

*Holy Women and Unholy Men:
Ruth Praver Jhabvala Confronts
the Non-rational*

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ANY WOMAN WHO WRITES witty novels in English about courtship and family life faces the occupational hazard of being compared to Jane Austen.¹ Despite the exotic character (to Western readers) of her Indian settings, this has frequently been the privilege and the fate of Ruth Praver Jhabvala.² It does not often happen, however, that the novelist who is compared to Jane Austen for wit is also compared to Anton Chekhov for humour tinged with melancholy.³ The fact that Jhabvala is the subject of both comparisons suggests that the atmosphere of her books is richly varied, but the affinity of her work with Austen's novels and Chekhov's stories is more than a matter of surfaces. Austen carried the values of the Age of Reason into the Romantic period, Chekhov opposed the anti-scientific outlook of the Russian Slavophiles and of Tolstoy, and Jhabvala attacks the proliferation of mystical cults. All three writers base their judgements of people and actions on experience and reason; they share a deeply rooted suspicion of the non-rational without being rigidly narrow in their outlook.⁴

As an heir of the eighteenth century — Johnson, Cowper, and Crabbe were her favourite authors — Jane Austen measured people and their feelings by the standard of reasonableness, and, like so many of the Augustans, she accepted a kind of Christianity which stressed rational morality far more than belief in the supernatural.⁶ (Even the devout Dr. Johnson, reacting to Boswell's anxiety about the strength of Hume's argument against miracles, warned his friend "that the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them.")⁷ Character-

istically, Austen feared imagination or emotion that could carry people beyond the control of reason. Christians might legitimately be Evangelicals, she thought, if they were so “from Reason and Feeling,” and she considered that a powerful imagination would corrode judgement unless it was guided by “Religious Principle.”⁸

The outlook of the Age of Reason was expressed in the empirical philosophy, according to which reality is to be apprehended by applying reason to the data acquired through sensory experience. This philosophy underlies the tradition of natural science, which was a central element in the life of Chekhov, a physician as well as an author. His biographer Ronald Hingley observes that his allegiance to medicine “reinforced his pragmatism, down-to-earth view of life,” helping to keep him from reaching “conclusions based on combined instinct and ignorance” and to remain “scrupulous in his respect for evidence throughout his writing career.”⁹ Scientific objectivity was accompanied in Chekhov by abundant compassion and ready humour but was not modified by religion, for Chekhov was a non-believer.¹⁰ As a pragmatist he rejected the Slavophiles’ devotion to autocracy, church, and peasantry seen as noble expressions of the essence of Russia as firmly as he rejected Tolstoy’s contempt for medical science and absolute commitment to the Sermon on the Mount. “I have peasant blood flowing in my veins,” he wrote, “and I’m not the one to be impressed with peasant virtues. I acquired my belief in progress when still a child . . . Prudence and justice tell me there is more love for mankind in electricity and steam than in chastity and abstention from meat.”¹¹ Beverly Hahn observes that “Chekhov’s work belongs to that European tradition of humanist literature, classical in spirit and often centring in comic modes of perception, which links Pope and Swift with Jane Austen, Henry James and James Joyce.”¹²

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Germany, educated in England, and for twenty-four years¹³ domiciled in India, where her first published fiction and most of her subsequent work are set. Her first three novels — *To Whom She Will* (1955; U.S. title: *Amrita* [1956]), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), and *Esmond in India* (1958) — focus on courtship, marriage, and social status and expose their characters’ pretensions and unrea-

sonableness in ways that make comparison with Jane Austen easy and natural. The aspect of Indian civilization furthest removed from the rational empiricist outlook, however, is the country's rich religious life, with its artistic, philosophical, and devotional components. In recent years certain lightweight gurus, very different from the great figures of Hindu philosophy and holiness, have attracted numerous Western disciples, and since the mid-sixties scathing portraits of such men have enriched Mrs. Jhabvala's works along with a comic and pitiable parade of their gullible European and American disciples.¹⁴

The figure of the swami first appears prominently in her fourth novel, *The Householder* (1960), where he has only Indian disciples and is neither lauded nor damned. At one time, Mrs. Jhabvala recalled in a lecture,

I wanted to believe in such a man too. Whenever opportunity came to visit a swami, I did so. I loved to think I was near someone holy, within the range of such wonderful vibrations.

