



Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography

Jean Rhys , Diana Athill (Introduction)

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Jean Rhys' unfinished posthumous autobiography. From the early days on Dominica to the bleak time in England, living in bedsits on gin and little else, to Paris with her first husband, this is a lasting memorial to a unique artist.

Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography Details

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Núria says

Creo que Jean Rhys ya era una escritora que me gustaba antes de leer nada de ella. De hecho, lo primero que leí de ella, 'El ancho mar de los Sargazos', no me gustó tanto como esperaba, pero ella seguía gustándome como escritora más de lo que me pudieran gustar los libros que escribiera. El problema es que esperaba mucho de 'El ancho mar de los Sargazos', porque se trataba nada más ni nada menos que la narración del primer matrimonio del señor Rochester de 'Jane Eyre' con Antoinette Cosway (la loca del desván), porque se trataba nada más ni nada menos que de una reescritura des de una óptica feminista y postcolonial de un clásico de la literatura inglesa. La idea me pareció brillante, la ejecución no tanto, pero seguí queriendo a Jean Rhys, porque es una de esas escritoras (como Janet Frame) que tuvo una vida con la que me es imposible no identificarme, no tanto por lo que vivió sino por lo que sintió (o más exactamente por lo que sufrió).

'Una sonrisa, por favor' es la autobiografía inacabada que Jean Rhys empezó a escribir cuando tenía más de ochenta años. Y ahora ya puedo decir que adoro a sus libros (al menos un libro suyo) tanto como la adoro a ella. Jean Rhys nació el 1890 en Dominica, hija de un médico galés y una dama criolla de origen escocés. Se crió en una isla dividida entre blancos y negros, con una niñera que le infundió el miedo, con un padre que casi siempre estaba ausente y con una madre distante y a la que tenía miedo, con unos hermanos mayores que pronto se marcharon de la isla para seguir con sus vidas y con una hermana pequeña a la que nunca le pudo coger auténtico afecto por culpa de los celos. Gwen (que era su verdadero nombre) se convirtió pronto en una niña tímida, insegura, asustadiza, y solitaria. Todo esto lo cuenta Jean Rhys en esta autobiografía.

Rhys luego se fue a vivir a Inglaterra a estudiar, pero tuvo que dejar los estudios cuando murió su padre, así que empezó a trabajar como corista y luego como actriz en obras de teatro de segunda fila y como extra en películas de bajo presupuesto. En Inglaterra pasó frío y se sintió sola, supo que la tristeza ya no la dejaría en toda su vida, pero aún así intentó dejarla atrás y se fue a París con su primer marido, allí trabajó como institutriz, perdió un hijo recién nacido y estrechó su relación con el alcohol. Conoció a Ford Madox Ford y empezó a escribir cuentos bajo su tutela. Y ahí se termina la historia que narra 'Una sonrisa, por favor', pero no se trata de un final feliz, porque Rhys se fue hundiendo cada vez más en el alcoholismo y el rencor (que probablemente le venía de su primera época en Inglaterra cuando sus profes de interpretación la machacaban por no tener un acento británico puro y perfecto) y no empezó a ser reconocida (y aún de una forma fugaz e incompleta) hasta el final de su vida, hasta que a mediados de los sesenta escribió 'El ancho mar de los Sargazos'.

Aunque en 'Una sonrisa, por favor' no se mencionan muchas veces las palabras "tristeza" y "soledad", es sin duda de esto de lo que trata el libro. Es un libro profundamente triste, deprimente casi. A diferencia de muchas autobiografías, Rhys pocas veces mira al pasado con nostalgia, más bien lo mira con la conciencia de haber sido toda la vida una perdedora, pero sin caer nunca en la autocompasión. No se trata tampoco de una autobiografía al uso, más bien diría que se trata de una serie de episodios autobiográficos contados por orden cronológico. Rhys describe su vida a grandes pinceladas, contando no tanto los hechos estrictos sino las sensaciones y sentimientos que tuvo al largo de su vida. Es una obra muy triste, lo repito. Y muy bella, que quede claro. Y reconfortante del mismo modo en que es reconfortante saber que existen mujeres que (como yo) nunca han dejado del todo de ser niñas tímidas, inseguras, asustadizas y solitarias.

