autobiography, whatever one writes, happens to be about the self it constructs. “Autobiography thus becomes synonymous with symbolic action in any form, and the word ceases to designate a particular kind of writing.”\textsuperscript{135} Jean Rhys’ writings pursue her evading self. She includes the main events of her life in disconnected fashion, by duplicating the manner in which they were actually lived. It is as if “Rhys, always concerned with the shape of her work, had worked out form, appropriate for a nearly formless life”.\textsuperscript{136} According to Davidson, \textit{Smile, Please}, for all its limitations, is an appropriate introduction to this author’s biography.

In Rhys’ position as a woman writer she suffered a few limitations. These can be viewed by critically analyzing her autobiography and her autobiographical works. They are as the following:

i) Conspicuous historicity:

Autobiographies fail if the authors lack insight or seriousness, wholeness of character, states Pascal. He believes that autobiography must create a significant meeting place between the individual and the outer world that illumines both. For Rhys, being a writer was a matter of chance initially and a sort of compulsion afterwards. Like a work of history she tried to be factually true and offered an honest ‘unvarnished’ picture of the facts in her writings. Phyllis Rose, commented that Jean Rhys had written a ‘bad’ autobiography and “her autobiography has little to add”:\textsuperscript{137} Rose’s comment is partial since she is blind to the conscious and conspicuous historicity of Rhys’s style. Naipaul, on the other hand, discerned it and admired Rhys’ writings frankly. He brought out that:

her books may serve current causes but she is above causes. What she has written about, she has endured over a long life; and what a stoic thing she makes the act of writing appear.\textsuperscript{138}

In her quest for peace and love, comfort and protection, identity and nativity, Rhys could never escape the historical sense of blacks and whites, of Creoles and expatriates, of women and wanderers, of outsiders and immigrants.

ii) Passivity and Pessimism:

Leading the ‘unbearably sad’ life and pursuing the ‘triumphs in art’ of writing, Rhys was concerned, as a woman writer, with the imposed passivity on women and
with the pessimism she could never get rid of. Her writings reflect the loss of dignity and security, the want of money and love, the absence of positive and satisfactory bonds of relationships, the lack of economic and material source for happiness and survival. Homelessness resulting in exploitation, poverty and depression is a very frequent chain of suffering in Rhys' novels and her life. Searching for passion, fulfillments, emotional and moral support, her women are free to wander but not free to choose. Being a woman is more than being a beggar or an orphan. She outrageously questioned "since I was born, hasn't every word I said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained?". The conflicts she confronted were the source of her continuous breakdown into pessimism and passivity. Her autonomy of spirit was crippled by the socially uniformed norms of womanhood.

Twelve-year-old Phoebe in Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose, learns that the qualities the world values in women are self doubt, silence and sacrifice. She learns that as a female she will be blamed for what men do; when they are attracted to her, she is "provocative"; when they sexually exploit her, she is wicked'. Before she is matured enough to make her choices, Phoebe decides that she cannot marry since "If no one ever marries me, and I don't know why they should, for nurse says I am not pretty and seldom very good". To be a woman, Rhys had discovered, was to be a victim; she demonstrates in her novels how women are excluded from economic and emotional security. As Nancy Leigh points out, they are "alienated from their bodies, and sexuality, and barred from power or independence by a society bent on creating female roles to meet male social and sexual needs". Rhys had herself suffered such victimization and speaks for those women who silently do the same. She stated, "I can abstract myself from my body" because such a psychic division comes naturally from experience with a world in which the overwhelming massage to woman is "Smile Please not so Solemn". Unable to evade from the stagnant center of passivity, her true self remained internalized.

iii) Want of Aestheticity:

A major period of her life in middle age, Jean Rhys lived self-destructively, lost in alcoholism and want of human contacts. Her publishers thought her dead, people talked about her is past tense. In her quest for belonging and knowledge, she had drifted away from her own self and the writer's sense of aestheticity. Paul Bailey has relevant view, in his remark:
Jean Rhys has been accused unjustly, I think, of sentimentality, a detached artist, self-pity, she makes a vice necessary for survival.\footnote{143}