(“Disinheritance,” p. 10)

In *The Householder* there is a hint that for all his good will the swami may be ineffective in a harsh world: “With the swami,” thinks the downtrodden hero at a time of stress, “there would be an escape, for however brief a time, from his sense of the world's oppression.”¹⁵ (Similarly the swami glimpsed in *Esmond in India* would talk comfortingly “in the abstract, in large philosophical terms,” but could give little help with specific problems.)¹⁶ In *The Householder* it is not, however, the swami who is mocked but English-speaking ladies and a German youth who are grotesquely naïve in their search for an Indian guru.

Mrs. Jhabvala's fifth novel, *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), shows that her attitude is beginning to change. A friend of the hero suggests that female devotees sometimes unconsciously fall in love with the younger swamis, but the book implies that a number of these teachers have an influence for good: the only upper-class character who associates with them is also the only one who has genuine compassion for the miserable shanty-dwellers.¹⁷ Yasmine Gooneratne, Jhabvala's foremost critic, considers that both *The Householder* and *Get Ready for Battle* portray

swamis favourably (Gooneratne, p. 8). In the sixth novel, *A Backward Place* (1965), there is a passing reference to two fraudulent men of this class — one claims that God, feeling a sudden craving, steals sweets through him¹⁸ — and by 1966, when, in the short story “A Spiritual Call,” she paints her second portrait of a swami, she is unambiguously hostile to him. The guru in this story exploits his young English disciple Daphne as an unpaid literary secretary and editor to help him shape his trite and incoherent thoughts for international marketing. Called to consult with him at night while his other followers sleep, Daphne observes him eat with gusto and, as the light falls on his face, she sees for the first time “something disagreeable” on his “short, blunt, and common” features — something which gives way to his usual “wise, calm, and beautiful” expression when he raises his head back into the shadows.¹⁹ This swami, who loves to travel and has plans for an ashram with air-conditioned rooms, is as grotesque as Molière’s Tartuffe, with his hair shirt and his valet. Daphne — the author especially regrets this — surrenders to him her rational, university-trained mind, and only slowly and incompletely realizes that she became a disciple because she fell in love with him.

When Mrs. Jhabvala returns to the subject of the self-seeking guru five years later in her story “An Experience of India” (1971),²⁰ she describes a large, robust swami of singularly unspiritual appearance who reaches a new level of viciousness, for he forces himself sexually on a woman disciple in what is almost a rape. Elements of “A Spiritual Call” and “An Experience of India” are much further developed in the subtle and complex novel *A New Dominion* (1972; U.S. title: *Travelers*). This book tells the story of Lee, an American girl deceived by a swami; of Raymond, an English visitor, and Gopi, the Indian youth with whom he falls in love; and of Asha, an Indian princess who seduces Gopi to console herself for the onset of middle age. The novel is divided into short sections, some narrated by the author in the third person, others written in the first person and ascribed to Lee or Raymond.

Jhabvala makes it clear that Lee’s swami, a hypocrite who enjoys meat and alcohol,²¹ is driven primarily by a craving for power. To a Hindu, his teachings, though good and true, are

commonplace — Gopi, who respects religion despite his low moral standards, does not have to read through the man's pamphlets, for he knows what is in them (p. 80). Combining characteristics of his forerunners in the short stories, the swami intends to travel widely, plans an air-conditioned ashram, uses a young girl to help him write a book, subdues his disciples with his hypnotic eyes, and, in an horrendous scene, rapes Lee. He seeks to obliterate the personal identities of his followers, and in his lust to dominate causes the death of Lee's friend Margaret by manoeuvring her into rejecting modern medical treatment for her hepatitis. When Lee, who is probably, as Asha suggests (p. 216), in love with him, continues to assert herself — at first, for example, she cannot bring herself to touch his feet (pp. 120-21, 157) — he breaks her spirit by conspicuously ignoring her and ultimately rapes her while yelling loathsome insults. Though she flees the ashram, he feels that he can draw her back — and then, he assures a mutual friend, "I will take her far, very far, right to the end if need be — and this time, Raymond, this time there will be no running away" (p. 209). Yet the swami is such a skilful actor that Raymond, even when he knows why Lee fled, continues to enjoy his company — "sometimes," the author observes, "in spite of himself" (p. 208).