Cuando una la termina tiene la sensación que todas las relaciones que establecemos con las personas con las

que nos cruzamos no son nada más que superficiales, impulsadas sólo por las circunstancias, con fecha de caducidad, porque en el fondo todos nos enfrentamos solos a nuestra tristeza. Y una se da cuenta que la vida no tiene sentido y que las casualidades más absurdas son las que le rigen. Jean Rhys se pasó muchísimos años sin prácticamente leer y empezó a escribir de la forma más curiosa. Se estaba hospedando en una habitación de lo más deprimente y había una mesa vacía que no soportaba ver vacía, así que decidió comprar algo y se decidió por unos cuadernos, sólo porque eran bonitos no porque tuviera ganas de escribir, pero una noche decidió escribir/vomitara todo lo que le había pasado en Inglaterra y así fue como empezó todo.

Lizzi says

Really enjoyed this. I have always loved Rhys' writing, and it was amazing to read about her early life in Dominica, and some of her time in England. She writes clearly, writing episodically to reflect her memories. Her writing is atmospheric and vivid, and yet somehow dreamy too. Blog review here: <https://theselittlewords.com/2018/03/...>

C.S. Burrough says

Jean Rhys died aged 87 in 1979 before completing her autobiography, which she had started dictating only months before. Later that year the incomplete text appeared posthumously under this title.

After years of reading and rereading Jean's fiction I, like many, was doubtless it was all pieces of her own life. That was irrelevant to me, yet so relevant too. That presumption - that she needed to borrow from herself rather than create - felt disloyal, insulting to her writing ability. Yet I also feared that by reading this I may be disappointed discovering that her fiction was not, after all, dressed up (or down) fragments her own life.

Such was the dilemma underlying my prevarication in reading this, a slow self-torture not unlike Jean's own which I knew so intimately from her stories. When I mustered the courage to read this it was the milestone I hoped it would be.

Yes, Jean's fictional books were distinguishable here in her real life. But thankfully, as the saying goes, 'truth is always stranger than fiction'. So I was saved, my dilemma redundant.

I had a reticence that this felt intrusive, like rummaging through her drawers when she had gone. However, I consoled myself, she would not have disclosed here what she chose not to, nobody was forcing her to say anything. My mother once said, 'I taught you everything you know ... but not everything I know!' Here was my favourite writer inferring likewise with those deliciously pregnant narrative gaps.

As devotees and biographers have noted, Jean bared her soul in her writing but kept some to herself. I was relieved she did likewise here, retained some small, precious dignity after the literary world had bellowed at her, in her dotage, for forever baring her most intimate truths veiled in gossamer thin fiction.

Many have concurred it was not just what Jean wrote that was so brilliant: it was what she did not write, those gaps left for the reader's mind to fill. Indeed, one biographer who researched her old drafts revealed that Jean always underwent a severe, almost self-lacerating editing process, originally taught her by ex-lover

and mentor Ford Maddox Ford. Here she does it one final time as she grinningly waves us farewell, leaving us longing to know what else happened in between these episodes she so tantalisingly punctuates.

In this Jean includes her first poem, penned the first time her adolescent heart broke. It comprises three simple words written three consecutive times: 'I didn't know, I didn't know, I didn't know.'

I will not desist revisiting her works whenever I get those Jean Rhys blues. That would be unthinkable. I need to know her words await me.

This, her last word, was not for this fan the end of Jean Rhys, not something that left me with any disloyal finality or closure on her. Rather, it confirmed that I should start over and read her books from scratch. Again. And again. And again.

Jill Blevins says

Every now and then a book enters your brain and won't let go. It haunts you long after you finish it, the feeling and the tone popping into your head while you're thinking of something else. You put yourself into the narrator's character so well that you feel the experiences you've read about almost as if it were you who lived them.

For me, this was such a book. There's no reason why this book resonated so well with me - I've never read any of her other work, and I have never heard of this author besides knowing she wrote the book upon which "Wide Sargasso Sea" was based, which I've also never seen. Regardless, I was transported into another time and place, enjoying the strong will of the character in a situation that seemed horrible, impossible, beautiful, dreamlike, and historical. Some books are movies, they are so visual and so memorable. This is one such book. And so quick and short and chopped up, making it extra easy to pick up between doing other things.

Ryan Williams says

Jean Rhys' life was a car-crash. Any autobiography by a woman who could write with such steel yet didn't know what a train was for could hardly fail. Sadly, this does. Too short, too scrappy, no narrative interest. Carole Angier's biography is much better.

Jenn(ifer) says

Reviewing this might break my heart.

It was a beautiful place - wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing - I want what it hides.'