It is true that Rhys is a detached artist, although living as a woman she could never detach herself. She felt in love with ‘beautiful words’ when she learned poetry in childhood, but she never used those to make her style rhetorically showy. Diana Athill pointed out that “her language does what it needs to do with elegance and economy which is perfectly natural and easy”.\footnote{144} It is because of her plain style and simple language that Helen McNeil calls her ‘feminine rather than feminist’ and Helen Carr praises her decorationless natural expression.

iv) Ambiguous ‘dependence’:

In her hard and monotonous life, Rhys transformed from a free-spirited Creole girl to a wandering youth, a passivated and depressed wife, self-destroying alcoholic, deeply passionate writer and a very matured woman. Her deprivations pushed her from one phase to another, so frequently that she blamed herself for her dependence and hated her helplessness. Davidson perceives in his reference to Ford-Rhys affair:

society blames the seduced and abandoned girl for her plight. She should have known better. But Rhys knows better than that. The whole process turned on more than the girl’s gullibility…Rhys also anatomizes the society in which such affairs happen as a matter of course and the men who direct them along their standard course.\footnote{145}

She was dependent on some or the other male in each phase of her life. Carole Angier probes deeper into the inter-connected creations of Rhys her life, her books and her autobiography. She remarks that dependence failed and tormented Rhys and she wrote about it but she never gave up her ideal of it.

v) Economic anxieties:

Jean Rhys’ life story had two central issues haunting her, that remained unanswered. One was her homeless and moneyless struggle for survival and the other was agonizing relationships she lived within and without. Aunt Clarice, she recalls, took her to buy clothes, but the beautiful wine coloured suit she liked was “far too expensive”; so she had to manage with ‘hideous garments’ and felt very miserable. An adolescent girl growing without father, she suffered fear and sorrow, abandonment and solitude, melancholy and submission. The inevitable economic
crisis followed her at every stage. She married in the hope of settlement and found herself broken after a short while, after marriage. She compromised with her dignity and self respect, staying at Ford’s and found herself lost and deprived of peace and love. Lost in the chaotic world of pretensions she re-married twice but everytime the economic set-back made her restless. Her second husband, Leslie loved her, work more than her and her third husband Max was arrested in his lawless embezzling of money in business. Rhys had known that ‘poverty is the cause of many compromises’. Twice she was discovered as a writer and frequently she was supported by brother, some unknown well-wisher and relatives. In her fiction she exposes the control of money over love, sex and relationships.

vi) Split Selfhood:

Rhys was herself a mixture of contradictory tendencies and her life too caused her split selfhood. She was shy and hopless, clumsy and ignorant, delicate by sensitivity and rebellious by spirit. Her sense of justice was as strong as her helplessness and passivity. Moody and mocking, honest and disillusioned she went on accepting life of rejected womanhood and her only relief was writing. The urge for writing was a psychological compulsion for her and yet she neither wanted her biography to be written nor did she disclose all details in her autobiography. Liz Lewis finds two selves in Rhys, through the character of Antoinette, as he calls those the reflected self and the real self. He quotes Howells, “it is the separation of the mirror which is operative, of self and image”.

Elgin W. Mellown complains that the ‘moral’ fervour is completely missing in the writing of Rhys. Mellown’s judgment seems partial and blind to the urge of Rhys for social acceptability, to her strong and inescapable sense of order, shape and justice. In her women, as Bloudgett perceives, long for a strong sense of “basic morality of tolerance, decency and compassion” but cannot find. It is true that she “ignores the customary value put on respectability, sobriety, chastity” but ofcourse, one cannot bother about whether “love.....is illicit in her novels”. Bloudgett admires Rhys for successfully recapturing the effects and pressures on her life. She also extracts from her experiences, a perspective on suffering which gives her a humaneness not yet acknowledged among her critics.

Rhys’s reproduction of woman’s life as she lived, surrounds the themes as failure of love, affairs, marriage, relationships and hopes of a lonely woman in the city-life. Thomas Staley views Rhys’s writings from a different critical standpoint.
when he comments that “survival and protection” are the “motivating forces behind her actions allowing her to fool herself for a while”. In a society where woman is expected to be dependent on man for ‘survival and protection’, the only choice before her is to fool herself. She knows she is going to be a failure in her dependence and yet she has to stick to that. In case she resists and rebels, she is supposed only to hasten that failure. The tragedy of woman’s intellectual and emotional survival is closely concerned with the people around her and the community she survives in.