The swami, whose capacity for evil recalls Rasputin's, perverts the traditional doctrine that by obliterating the ego a person can make way for the emergence of the soul or divine self in a mystical rebirth. This belief is Western as well as Eastern: *The Book of Privy Counselling*, a fourteenth-century English treatise, speaks of the soul's "noughting of it-self," and when Blake in his later prophetic books advocates "self-annihilation" he is employing a Christian term of respectable antiquity.²² The principle was expressed within an institutional framework in the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Western disciples in *A New Dominion*, however, encounter a crude form of this doctrine, for while the aspirant must renounce worldly self-assertion and attachment to the pleasures of the senses, he is not required to surrender all judgement and discrimination. When the nineteenth-century teacher Sri Ramakrishna found that his disciple Jogindra had purchased a cracked vessel, he exclaimed, "What — you

bought a pot and didn't examine it first? . . . Just because you're a devotee, that's no reason to be a fool." When Jogindra spied on him at night, afraid that he was going to his wife (as an ascetic, Ramakrishna did not consummate his marriage), he commended the young man saying, ". . . before you accept anyone as your guru, you should watch him by day and by night."²³ But Lee and her friends come to India without any knowledge of mystical traditions and are dazzled by unfamiliar ideas and romantic swamis that they are ill-equipped to judge.²⁴

Jhabvala does not explicitly mention the ignorance of the Western disciples she portrays, probably because she not only deplures swamis but distrusts the mystical doctrine itself in spite of her desire that holy men might really exist. Characters as different as Raymond and Lee recoil from the swami's cruel attempt to obliterate the egos of his disciples. For all his enjoyment of the swami's company, Raymond cannot accept his failure to acknowledge that his disciple Evie is present with them. When Raymond offered her a beverage,

she put up one frail hand as if to say please don't bother about me. I'm not here, or if I am, I am as nothing. But — unlike Swamiji, who did so without effort — Raymond could not regard her as nothing. . . p. 143)

Lee, finding herself beside two fellow disciples one of whom is in a coma and the other meditating, discovers that it is "like being with two people who were not there" (p. 230), and when she describes the pain and degradation of being raped by the swami she tells how "I didn't feel as if I were a person any more . . . *He* was the only person there" (p. 198). The author's view becomes particularly clear when Raymond tempts Lee to disclose the misery that engulfs her on the ashram while her guru ignores her: "his voice," she realized, "was also full of concern — *personal* concern — caring for me. At that moment I was ready to open my heart" (p. 182).

As one counterweight to the contemplative life of the fraudulent swami, Jhabvala describes the good works of the elderly English missionary Miss Charlotte, who busies herself with the sick and the aged. She paints an attractive picture of Miss Char-

lotte, but, although she herself is Jewish, she does not raise the question of whether missionaries are detaching non-Christians from their spiritual and cultural heritage. Miss Charlotte, however, is not narrow-minded: her favourite authors are the unbelievers George Eliot and Thomas Hardy (p. 21), and she is touched by celebrations commemorating the Moslem saint Salim Chisthi (p. 170; cf. Gooneratne, p. 200).

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's writings show that she would in general agree with George Orwell's humanist rejection of Mahatma Gandhi's values: according to Orwell, "our job is to make life worth living on this earth, which is the only earth we have," and "sainthood . . . is a thing that human beings must avoid."²⁵ Nevertheless, when Jhabvala explained how she had once delighted in swamis but had now come to loathe them, she admitted that she was "at the same time always wishing: if only it could be. . . ." She observed young women like Evie:

they got jaundice and became very pale and worn away physically and as people, in their personalities. They had given up their personalities (as tough, thinking, fighting European or, more often, American girls). Their eyes and thoughts and souls were only for their guru. I deplored them . . . I laughed at, even despised, them; but also envied them — for thinking they had found, or maybe — who am I to judge? — they had found, what I had longed to find and never could and I guess never would now. ("Disinheritance," pp. 10-11)