That paragraph is taken from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and doesn't it beautifully express what we want from an autobiography? We want to know what is hidden. We want to know what we cannot glean from the books.

Jean wrote, "I have not met other writers often... That does not matter at all, for all of a writer that matters is in the book[s]." I guess I have to be content with that, for Jean died and she kept her secrets. Her autobiography gives us only glimpses ... fragments...

Smile please. When I was in 10th grade, my English teacher asked her students to bring in a song that best described our view of ourselves. I brought in this: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ea6Mo...>

As I stood in front of the class, Morrissey's sad story (my sad story) blaring from the speakers, I looked out at the faces of my classmates. They looked back at me blankly. Or worse, with pity. I don't know what I had hoped I would accomplish with this admission: did I think they would understand me? Accept me? Know me better? No. All that I accomplished was exposing my feelings of shame, so I shrunk back into my shell and did what I learned to do best: I hid.

"What happened was that, as soon as I had the slightest chance of a place to hide in, I crept into it and hid. Well, sometimes it's a fine day, isn't it? Sometimes the skies are blue. Sometimes the air is light, easy to breathe. And then there is always tomorrow..."

Did you ever find someone whose writing sounded so much like your own inner voice that you found yourself shouting 'yes! she gets it! yes! she knows me!'? I knew when I read Jean's novels that there was no way the content was purely fictional. No one can write pain like that, write numbness like that, who hasn't experienced it first hand.

I didn't really need to read about Jean's childhood, because she wrote it all so eloquently in the voice of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I know what it's like to be a little girl who feels invisible. And how quickly one can learn to endure solitude, even begin to prefer it (*"Isn't the sadness of being alone much stressed and the compensations left out?"*). I know what it's like to push your feelings down, escape, until it no longer even occurs to you that you have feelings. I know what it's like to hide and how hiding becomes second nature. Jean says, *"I can abstract myself from my body."* The man she said that to looked at her with horror, with pity. But is it really so horrible? We all have to figure out how to get along in life.

Smile Please. In the beginning pages, Jean describes a story of looking at a picture of herself when she was a little girl, *"...she wasn't me any longer. It was the first time I was aware of time, change and the longing for the past. I was nine years of age."* Nine years of age and already longing for the past. She says that man had a look in his eye as he gazed upon her, "Not a pretty little girl." "O God let me be pretty when I grow up! Let me be. Let me be. O God!" How I longed to be a boy. That math teacher who told me I didn't need to worry about learning math: "You're a pretty girl, you won't need math." Oh how we are judged by our looks. Jean understands. She felt how harshly girls are judged on their looks, "I was wearing an ugly brown Holland dress... and from my head to my black stockings, which fell untidily round my ankles, I hated myself."

I wish I could go back in time and be a mother to young Jean. I would hug her and tell her always how much I love her. I would spend leisurely afternoons with her and I would make her know how important she is. I wouldn't ignore her the way her mother and father did. The way my mother and father did. (Learn this lesson above all, parents-ignoring your children is just as abusive as anything else). Then maybe Jean wouldn't have spent the rest of her life walking around with a gaping hole trying so hard to fill it with men or alcohol. Maybe she wouldn't feel ashamed or broken or hollow. Maybe she wouldn't have needed to push her feelings down so much that she then felt nothing at all, that she got used to being alone, that she preferred it.

But then these books wouldn't exist. Then people like me wouldn't find a little bit of relief by knowing we have a kindred spirit in Jean.

"Mortal Sins: Pride, anger, lust, drunkenness??, despair, presumption (hubris), sloth, selfishness, vanity, there's no end to them, coolness of the heart. But I'm not guilty of the last. All the others."

Above all things that I love about Jean Rhys, I love her humanity. I apologize for taking this review and making it more about me than Jean. Selfishness. Hubris. But it's all very personal for me.

Jean wrote, *"I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing. Always something would go wrong. I am a stranger and I always will be, and after all, I didn't really care."*

I wish I could thank Jean Rhys for the gift she has given me. We all wonder what our purpose is on this big ball of gas. Jean's writing was her purpose, for she gave so much of herself. Her truth. She wrote, *"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 an abject failure to myself. I will not have earned death... Sometimes, not often, a phrase will sound in my ear clearly, as if spoken aloud by someone else. That was one phrase. You must earn death."*

Dear Jean, You've earned so much more.

