

ADIEU FOULARDS, ADIEU MADRAS: THE PLACE OF THE EURO-
CREOLE WOMAN WRITER WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO THE WORKS OF JEAN RHYS AND PHYLLIS SHAND
ALLFREY.

P. MABAI ESPINET

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to affirm the literary context of the works of the Caribbean Euro-Creole writers, Phyllis Shand Allfrey and Jean Rhys, both of Dominica. Their works were published during the period 1925-1985.

The scope encompasses literary history, critical analysis and biography, and the necessary background of West Indian social history and politics pertinent to the subject. The work is divided into nine chapters. The introductory chapter sets up the historical and cultural matrices, and provides an understandable context for these writers and their works. It therefore considers the early literary history of the region, mostly residing in diaries and travel books.

The thesis has the following objectives:

(i) to determine whether there exists common ground in these writers' perspectives or whether the differences are useful in determining context and place

(ii) to evaluate their literary products and claim their place in the context of Caribbean literature in English

(iii) to discover and explicate how, as women, they also functioned as writers

In order to do this I propose to examine their work, including autobiographical material, unfinished manuscripts and works not specifically of a literary nature.

In conclusion, I hope to have isolated and analysed a Caribbean Euro-Creole sensibility expressed in literary terms, and to have provided some insight into the place of such writers in the growing architecture of the West Indian literary canon. As the earliest group of female West Indian writers, their particular struggle to "break set" by writing in defiance of the ordinarily prescribed roles for women of European descent, and the consequent costs of this action, are deserving of acknowledgement and analysis in the context of a feminist approach to Caribbean literary studies. Beyond this, the study seeks to examine what made them write

instead of finding self-expression elsewhere: an important dimension to the question of women's creativity and the means of its realization in concrete terms.

I must have assisted me in completing this work, too numerous to thank individually. I would like to mention my supervisor, Professor Kenneth Surin, for working with me over the period of time it took to complete the dissertation, for his patience and tolerance throughout, as well as his rigorous critical input.

I would also like to mention the following: the University of the West Indies, for awarding me a modest travel grant in 1985 to conduct some of the primary research; Professor Gordon Schlegel for numerous discussions about early West Indian literature; Dr. Frank Birbaumer of York University for assistance with utilizing academic research facilities in Toronto; Dr. David Trotman of York University for many discussions on the historical perspective; the cooperative staff at the MacFarlin Library in Tulsa for use of the Jean Rhys Collection; Lennox Honychurch of Dominica for access to the Allfrey and Kapier papers as well as extensive conversations on Dominican literary history; the late Phyllis Shand Allfrey for her generosity with her works and for an interview and numerous conversations; the late Elliot Elias who graciously granted me an interview from her hospital bed; Patricia Honychurch of Dominica for information about local Dominican history and geography and also for information about the Rhys family estates; Ewa and Steve Williams of Dominica, relatives of Jean Rhys; the late Robert Allfrey, husband of Phyllis Shand Allfrey; Sonia Adelske, adopted daughter of Phyllis Shand Allfrey; Robbie Allfrey, adopted son of Phyllis Shand Allfrey; Max Peacock of WASS in Barbados, Honor Ford-Smith of Sister, and Stephanie Martin of Sister Vision Press for discussions on the Euro-Creole context; family and friends who, over the years have provided support in countless ways.