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's hope that "it could be" — that "a man so good he was holy" ("Disinheritance," p. 10) might exist — seems not to have completely died. Her later work contains portraits of three women who are reputed to be holy and whose remarkable qualities are not easily explained.²⁶ The first is a shrivelled old woman whose ecstatic storytelling, singing, and dancing, which are certainly innocent and perhaps inspired, lead the jaded American heroine of "An Experience of India" to seek a teacher who can bring her to what this person has found. The old woman is holy in other people's eyes, not her own. The second such figure of wisdom — Banubai in *A New Dominion* — is small, old, toothless, wrinkled, and joyful, like her forerunner in the short story, and she is described as "a prophetess" in the list of characters

which introduces the novel. Gooneratne sees Banubai as a bogus saint (Gooneratne, pp. 185, 189-90, 194-95, 197, 201), but she does not deserve this condemnation. She is not, indeed, perfect — none of this novelist's characters are: she is fond of sweets and handsome men (p. 124), she considers that Raymond is unable to love (p. 166), she exaggerates the perniciousness of Western materialism (p. 189), and she claims — clearly in contradiction to the author's views — that suffering is good when it draws people's attention from this world to the next (p. 119). Superficially, indeed, Banubai has some resemblance to the swami: in particular, Lee and Raymond feel that both of them have eyes that gaze into people's very thoughts (pp. 155, 202). Banubai, however, not only has exceptional insight into her visitors' minds but uses it to give them what help she can. When Lee, having fled the swami, comes to her, she is glad of the girl's escape from an evil master but sees that her emotions are not detached from him (pp. 202-03). With comparable insight, she recognizes that the homosexual Raymond has corrupted Gopi, luring him away from his widowed mother and sisters and his college studies into a life of unfamiliar luxury (p. 190) and smoothing the way for the rich and aging Asha to make him her lover or kept man. For a time Raymond even encourages their relationship (p. 140), though when Gopi's family want to arrange his marriage he tries in vain to undo the mischief that he has done.²⁷ Banubai, for her part, attempts to transmute Asha's passion into maternal love, but her apparent success proves only temporary. Trying to redeem Asha, too, she has to struggle against the latter's old woman-servant Bulbul, who is descended from a long line of unmarried singing and dancing girls (p. 235) and whose delight it is to minister to her mistress's illicit pleasures.²⁸

In portraying Banubai, Jhabvala tries to give as rational an explanation of her powers as possible: "she had always," says the author herself,

been an unusual person with unusual gifts. She could look deep into other people's personalities, and it enabled her to have so immediate an intuition of what activated them that it was often possible for her to tell them something about their past and make

a guess at their future. She gained quite a reputation that way, and people began to come to her for guidance

. . . She even had a number of sophisticated, highly westernized visitors, and if most of them came in the first place to see her as a curiosity, some of them were truly impressed by her powers. (p. 117)

We are given an opportunity to see how rational Banubai's counselling can be when a family distraught at the mysterious disappearance of one of its members comes to her for help. She astutely describes just the thoughts and feelings which would afflict the near relatives of a missing person, and gives them the best advice that she can offer fellow believers: whatever happens will be God's will, and they must submit. Asha notices that they depart "somewhat lightened" (though this does not happen with all of Banubai's troubled visitors), and Banubai is left exhausted by her effort to give comfort (pp. 131-33). In spite of the predominating rational element in such counselling, there is also a vein of strangeness, even of mystery in Banubai's proceedings. As long as Gopi visits her, she dotes on him, caresses him affectionately, and claims that he has been her son in many previous lives; as soon as she hears of his betrothal, she seems to detach her emotions from him — when the news comes, it hardly causes a pause in her joyful singing to Lord Krishna (pp. 165, 173). Indeed, as the author herself says, "Banubai was an extraordinary woman" (p. 117).

