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**AN ANALYSIS ON PERSONALITY OF RUTH
PRAWER JHABVALA AS A CREATIVE WRITER**

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An Analysis on Personality of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala as a Creative Writer

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Abstract – Anglo-Indian writer, who started as a novelist in the 1950s, and then in the mid-1960s began her successful career as a screenwriter with the Ivory-Merchant film team. Jhabvala won her first Academy Award for *A Room with a View* (1985) for best adapted screenplay. The second came for *Howards End* (1992). Both films were based on E.M. Forster's novels. Jhabvala's novel *Heat and Dust* was awarded the Booker Prize in 1975.

"But I think I could not have learned from films if I had not written all these novels and really learned how to set characters in motion. If you just sit down and write a screenplay, I don't think you can."

(from *Conversations with Screenwriters* by Susan Bullington Katz, 2000)

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INTRODUCTION

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala was born in Cologne, Germany. Her father, a lawyer, was of Polish-Jewish origin and her mother was German-Jewish. Jhabvala attended Jewish segregated school before she emigrated in 1939 with her family to Britain. The family settled in Hendon, northwest London, where Jhabvala attended Hendon Country School. In her new home country she switched from German to English at the age of twelve. During the war years she read the works of Dickens; Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* she took with her during the bombings of London to an air raid shelter. Jhabvala's father committed suicide in 1948 after learning that the rest of his family had died in the Holocaust.



In 1948 Jhabvala became a British citizen. She studied English literature at the University of London, receiving her MA in 1951 from Queen Mary College. In the same year she married a Parsee architect, C.S.H. Jhabvala, with whom she moved to India. For the next 24 years

she lived in New Delhi. Increasingly disenchanted with India Jhabvala moved in 1975 to New York City, dividing in the following years her time between two countries. Later Jhabvala also became a US citizen.

Jhabvala started to compose stories at an early age, but as a housewife in Delhi, she found enough time to write seriously. Her first novel, *To Whom She Will*, appeared in 1955. She also began to contribute short stories to the *New Yorker*. Her early novels depicted ironically the life and manners of Indian middle-class families, Europeans trying to understand India, and the clash between Eastern and Western cultures. Through her husband's architectural firm, she met families that lived a life that was much different from the life she was living. Often her stories are seen from the point of view of an outsider. Some Indian critics have labelled her authorial detachment as a sign of old-fashioned Western attitudes toward India. "Jhabvala is a connoisseur of divided souls, conceiving characters whose inner longings are at odds with their outer protective coloration," wrote Deborah Mason in her review of Jhabvala's short story collection *East Into Upper East* (1998). The "East" in the title refers to New Delhi and the "Upper East" to New York. Noteworthy, Jhabvala's German-Jewish heritage has never occupied a central place in his work.

Jhabvala's Booker Prize novel *Heat and Dust* was a love story, which contrasted the 1920s and the 1970s. Olivia, a bored colonial wife, is married to an English officer, Douglas Rivers. She falls in love with the local nawab, a minor Indian prince. She becomes pregnant, has an abortion, and abandons her

husband. Fifty years later her step-granddaughter, the narrator, travels to India to investigate the enigma of the family scandal. "Fortunately, during my first few months here, I kept a journal, so I have some record of my early impressions. If I were to try and recollect them now, I might not be able to do so. They are no longer the same because I myself am no longer the same. India always changes people, and I have been no exception." In her diary she tells about her own affair, she also becomes pregnant but she decides to have the child. *The Washington Post* compared the setting of the novel and its theme of Anglo-Indian relationships to E.M. Forster's famous novel *A Passage to India*. In *In Search of Love and Beauty* Jhabvala changed her scene from India to New York City, but used again one of her favorite themes, the way "odd shards and fragments of the past" affects the present. The story dealt with Austrian and German immigrants in New York and their destinies through three generations. *Out of India* (1986) was chosen by the *New York Times Review of Books* as one of the Best Books of 1986.

Jhabvala's collaboration with the producer Ismail Merchant and the director James Ivory in their beautifully crafted film productions started in the 1960s. Merchant had read in Hollywood Jhabvala's novel *The Householder* (1960). The domestic comedy told of a newly-married couple, Prem and Indu, Prem's new obligations, and his road to achieve the position of a householder. In Delhi Merchant and the American director James Ivory, with whom he had established a production company, approached the author. The two filmmakers had heard that Jhabvala guarded her privacy fiercely, which was proved when at first on the telephone she pretended to be her mother-in-law. In an interview Jhabvala later confessed that she wasn't even a film buff, and she hadn't seen many films. However, their meeting led to one of the most extraordinary collaborations in film production.

Jhabvala's adaptations of classic English novels include works by Henry James and E.M. Forster. In *Conversations with Screenwriters* Jhabvala revealed that when she wrote a scene, she didn't think much about it, how it's going to be in the film. "I just think, 'How are these two characters going to interact with each other?' I know it can't be the same as on the page in a novel - it must be much more direct and the language has to be simpler." The adaptation of *A Room with a View* was very faithful to the original text, although Jhabvala made small changes to streamline Forster's work for film by combining events.