Women writers are noticed stressing the reflection of their emotional side of relationships and personal life rather than the professional. Most of them write autobiographies to fulfil their need for shape, continuity, wholeness in life. Rhys too, wrote Smile, Please with a desire to shape her life that she strongly felt to be shapeless and disordered. Her discontinuous life with break-ups, gaps and constantly shifted places was an episodic story of a woman who was never at ease. Apparently passive and actually helpless, she lingered between the hope of some unknown good that may come to her, and the depression of having witnessed the breach in dreams and reality, desire and experience, trials and failures.

Placed with the exiled artists as Joyce, Mansfield, Patrick White, Naipaul, George Lamming, Doris Lessing and Ngugi Wa Thiango, Rhys was self-conscious in her artistic freedom to exploit individual identity, isolation and conspicuous historicity. She wrote with a desire to transform the codes of cognition. She explored the unconscious in life and art. In her unlikely life, the belated discovery of Rhys as a writer of great talent, “emphasize just how shabbily she was treated during most of that life. How rewarding the honours and the money might have been if they had come when she most needed them”.

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5.8 Conclusion: Quest for belonging

Writing is an act of affirmation, inspired by faith. Writing autobiography is an act of self-identification and self-assertion. Sartre emphasizes the author’s motivation behind writing, when he states:

...we must bear in mind that the writer, like all other artists, aims at giving...a certain feeling...that this feeling, when it appears is a sign that the work is achieved.... Each one has his reasons; for one, art is flight; for another, a means of conquering....

For many women writers, art plays a double role. In a way it helps them release and refresh their minds and in another, it gratifies their craving for self exploration and emotional fulfillment. It offers them and opportunity to reveal the suffocating pressures in their lives, to push the haunting past into oblivion and get rid of that. In her autobiography *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* Angelou consistently releases her girlhood experiences, like her first shocking encounters with racism and her rape at the age of eight, even her adolescent struggles to achieve self-reliance and to attain womanhood.

It is agreed by most of the critics that women writers consciously shape the events of their lives into a coherent whole. By means of a narrative sequence of the events, they unify the links of their life, phases and personality. Jelinek remarks that it is not surprising that

With men socially conditioned to pursue the single goal of a successful career, we find such harmony and orderliness in their autobiographies. Such unity betokens a faith in the continuity of the world and their own self-images. The unidirectionality of men’s lives is appropriately cast into such progressive narratives.

According to Sue Roe, the work of Jean Rhys, can be seen to reflect:

The development of an experimental, diarist form, into realism, but her final work is realist only in the sense that it is inspired by her mature understanding
Roe comments that Rhys belongs to twentieth century by her ‘modish’ style and moral perspective. In her acute sense of nativity and its role in the process of alienation, she fictionalized her memories of a plantation riot, racial tensions and cultural conflicts in West Indies. Her fiction is everytime enveloped in the story of vulnerable and plundered womanhood but she “never managed to develop the self assurance of personality either as a woman or as an artist”. Her stories deal with the difficulties of being a ‘deracinated woman in Europe’. Born in the Leeward islands, she spent most of her life in wandering between London and Paris, without parental support and financial backing. She discovered in white Creole womanhood entirely new and painful trauma of gender and racial issues. The act of writing was ‘magic’ to her. She told her confident friend, Plante, “Only writing is important. Only writing takes you out of yourself”. David Plante quotes the dialogue he had with Rhys to demonstrates how badly she needed a relief such as writing:

‘Do you ever think of the meaning of what you write?’ ‘No, no....you see, I’m a pen. I’m nothing but a pen’. ‘And do you imagine yourself in someone else’s hand?’ Tears come to her eyes. “Of course, of course. It’s only then that I know I’m writing well. Not really true,...not as fact. But true as writing”.