The narrator of Mrs. Jhabvala's next novel, *Heat and Dust* (1975), is a contemporary young woman who tells how she comes to India to investigate the experience of her grandfather's first wife, Olivia. Half a century before, Olivia deserted her husband for a minor Muslim prince. Though this novel contains less humour than the earlier books, it portrays a bizarre English youth who, under the name Chidananda, has become an initiated Hindu sadhu or holy man — a sadhu with a saffron robe, a shaven head, a Midlands accent, and a voracious appetite for food and sex. What most disturbs the narrator — and here she seems to be the author's mouthpiece — is his flight from reason: his chanting of his mantra, she complains,

seems somehow so *mindless* that it drives me crazy. It is as if all reason and common sense are being drained out of the air.²⁹

As Lee's swami is contrasted with Banubai, Chidananda is contrasted with a coarse, elderly peasant widow known as Maji and regarded by others as a holy woman. The sober-minded narrator admits

it always seems to me that she has powers that others don't. Once I had a headache and she put her hand on my forehead and I can't describe the strange sensations transmitted to me. (p. 137)

The narrator becomes pregnant by a married Indian, and Maji massages her, ostensibly to cause an abortion. The massage, however, seems to infuse a radiance into her that makes her instantly decide to keep the child. The author clearly respects Maji, for she is the only person the narrator can find to tend to a destitute and dying beggarwoman. Chidananda, by contrast, remains indifferent to the agony of a young wife being burned with red-hot irons as a cure for fits. Maji recommends a pilgrimage as a better form of therapy — and as a beneficial activity for Chidananda. Both go, and while we are not told whether the wife is cured, Chidananda sloughs off his assumed identity and reverts to Christianity. Like Banubai, Maji combines strange insights with good sense.

In her most recent novel, *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983), Mrs. Jhabvala turns from the aberrations of Indians and their Western visitors to the domestic follies of Americans. The North American counterpart of her swamis is the gluttonous, philandering Leo Kellerman, who shares their knack of making each member of a group feel that he is looking into his or her soul³⁰ as well as their skill in attracting wealthy female admirers and their ambition to found an institution with many branches (p. 101). He bases his community — the Academy of Potential Development — on a blend of theatre, psychiatry, and Eastern religion, but his only true gift is an exceptional insight into people (pp. 85, 153). Despite Leo's affinity with the swamis, the book contains no counterpart to the prophetesses. The one major character who is not culpably self-centred is the plain, ungifted but exceptionally compassionate Natasha. She is self-sacrificing, and unacquisitive,

cares deeply about people without being possessive, and has the good sense not to believe in Leo's work (p. 18). Her unsatisfied longing for a settled and traditional way of life (p. 168) underlines the author's penetrating satire on the fads and philandering of contemporary Americans; similarly Leo's posturings reflect her uneasiness about the cultivation of prolonged introspection — an uneasiness that may spring from what she refers to in "Myself in India" as her "deplorable tendency to constant self-analysis" (*How I Became*, p. 9).

To a considerable extent, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala identifies the outlook she regards as non-European with the predominance of emotion over reason, an imbalance which she associates with a turning away from reality and a passive acceptance of evil and suffering. As she tells us in "Myself in India," she loves India's devotional songs, which can make her temporarily feel that everything that distresses her "is of no importance at all because all that matters is this promise of eternal bliss," but she asks "whether religion is such a potent force in India because life is so terrible, or . . . is life so terrible because, with the eyes of the spirit turned elsewhere, there is no incentive to improve its quality?" (*How I Became*, pp. 15-16). In *A New Dominion*, she can treat the theme lightly through the innocently naïve founder of the University of Universal Synthesis, who wishes to bring together scholars from the rational West and the feeling East "to educate the mind in the language of the heart and the heart in the language of the mind" (p. 166). Jhabvala probably regards this ideal as unattainable and agrees — as she partly confirms in an interview³¹ — with Major Minnies in *Heat and Dust*, who believes that the Western mind should guard itself against becoming Indian. A British political officer so devoted to India that he spends his retirement there after independence, Minnies holds that a Westerner who loves that country should love her "with a virile, measured, *European* feeling," and that "One should never . . . become softened (like Indians) by an excess of feeling" (p. 171) — no doubt the kind of feeling that allows the dishonest businessman in "How I Became a Holy Mother" (1976) to be filled with rapture by a holy man's blessing (*How I Became*, p. 144) or Chidananda to ignore the tortured wife's agony. A par-

