



## Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage

*Helen E. Nebeker*

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Jean Rhys died May 14, 1979, at the age of 89, acclaimed after years of obscurity as perhaps the major literary discovery of the 20th century. Born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams in 1890, West Indian by birth, Welsh and Creole by heritage, English by tradition and experience, artist to the very core of her being, this tiny ultra-feminine woman (whose dying request was reportedly "Please, my eyeshadow") has left an indelible imprint on the literature of the 20th century, achieving even greater importance as her work is assessed by a new and growing readership in the 21st century. Fifty years ahead of her time intellectually and perceptually, Rhys evokes in the body of her five brief novels the stifling ghosts of an almost malignant Victorian heritage.

In this second edition of what is acknowledged to have been the first complete study of the novels of Jean Rhys by a woman--not a feminist--scholar, Professor Nebeker discusses each novel in careful detail, substantively facing basic and unanswered critical questions concerning Rhys's undeniable power. In analyzing Rhys's body of work as an oeuvre, Nebeker uncovers levels of complexity, technical and thematic, which lead into shadowy mazes of Freudian symbols and Jungian archetype. These complexities of symbol and archetype culminate in the final genius of Rhys's last and most acclaimed novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where as Nebeker demonstrates, Rhys herself emerges as Myth-maker, revealing the archetypal female consciousness.

In this second edition, Nebeker makes no pretense of undertaking analysis of the growing body of critical comment. The work accomplished in the original study leaves her content with what she has striven to do: assess the living art of a woman prodigy in her personal voyage in the dark, into the abyss of life.

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