Kris says

There is something sadly fitting about *Smile Please*'s being an unfinished autobiography. According to her publisher Diana Athill in the volume's foreword, Rhys was reluctant to revisit in an autobiography painful aspects of her past that she had already treated in her novels. At the same time, Rhys was frustrated by her readers' tendency to assume all scenes and characters in her novels were drawn directly from her own life.

This explanation of Rhys's decision to reverse herself and begin work on her autobiography seems logical, but too pat. I suspect, although I could be wrong, that Rhys, at the end of her life, felt the need to reach back into the past and try to touch her former self, a lonely girl, and later woman, who always felt isolated and apart. *Smile Please* is a touching and heartbreaking representation of the deep loneliness and alienation at the core of Rhys's identity. At the same time, there is a clear sense of Rhys's strength, talent, and beauty emerging from these pages.

As I read *Smile Please*, I felt as though I was seeing scattered fragments of Rhys - glimpses of her life from childhood through young adulthood, creating a mosaic in which it often was difficult to capture more than a fleeting sense of Rhys's innermost thoughts or sense of self. The work is composed of a series of short vignettes, with a first half, focusing on her childhood, that Rhys drafted completely herself, and a second half, composed of detailed notes about events during her adulthood, that Athill later shaped into their current format.

The scattered feeling at the heart of *Smile Please* comes not only from the book's format, but also from

Rhys's style of approaching her life obliquely. From her very first paragraphs, as she describes a photograph of herself as a young child, she depicts the past as ephemeral, and herself in the past as irretrievably isolated from herself in her present:

"The chosen photograph in a silver frame stood on a small table under the sitting-room jalousies of our house in Roseau. It pleased me that it was by itself, not lost among the other photographs in the room, of which there were many. Then I forgot it.

"It was about three years afterwards that one early morning, dressed for school, I came downstairs before anyone else and for some reason looked at the photograph attentively, realising with dismay that I wasn't like it any longer. I remembered the dress she was wearing, so much prettier than anything I had now, 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. It was the first time I was aware of time, change and the longing for the past. I was nine years of age." (13-14)

Throughout, Rhys continues to explore this strong sense of isolation and loss. She describes her inability to bridge the gap of race and status separating her from her family's servants in the West Indies, a sense of separation that extended to her awareness of an unbridgeable chasm between herself and the West Indians living around her, particularly as she remembered an interaction between herself and an older black girl at her convent school, whom she was admiring and longing to befriend:

"Finally, without speaking, she turned and looked at me. I knew irritation, bad temper, the 'Oh, go away' look. This was hatred -- impersonal, implacable hatred. I recognized it at once and if you think that a child cannot recognise hatred and remember it for life you are most damnably mistaken.

"I never tried to be friendly with any of the coloured girls again. I was polite and that was all.

"They hate us. We are hated.

"Not possible.

"Yes it is possible and it is so." (39)

In her recollection of this event, Rhys does not reflect much on the politics of race relations in the West Indies. She captures her childhood understanding, as if caught in amber, and holds it up for us to examine.

Rhys's sense of separation also extended to her relationship with family members. Of her mother after the birth of her younger sister, she writes, "Yes, she drifted away from me and when I tried to interest her, she was indifferent." (33). Longing to find a way to compete successfully for her mother's attention, Rhys writes, "Once I heard her say that black babies were prettier than white ones. Was this the reason why I prayed so ardently to be black and would run to the looking glass in the morning to see if the miracle had happened And though it never had, I tried again. Dear God, let me be black." (33) Her father, although a kind man, was too preoccupied with politics and the adult world to pay much attention to Rhys. "I can only remember my father in little things. I can remember his walking with me arm in arm up and down the verandah, how pleased I was. He gave me a coral brooch and a silver bracelet." (58) However, as she leaves the Dominican Republic for England at the conclusion of the first section of *Smile Please*, Rhys straightforwardly records the end of that stage of her life, "Down in the cabin which I shared with my aunt I saw that the little coral brooch which I was wearing had been crushed. I had been very fond of it; now I took it off and put it away without any particular feeling. Already all my childhood, the West Indies, my father and mother had been left behind; I was forgetting them. They were the past." (76)