ticularly striking example of such an aberration occurs in *A New Dominion*, where the disciple Evie, her face suffused with a look "so gentle, so good, so full of kindness for all created beings," ignores the needs of the mortally sick Margaret to gaze with adoration on the swami, who has recently insisted that an injured dog must be left to howl in anguish until it died (pp. 158-59). Yet in *Heat and Dust* the charitable Maji passes through religious trances without moral injury, perhaps even with advantage (p. 163), suggesting that Mrs. Jhabvala, despite profound misgivings, is not prepared to condemn categorically all mystical practices and their accompanying emotions.

The predominance of feeling over reason is a common object of Jane Austen's satire. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet observes that her sister Jane, who is rapidly falling in love with a new acquaintance, "cannot even be certain of the degree of her own regard, nor of its reasonableness." Subsequently Elizabeth's own experience confirms the superiority of rational love, which grows slowly and is based on esteem, over the love which "is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged."³² It is a lesson that Jhabvala's Gulab, an Indian girl who does not "form decisions" but follows "her instinct" and who impetuously marries an entirely unsuitable Englishman — "an unredeemable cad and sadist," Haydn Moore Williams calls him³³ — badly needs to learn (*Esmond in India*, pp. 36-37, 248). Similar irrational emotions drive Jhabvala's spiritual seekers: the German youth in *The Householder* comes to India because he has seen a holy man in a dream, and Daphne in "A Spiritual Call" — like the Countess in "How I Became a Holy Mother" — conceives an instantaneous devotion to a swami she meets in the West.³⁴ Lee's experience, though not so sudden, is of a comparable nature; her and her companions' disastrous misjudgement of their guru has a comic counterpart in Jane Austen in Catherine Morland's misjudgement of General Tilney under the influence of Gothic novels — novels that have so excited her that an invitation to a residence with the romantic name of Northanger Abbey can work up her emotions "to the highest point of extasy."³⁵ Nevertheless, as has been shown, Austen's devotion to rationality does not prevent her

from being a pious Christian and from believing that feeling as well as reason has a place in religion.

Chekhov, too, exposes delusions that spring from limitations of character, but the quality that Jhabvala most obviously shares with him is a combination of insight into the nuances of joy and sorrow with the humour of a detached observer, a combination that is responsible for the characteristic Chekhovian atmosphere. Thus the young girl Shakuntala in *Esmond in India*, with her partly assumed sensibility and her imaginary idealism, has a likeness to the less self-conscious Irina in Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, and such Jhabvala characters as the idle, effeminate young husband of "The Interview" (1957), the elderly widow of "The Man with the Dog" (1966) with her Dutch lover, and the neglected wife of "Rose Petals" (1971)³⁶ have a notably Chekhovian flavour. That Chekhov's values resemble Jhabvala's can be seen especially clearly in one of his most famous stories — "Ward Number 6." As Jhabvala's devotees ignore the suffering around them in their pursuit of personal holiness, so Chekhov's provincial physician, Dr. Ragin, asks himself

why pain *should* be relieved. Firstly, suffering is said to bring man nearer to perfection. And, secondly, if mankind should really learn to relieve its sufferings with pills and drops it would completely turn its back on religion and philosophy which have hitherto furnished a bulwark against all manner of ills, and have even brought happiness too.³⁷

In defiance of reality, Ragin maintains that despite the discoveries of modern medicine

the essence of things has not changed a bit, sickness and mortality still remain. . . . between the best Viennese clinic and my hospital there is no real difference at all

and that

You can find consolation inside yourself in any surroundings. . . . Diogenes lived in a barrel, but was happier than all the emperors of this world.³⁸

Not until he is forcibly confined in his own mental ward does he recognize the truth of his patient Gromov's argument that it is only because his own life has been so comfortable that he has

been able to hold such a theory. Gromov, like the author, judges theories on the basis of experience and reason, but Chekhov is no blinkered materialist. In his story "On Official Business" the coroner Lyzhin — a character who, as Ronald Hingley notes,³⁹ serves as a spokesman for Chekhov — comes to perceive all human beings as part of the one entity which is life, "a single miraculous and rational organism," so that a prosperous person cannot without guilt condone the suffering of a single one of the masses whose poverty sustains the rich. However, it is only through "the gift of penetrating life's essence,"⁴⁰ a gift transcending reason, that Lyzhin comes to see the rational essence of human life, and his mode of perception is comparable to those of Banubai and Maji.