Rhys as a writer, seeks the knowledge of human experience from the perspective of marginalized, isolated minds, whose view is different from the prevailing ideology of mediocrity. She exploits the issues of racial and sexual bias in her writings. She makes her life narrative unique in its innovative beginning and refashioning of experience. She had articulated the falsehood of established ideas and had examined the value of love in relationships of family and community life. In her writings she did expose prejudices and reject the prevailing beliefs. To individuate the truth and values, she attempted a subtle creation of alternative ideologies, overtly in her modern style and language. Angier calls her “partly modern” because she parodied the illusion of perfection in love and relationships in he own non-feminist way. Discarding the saturation of emotionalism, she bluntly exposed the bond
between money and sex, desire and male authority, biological helplessness and poverty, even the strategies of survival and love. Kathleen Wheeler perceives:

......but just as Jean Rhys......insisted, we can focus in on any difference we like. Yet if we turn that chosen difference into a category......we dehumanize ourselves, ......to focus on certain difference....some 'biological fact' is to interpret the world ideologically. For Rhys, we are all first and foremost human beings, to be treated as individuals, not to be categorized, classed, and labeled with price-tags of our worth.158

Angier explains Rhys’ life very finely in her biography, by legalizing the kinship of Rhys’s creative works and the stages of her life. She calls Rhys a ‘savage individualist’ while charting her parallel development in life and work; she remarks that Jean Rhys as a young woman, faced the “difficulty of living with a dream, and then having to live without it”. Angier further explains:

strange, piquant mixture of weary experience and childlike romance, of tough talk and soft hopes.....is inimitable Jean Rhys....she didn’t really want the old world swept away; she just wanted to take into its security people like her. When it wouldn’t she did long for the new world; but as soon as she saw it, she was afraid it was worse than the old.159

As a writer, Rhys was not natural explorer of her own age, its issues and conflicts. It was almost an accident. What she wanted to explore were always her own very personal feelings. “She had to stay very close to her experience. She cut, shaped and ordered it; she changed details and unimportant facts. But she stayed true to the essence of each experience”.160

Many critics consider Rhys, as a feminist writer, and ignore the really significant issues she presented. She reacted sharply to political implications and used to tear anything she read, even mildly feminist. Her concern was more for individuality won at the price of comfort and respectability. She wanted to expose the power-money-sex-triangle metaphorically branded as society. Carol R. Hagley denies that Rhys’ wider concern is with the alienation and exploitation of human beings anywhere regardless of age or sex. She comments that ‘ageing’ is a process, “an integral part of this wider theme of alienation and exile” in Rhys.161 Wheeler agrees that Rhys was not a feminist “in the conventional, familiar sense, for she had no single attitude to women” but rather a variety of attitudes to human beings as
individuals. For Staley, “women are not the sole victims, for sexual exploitation is only a major symptom of a far more pervasive disease”.162

Young women without acceptable and secure marriages, without confirmed sources of earning, are prone to anxiety, isolation and loss. They are fated to suffer the fear of social insecurity, hardened life and are forced to live that unsteady life. The social climate offers them outrageous violence, sickness resulting from the loss of affection, complex relationships and economic dependence. These in turn, become the grounds of their exploitation. Rhys reflects the use of money to corrupt, control and exploit weaker class in society. She commented in My Day:

......loneliness is not the worst by any means.  
Some old people are lonely, but a great many others live in dread of being argued with, persuaded or even forced to do something which they know will be catastrophic.163

Rhys’ perception of self is matured in the spiritual sense. Strength through knowledge and knowledge through experience is Rhys’ legacy to this unjust world. She contemplated in the philosophical self analysis, “But if everything is in me, good, evil and so on, so must strength be in me if I know how to get at it”.164 She had been concerned in her writings with contemporary issues of prisoners and patients, social machinery for financial and political sustenance, silence and utterance of the helpless voices and the suppressed minds. Lucy Wilson places Rhys as a writer next to Nietzsche, Artaud, Focault and other radical thinkers who dared to challenge the comforting lies, passing as articles of faith that through history have drawn the line between those who dominate and those who are dominated.165