The second section of *Smile Please*, "It Began to Grow Cold," focuses on Rhys's life in England -- her struggles to feel at home in a cold, foreign England, her aunt's frustrations over Rhys's odd ways (for

example, her taking hot baths in English boarding houses), Rhys's attempts to feel a part of life at school in spite of her odd clothes. Her intermittent career as a chorus girl brought home to her the feeling of living precariously, with unpredictable lodging, constant worries over money, and the constant need to be on guard and aware of some men's sexual predation on chorus girls. Throughout this section, Rhys shies from providing intimate details of her relationships with men. Describing her first affair, she writes only, "By now, my first real affair with a man had started. The pantomime didn't run for long and I didn't try for anything afterwards. I knew that however crudely Mr. Peterman had spoken when he asked what the hell I was doing on the stage, he had spoken the truth, but my lover imagined that I could get on in the theatre and insisted that I should have singing and dancing lessons. Dutifully I attended them. The rest of the time I spent looking out of the window for the messenger boy, because he always sent his letters by messenger." (91) Throughout the rest of the book, Rhys continues to refer obliquely and glancingly to important relationships and events in her life. Her connection with lovers and former lovers often is played out via impersonal intermediaries. In some of the most heartbreaking writing in her autobiography, Rhys remembers her struggles to eke out a living for herself and maintain her dignity.

Smile Please is a heartbreaking autobiography, but there is beauty in the facets of Rhys's story. Her writing is spare, direct, and often lovely. Her unflinching depiction of herself makes me ache for her, but also admire her. Her ability to rise above her pain, to turn it into art, provides us now with a means to connect with her after her death. I hope she feels us in some way. I hope she no longer feels alone.

Diana H. says

Excellent book!

Ambivalenza says

There were pages that I just had to read and then reread and then copy into my notebook. The book got more interesting when she moved to London, Indeed, "It began to grow cold" and she reflected it with such beauty. This is a book that I will read again. I got a little stuck in the chapter where she set up a trial for herself.

Mariel says

*Night has a thousand eyes,
day but one*

Jean Rhys novels were autobiographical. I didn't want to go around being an asshole reading her books assuming that everything within was autobiographical. Other people went around saying it a lot. I would shake them by their shoulders and ask if they didn't feel like mind readers as I did. That's how I feel when I read Jean Rhys novels. It is a large part of why I love her as much as I do. I had a feeling the outlook, at least, was autobiographical. If you have read her novels you will recognize her life in all of them. Her childhood in the Caribbean islands is reflected in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The move from the heat to the cold of

England is *Voyage in the Dark*, as well as the love affair she didn't know what it would be like when it ended. English men judging her with their devaluing eyes. This is not a pretty little girl. I had own moment like that Englishman when I was a little girl. This strange man went in for a handshake and saw that I had been licking the salt of nervousness off of my palms. I can remember the look he gave me still. Not a pretty little girl. I had the sensation again of reading Jean Rhys's mind. The part of her mind that feels as if it has been taken a hold of by someone else. They could have stuck their flags of Dominica or England or France in the dark parts and flap despite any new winds. We are still here.

The look a beautiful island girl gives young Jean. We all hate you. How can those two eyes speak for all of the eyes of the island? You don't belong here in your white ghost skin against our night time camouflage. Her brothers and sisters, dark to her fair, move on without her. They leap off the stage during her birthday play. To hell with this shit! Scared of aunts, scared of mommy. Scared until their absence is just an absence. If you have to be someone other than you... Jean learns how to be alone.

Sometimes it was not like mind reading and Rhys tried to explain things that had worked for me better when I could read the waves coming off the trembling women waiting and waiting (for someone, or to die, or just for some baby darkness again). Her repression is explained away because she saw her dog doing it (doggy style, no doubt) and her mom told her to repress it. Shit, I've seen that loads of times! I once walked in on my uncle doing it on the couch when I came home from school. The dogs were better. It is interesting that she says she remembered always if she had tried to repress. But still, sometimes you know how people just tell you things about themselves? That can be interesting because you know what someone else thinks is interesting to tell someone else. What people tell you isn't always true. I know! I'm telling stuff no one knows right here. This autobiography isn't free of that either. Not that I can know for certain, or anything, but I had a feeling. The pain in her novels belie a lover who was good to her. A lover who paid her off as a whore through the letterhead of his lawyer? A family who sends her off to England and would not have her back into their familial embrace. Jean learns how to be alone.

Her husband who was a criminal walked around inside the criminal husband who couldn't walk free without walking right back into the noose of *Quartet*. I noticed that the other inspiration for *Quartet* was omitted. Maybe because he's famous? (Even though I don't remember his name I know that he's famous. To other people.) I'm sure they have some bodies of water with names that I could make some clever remark like the river of denial. Curse my geography. The dire straits?