Superficially, Jhabvala resembles Austen in her witty portrayal of snobbery and self-deception, and Chekhov in her delicate, humorous evocations of mood and feeling. On a deeper level, she shares Austen's and Chekhov's conviction that the dictates of reason and experience should prevail over emotion and provide a guard against irrationality. Jhabvala regards submission to a guru as a form of extreme emotionalism accompanied by indifference to others' suffering and by a failure of the respect due to the uniqueness of each individual. Even Banubai, Asha notices, is "like the sun and wind that play on all alike" (*A New Dominion*, p. 173). Most of the swamis, in addition to promulgating a false theory, are the very opposite of the ego-free persons they pretend to be. But although in "Myself in India" Jhabvala writes sadly of "ashrams full of little old half-starved widows who skip and dance about, . . . giggle and play hide and seek because they are Krishna's milkmaids" (*How I Became*, p. 15), her fiction contains portraits of three very different aged female devotees. Her characterization of the Krishna-worshipper in "An Experience of India," of Banubai, and of Maji shows that Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, like Chekhov, is open to the possibility that there may be non-rational, non-sensory modes of perception which can contribute to the betterment of human life.

NOTES

¹ Examples are Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor; see Harry Blamires, ed., *A Guide to Twentieth Century Literature in English* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 228, 273.

- 2 E.g., Maurice Richardson, rev. of *Esmond in India*, *New Statesman*, 3 January 1959, pp. 22-23; Milton Crane, rev. of *Get Ready for Battle*, *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine of Books*, 10 February 1963, p. 4; K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, 3rd. ed. (New Delhi: Sterling, 1983), pp. 452-53. In her *Silence, Exile and Cunning: The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1983), Yasmine Gooneratne specifies detailed parallels between Jhabvala and Austen characters; see, for example, pp. 44, 55, 57, 96-98. For my references in this article, I am much indebted to Mr. Ralph Jonathan Crane, whose M.A. thesis "Ruth Praver Jhabvala: A Critical Introduction and Annotated Bibliography" (University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1983) I supervised.
- 3 "New Fiction," rev. of *A Backward Place*, by R. Praver Jhabvala, *Times*, 20 May 1965, p. 17; V. S. Pritchett, "Snares and Delusions," *New Yorker*, 16 June 1973, pp. 106-09; Ramlal Agarwal, "Outsider with Unusual Insight," *Times of India*, 25 March 1973, p. 11; "Ruth Praver Jhabvala in Conversation with Yolanta May," *New Review*, 2 (December 1975), 53-57.
- 4 Renee Weingarten argues in "Ruth Praver Jhabvala: A Jewish Passage to India," *Midstream* (March 1974), 72-79, that Jhabvala's failure to surrender to the Hindu spirit is due to the rational temperament which is part of her cultural inheritance. Vasant A. Shahane notes in *Ruth Praver Jhabvala* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1976), pp. 26-27, that she judges her characters from a "western rational and scientific" standpoint.
- 5 David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978), p. 134.
- 6 Cf. Cecil, p. 193, and D. D. Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 56, 68-75.
- 7 Frederick A. Pottle, ed., *Boswell's London Journal 1762-63*, reprinted (London: Heinemann, 1951), p. 318.
- 8 R. W. Chapman, ed., *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others*, 2nd. ed., reprinted (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 410, 486.
- 9 *A New Life of Anton Chekhov* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 52.
- 10 Hingley, p. 310.
- 11 Simon Karlinsky, ed., *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 261.
- 12 *Chekhov: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 6.
- 13 Ruth Praver Jhabvala, "Disinheritance," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 326 (July 1979), 4-14.
- 14 Fritz Blackwell has discussed this subject, with special reference to the relationship between the spiritual quest and sexuality, in "Perception of the Guru in the Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala," *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, 5 (July 1977), 6-13.
- 15 *The Householder* (London: Murray, 1960), p. 175.
- 16 *Esmond in India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 96.