A Room with a View was the first Forster novel to be adapted by Merchant Ivory Productions. It was followed by *Maurice* (1987), written by Kit Hesketh-Harvey and James Ivory, and *Howards End*, for which Jhabvala won her second Oscar. In 1990 she won the Best Screenplay Award from the New York Film Critics Circle for *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge* (1990), starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, and in 1994 she received the Writers Guild of America's (WGA) Screen

Laurel Award. - Ismail Merchant died in May 2005. At the time of his death he was working on *The White Countess*, based on a screenplay by Kazuo Ishiguro. Ruth Praver Jhabvala died at her home in Manhattan on 3 April, 2013, after a long illness.

NOVELS

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Esmond in India. London: Allen & Unwin, 1957.

Get Ready for Battle. London: J. Murray, 1962.

Heat and Dust. London: J. Murray, 1975.

The Householder. New York: Norton, 1960.

In Search of Love and Beauty. New York: Morrow, 1983.

My Nine Lives. London: J. Murray, 2004.

The Nature of Passion. London: Allen & Unwin, 1956.

A New Dominion. London: J. Murray, 1972. Published as *Travelers*. New York: Harper, 1973.

Poet and Dancer. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1993.

Shards of Memory. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995.

Three Continents. New York: Morrow, 1987.

To Whom She Will. London: Allen & Unwin, 1955. Published as *Amrita*. New York: Norton, 1956.

SCREENPLAY

- screenplay: *The Householder*, 1965 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Shashi Kapoor, Leela Naidu, Durga Khote)
- screenplay: *The Guru*, 1969 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Michael York, Rita Tushingham, Utpal Dutt)
- screenplay: *Bombay Talkie*, 1970 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Jennifer Kendal, Shashi Kapoor)
- screenplay (with James Ivory): *Shakespeare Wallah*, 1973 (film dir. by J. Ivory, starring Felicity Kendal, Shashi Kapoor, Laura Liddell)
- screenplay: *Autobiography of a Princess*, 1975 (with J. Ivory, J. Swope, film dir. by James Ivory, starring James Mason, Madhur Jaffrey, Keith Varnier)

- screenplay: Roseland, 1977 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Geraldine Chaplin, Teresa Wright, Lou Jacobi)
- screenplay: Hulabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures, 1978 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Peggy Ashcroft, Victor Banerjee, Larry Pine, Saeed Jaffrey)
- screenplay: The Europeans, 1979 (from Henry James's novel, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Lee Remick, Robin Ellis, Tim Woodward)
- screenplay: Jane Austen in Manhattan, 1980 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Robert Powell, Anne Baxter, Michael Wager)
- screenplay: A Call from the East, 1981
- screenplay: Quartet, 1981 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Isabelle Adjani, Maggie Smith, Alan Bates)
- screenplay: Heat and Dust, 1981 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Julie Christie, Christopher Cazenove, Shashi Kapoor)
- screenplay: The Courtesan of Bombay, 1982 (semi-doc. film, dir. by James Ivory, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Ismail Merchant)
- screenplay: The Bostonians, 1984 (from Henry James's novel, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Christopher Reeve, Vanessa Redgrave, Madeleine Potter)
- screenplay: A Room with a View, 1985 (from E.M. Forster's novel, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Helena Bonham Carter, Maggie Smith, Denholm Elliot, Julian Sands)
- screenplay (with John Schlesinger): Madame Sousatzka, 1988 (based on the novel by Bernice Rubens, film dir. by John Schlesinger, starring Shirley McLaine, Peggy Ashcroft, Twiggy)
- screenplay: Slaves of New York, 1989 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Bernadette Peters, Madeleine Potter, Adam Coleman Howard)
- screenplay: Mr. and Mrs. Bridge, 1990 (from Evan S. Connell Jr's novels *Mrs. Bridge* and *Mr. Bridge*, dir. by James Ivory, starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Blythe Danner, Simon Callow)
- screenplay: Howards End, 1992 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson, Vanessa Redgrave, Helena Bonham Carter)
- screenplay: The Remains of the Day, 1993 (from K. Ishiguro's novel, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson, James Ivory)
- screenplay: Jefferson in Paris, 1995 (film dir. by James Ivory, starring Nick Nolte, Greta Scacchi, Jean-Pierre Aumont)
- screenplay: Surviving Picasso, 1996 (based on *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer* by Arianna Stassinopolous, starring Anthony Hopkins, Natascha McElhone, Julianne Moore)
- screenplay (with others): The Proprietor, 1996 (film dir. by Ismail Merchant, starring Jeanne Moreau, Sean Young, Sam Waterston)
- screenplay (with James Ivory): A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries, 1998 (based on the novel by Kayle Jones, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Kris Kristofferson, Barbara Hershey, Leelee Sobieski, Jane Birkin)
- screenplay: The Golden Bowl, 2000 (based on the novel by Henry James, film dir. by James Ivory, starring Kate Beckinsale, James Fox, Uma Thurman, Jeremy Northam, Nick Nolte, Anjelica Huston)
- screenplay (with James Ivory): Le Divorce, 2003 (based on the novel by Diane Johnson, dir. by James Ivory, starring Naomi Watts, Kate Hudson, Leslie Caron, Melvil Poupard)

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