Smile Please (I heard similar things all throughout my youth. Complete with ironic nicknames) is titled an unfinished biography. Jean Rhys died before she could finish it, it is true. I consider it unfinished because I don't believe in the doom she professes to be her fate. What if the film kept rolling... It didn't have to be that way even if that was how it happened. (That it was their choice is why her first novels are my favorites and *Wide Sargasso Sea* I do not love.) I mean, she lets go of them all, except for in her writing. I loved this book when she's writing about her life about the things that happened. It is frustrating the editorial notes about how this or that portended her misery. But really? Jean Rhys has the fiery eye of Sauron turned on herself. On others she would burn inside out rather than look at the light within as they fried (like a face looks when you stick a flash light in your mouth). That's the feeling that I have. I know that one only knows oneself, I do. I still wonder why if you are creating a world in a novel why you would not create beyond yourself to other people and be at ease with yourself. Well, I know it goes that way because I struggle with that myself. I know how set adrift she felt when she looks at the photographs of the little herself when she felt flesh limbs with other blood limbs in a fountain. A fountain of youth, Mariel? Yes! What do you want from me? I'm no writer. Where did it all go wrong? I care about what she missed. I guess she was trying to get back something she missed. It's just a feeling I had while reading this. Jean Rhys is alone even in her novels. She couldn't even get to have it even then. Jean doesn't learn how to be alone. One of her rituals as a girl was to sit in the

stairs and listen to the music until she couldn't bear to hear anymore. She fell in love with words. She learns how to be alone.

The night has eyes...

This is from a diary entry she wrote in the 1940s and didn't know if she could find a way to include in *Smile Please*. Fuck!

"No more quotations. Paul Morand says in one of his books that English novelists always start with a quotation. The text before the sermon. I found that witty."

Fuck! I've been doing that!

P.s. I blew through all the Jean Rhys way too fast. I'm almost done with all the short stories and there will only be the letters. Why do I always do this?

Stephen Curran says

SMILE PLEASE was written late in the life of Jean Rhys, after a long period of obscurity had been brought to an end by the publication of *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*. It's divided into three parts: the 'unfinished autobiography' of the subtitle; some incomplete drafts of the rest of the planned book, titled 'It began to grow cold'; and 'From a Diary: at the Ropemaker's Arms', which the author was thinking of including in the finished text, if she could find a place for it.

The prose is even more pared back than it is in her early autobiographical novels, and is just as readable. But I have to wonder whether the whole thing is worthy of publication, and not just of interest to Jean Rhys scholars. It's more of an extended appendix than a book in itself. Worth a look, though, for the glimpsed insights into her discovery of her talent for writing: "I filled three exercise books and half another, then I wrote: 'Oh, God, I'm only twenty and I'll have to go on living and living.' I knew then that it was finished and that there was no more to say."

Annelies says

This was very interesting to read. I read *Wide Sargasso Sea* before and I felt that it must have come from some deep kinship with Bertha/Antoinette.

This memoir starts off with a foreword by Diana Athill, Jean Rhys' editor. She states that a lot of Rhys' private life had already been used in her novels, but that they were not autobiographical in every detail, as readers sometimes suppose. In *Smile Please* I have seen quite a number of details that I recognise from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but there is enough context to emphasize that Bertha in WSS is not a clone of Jean Rhys.

Smile Please is, though not at all gloomy and dark, a story of loss. She loses her childhood home Bona Vista, her brothers leave for school in England, her spoiled little sister takes all attention from her mother. She remembers instances where her friend Willie doesn't want to play with her anymore, her nurse doesn't like her and she can't see her aunts anymore because of family quarrels.

The burned house with the mounting stone brought me straight back to Coulibri.

In her adult life when she takes matters more into her own hands she seems somewhat happier, but the childhood recollections are almost all of neglect and loss.

With WSS in mind the following passages struck me:

"There is something as unstable as water in me, and when things get tough I go away. I haven't got what the English call 'guts'."

"I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing."

Susie Anderson says

"i'm only twenty but i have to go on living and living"

Courtney says

I read this book after "Wide Sargasso Sea" was assigned in one of my college lit classes. It is more like a collection of scenes, but it is a powerful work. Rhys sardonic humor is fascinating. I believe she is one of those people I would love to have lunch with...I guess if I get my wish of heaven being a big Barnes and Noble then we might.

Alexandra Naughton says

God I love Jean Rhys so much.