- 17 *Get Ready for Battle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 109, 19, 38.
- 18 *A Backward Place* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 57-58.
- 19 The dates of first (periodical) publication of all the stories mentioned, given in the text, are cited from Crane's thesis. Footnote references are to the specified edition of the relevant collection of Mrs. Jhabvala's short stories — in this case, *A Stronger Climate: Nine Stories* (London: Murray, 1968), p. 111.
- 20 *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 119-37.
- 21 *A New Dominion* (London: Granada, 1983), p. 142; hereafter cited parenthetically.
- 22 *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 149 and nn.; William Blake, *Milton* 14:22, for example. See also "Self-annihilation," *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- 23 Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 222-23.
- 24 Gooneratne, p. 192, notes that Lee's "studied avoidance of anything even remotely intellectual" makes her very vulnerable.
- 25 *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), IV, 466-67.
- 26 Gooneratne, p. 201, states that Jhabvala allows for the fact that "There are areas of mystery in Indian life, indeed in all life, which do not yield their secrets easily," and that she is open to the possibility "that a reality exists to which Raymond's scepticism renders him blind."
- 27 Raymond is compassionate, sensitive, and cultured, and he makes no physical advances to Gopi, perhaps because of "a certain stoicism he had grown up with and used all his strength to develop" (p. 206). Nevertheless, Gooneratne gives much too favourable an account of him. He is an object of the author's satire as well as her respect. Thus he writes to his mother about his "fascinating research" on old shrines; the next section of the novel, which focuses on the bliss he finds in Gopi's company, is entitled "Raymond's Fascinating Research" (pp. 128-31; cf. Gooneratne, p. 194). Raymond can give Banubai no legitimate reason for his continued presence in India: in fact his passion for Gopi has made him postpone his departure; it will soon make him deposit his mother's letters unread in his portfolio (pp. 190, 161, 182). He is drawn to Gopi almost entirely by the latter's good looks; unlike Raymond, Gopi is no intellectual.
- 28 Despite her general disparagement of Banubai, Gooneratne admits, pp. 293-94, that she is Asha's good angel while Bulbul is her evil one. She counts Raymond's doubts about Banubai against her, p. 188, but Raymond's preference for the company of the swami, who, he feels, looks into his thoughts "with tolerance, forgiveness, even amusement" (*New Dominion*, p. 189) hardly inspires confidence in his judgement, while the wicked Bulbul's dismissal of her as "that old witch" (p. 177) counts for her.
- 29 *Heat and Dust* (London: Murray, 1975), p. 80; hereafter cited parenthetically.
- 30 *In Search of Love and Beauty* (London: Murray, 1983), p. 2; hereafter cited parenthetically.

- ³¹ "Jhabvala in Conversation with Yolanta May," p. 54.
- ³² *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd. ed., II (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 22, 279.
- ³³ *The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* (Calcutta: Writer's Workshop, 1973), p. 31.
- ³⁴ *The Householder*, pp. 41-43; *Stronger Climate*, p. 92; *How I Became a Holy Mother*, p. 143.
- ³⁵ *The Novels of Jane Austen*, V (1972), 140.
- ³⁶ *Like Birds, Like Fishes and Other Stories* (London: Murray, 1963), pp. 107-22; *Stronger Climate*, pp. 191-214; *How I Became*, pp. 138-53; the title "The Man with the Dog" alludes to Chekhov's famous story, "A Lady with a Dog."
- ³⁷ *The Oxford Chekhov*, trans. and ed. Ronald Hingley, VI: *Stories 1892-1893* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 132. It should be noted that Banubai, who sees some good in suffering, also tries to relieve it.
- ³⁸ *Oxford Chekhov*, VI, 138, 142.
- ³⁹ *Oxford Chekhov*, IX: *Stories 1898-1904* (1975), p. 12.
- ⁴⁰ *Oxford Chekhov*, IX, 122. Some critics maintain that Chekhov's story "The Black Monk" also implies that non-rational experience can yield valuable insights; see, for example, Karlinsky, pp. 248-49.