Rhys accepted the challenge by writing ‘dangerous’ books. Not long before her death, she told the novelist Plante that her friends called her “socialist Gwen” in childhood because she had taken the side of blacks and the workers against the white ruling class. James describes this as Rhys’s “rejection of European materialism in favour of the vitality of the black folk culture”.166 In her Creole identity, Rhys acknowledged a “racial heritage which seemed in natural harmony with life”.167 The desire to be back is reiterated by Rhys in her fiction. She used to “long so fiercely to be black” and to dance with them. Rhys envied the black Creoles because they have “more freedom, particularly sexual, than the white islander who must conform to the constraints of the colonist community”.168 As a socialist outcast cut off from the
normal human contact, she could perceive the powerlessness of the alienated individuals who were not able to alter their conditions. Voicing the agony of such women, in her fiction, Rhys attempted the creation of that solitude and rejection which she suffered herself. The solitude of her protagonists, like that of her own, is constitutional, apparently artistic, psychologically absurd and painful. The pain of abandonment felt by ‘Hamletian’ contemplations of Rhys and her women finds relief in the illusions of love and hope of protection in man’s shadow, flashing the chance of continuity and survival. In the troubling sense of displacement and vexing question of identity, Rhys came to know that she suffered because of her want of belonging. She cherished her illusions of love and healthy relationships and tried to revive her dream of love again and again. Her failures made her cynical to same extent. In *Tigers Are Better Looking* she wrote:

> you people pine to death if you hadn’t someone to look down on and insult. I got the feeling that I was surrounded by a pack of timed tigers waiting to spring the moment anybody is in trouble or hasn’t any money. But tigers are better looking, aren’t they?\(^{169}\)

Rhys’s the only faith was in her strength of writing that not only influenced life but brought the identity that she kept on missing throughout life. She believed that her very individuality was at stake in writing, although she was unable to conform as a writer because she was “incapable of tolerating the boredom of mediocrity”. Vijayshree C. critically comments in her study of *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

she shows a consistent and unrelenting engagement with the literary and ideological traditions of England and Europe....Rhys constantly evokes and interrogates the canonical texts of the mainstream such as *Kublakhan, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Nana, A Passage To India* and *Ulysses* effecting a deliberate deconstruction of the androcentric and Eurocentric paradigms contained herein.\(^{170}\)

Rhys’s defining sensibility proves her as West Indian rather than British. Voicing the third-world Creole predicament, historically, she dares to deconstruct the colonized consciousness. Accompanying other West Indian writers as C. L. R. James, Victor Reid, George Lamming and Derek Walcott, Rhys envisions the historic past, as Vanouse comments:

> to most completely explore the problem of West Indian Identity....serves as Rhys’s medium for
suggesting her radical ideas of Creolization for it is now that she suggests that the individual must identify with the slave past, and reject the apartheid racial and cultural biases.\textsuperscript{171}

The issue of identity for Rhys was the most vexing question. In human relationships she found her ‘I’ missing because her quest for belonging was never fulfilled. “So between you, I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all”.\textsuperscript{172} Her life as a woman was a quest for belonging and as a writer she could fulfill it, although after a gradual and late recognition and re-discovery. What she could not achieve as a woman, fortunately she did achieve finally as a writer.

Rhys fought against the silences that envelope woman’s identity. Moving through the failures and depressions, she reached at last to break the barrier of racial hatred in her fiction and to create a sense of autonomy for woman. In life she was helpless and unable to assert her existence, in writing she compensated and explored the individual consciousness so confidently that modern critics have started comparing her to the first-rank twentieth century figures in literary world, like James Joyce, Conrad, Pound and Woolf. She resembles the modern writers like Stein and Wallace Stevens in her poetic perceptions and experimentation with style. Inspite of her split identity and quest for belonging, she concentrated on other important contemporary concerns like social and historical injustice, the want of order, need for folk-culture and broad human outlook. West Indian writings, according to Bruce King:

\begin{quote}
has been concerned with such contracts as the poor and the middle-class, history and the present, desire for and suspicion of education, dispossession and freedom, racial difference and Creolization, metropolitan and regional culture, local pride and embarrassment.\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

Jean Rhys, however, is triumphant in transcending the racial and regional, gender controlled and other borders of expression. She reaches the human plain where her expression is not partial to sex, class, race, religion or nation. Her place in modern fiction is safe and secure on account of the ‘truth’, the transparent realism she employed. Her autobiography and her novels shall ever be known as the testimonials of human virtues like honesty and simplicity, plainness and devotion to truth.
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