

The Negative *Flâneuse* in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*

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I

Discussions of women's relations to public spaces have mainly focused on the possibilities of the *flâneuse*, a female spectator in search of modernity. Some feminist critics such as Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff hold that a modern woman cannot be a *flâneuse* because public space has been dominated by men while women of the respectable middle class were not allowed to walk alone in urban spaces in the mid-nineteenth century (Wolff 34). On the other hand, such critics as Elizabeth Wilson, Ann Friedberg, Mica Nava, and Helen Richards contend that shopping and department stores made it possible for women to enter public spaces freely. In her book *The Sphinx in the City*, Elizabeth Wilson argues that women actually had a greater degree

of freedom in nineteenth- and twentieth-century cities than Wolff claims. In addition, she points out that city life has allowed women to have more freedom than rural and suburban life (10). Linda McDowell agrees with Wilson's opinion that the public spaces of the city have functioned for women as an escape from "the confines of domesticity" and "male dominance," and from the "bourgeois norms of modern city" (149). These individual experiences of female *flânerie* are described in many women writers' works that can be understood as *Bildungsroman*, whose heroines reside in the spaces of the metropolis. In the female *Bildungsroman*, heroines' minds are apt to be directed to the outer world in response to new adventures in public space. They are the "romantic heroines" or "inspiring professional role models" whose adventures moved from strictly private realms toward the public sphere (Showalter 103).

Contrary to many women writers' way to narrate the *Bildungsroman* of the heroines, Jean Rhys (1890-1979) explores the physical and psychological experiences of marginal women in the metropolis, who have generally been ignored by elite women writers as well as feminist scholars. There had been no female English writers who depicted the isolation of silenced women and their physical and emotional instability, but Rhys created a new kind of urban character. Unlike other courageous or self-willed heroines, Rhys's *flâneuses* are not personally fulfilled in the city, and their autonomy is severely challenged. They are alone in foreign cities without friends or families. They are forsaken, poor, and not properly educated. They can obtain only temporary work, for example, as mannequins, models, chorus-girls, and prostitutes.

In this respect, their insecure economic conditions are related to their social coding as commodities in a capitalist metropolis. They do not have any option to improve their situation; they can only descend the wretched ladder of society. There exists in Rhys's work none of the optimism of many previous or of her contemporary female authors; she shows instead the darker side of urban experience through her *flâneuses*. Rhys's presentation of the New Woman in the city has understandably displeased a number of feminist critics. Rachel Bowlby, for example, calls Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight* the "negative *flâneuse*" (*Still Crazy* 53). Bowlby laments that Rhys's novels seem to mock the bright hopes of new women's stories, or even the bright hopes of any stories of progress, as mere drawing-room fantasies. Her heroines drift around the cities of Europe in states of melancholy from which they seem unable to escape.

Recent scholars' analyses of Rhys's works through the lens of the *flâneuse* mainly deal with *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) in terms of space (cafés), consumerism, or subjective fragmentation. In his dissertation *Expatriate Identity and the Modernist Metropolis* (2001), Thomas Martin Smyth argues that Rhys's works record the tendencies of the 1930s. Analyzing the relations between American and British expatriate representations of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and the formation of expatriate identity, Smyth argues that in modernist texts, representation of place becomes dependent on the individual perceiving consciousness. He contends that cafés in Rhys's work represent the danger of the loss of emotional control because they serve as reminders of Sasha's past expatriate life in Paris. Cafés serve as conduits of the past for Sasha and, in this

sense, these cafés thus function as liminal spaces and impel Sasha to reconstruct her past life in Paris. In *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (2005), Carol Dell'Amico discusses *Good Morning, Midnight* in relation to other *flâneur* texts of the period—Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. She writes that *flâneur* novels are interested in exploring the nature of metropolitan culture and social life especially with respect to consumerism. She asserts that Rhys's novel is paradigmatic in this regard, as character interactions in the novel are constructed as relations of "exchange" (8). Finally, in her dissertation, *Women in the City: Female Flânerie and the Modern Urban Imagination* (2009), Vera Eliasova explores the trajectory of female *flânerie* in women's writing from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. She also deals with *Good Morning, Midnight*, showing how the writer employs the *flâneuse's* subjective fragmentation in order to imagine a new urban self that opens toward urban space. She examines Rhys's stylistic experiments in depicting a new *flâneurial* consciousness, in which urban and private spaces interact and finally implode. According to Eliasova, the fragments of the city and the fragments of self are mixed and float together in Sasha's mind.

As reviewed above, only Sasha Jensen has been classified as a *flâneuse* among Rhys's heroines mainly due to her position as a traveler in Paris. Meanwhile, Ann Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) has been analyzed in terms of Creole identity and schizophrenia and compared with Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). By investigating the relations between urban space in twentieth-century Europe and the marginalized woman

adrift in the metropolis in *Voyage*, this study is concerned primarily with the manner in which Rhys's *flâneuse* perceives and manages her crisis of subjectivity while living in a metropolis and consumer culture. *Voyage* depicts a graphic portrait of the wretched modern woman's situation in the metropolis, featuring a bourgeois man and his impoverished mistress. Rhys describes how the marginal urban woman is driven to position herself as a sexual commodity due to her deplorable conditions.

II

The urban environment was much more influential on Rhys's fiction than critics have credited it. As a migrant, a Creole, and a woman writer, Rhys connects her state to a particular urban aesthetic, suggesting that the peripheral migrant performs a significant function as a *flâneuse*. The "*flâneuse*" is a very applicable trope to depict the complex situation of women in open space; she is an observer like the male *flâneur*, but at the same time, she is an object for males, part of the urban scenery. When she performs a role of active observer, she walks and witnesses the urban streets; on the other hand, when she is positioned as an object for males, she is passively treated as a woman of the streets, a prostitute, by men. Rhys's negative *flâneuse*, who exits on the city margins after the Great War, is disgusted by the sordid modern environment while drifting around its peripheral limits.

Rhys's *flâneuses* occupy a different social class and position from other contemporary English heroines like, for example,

Miriam Henderson in *Revolving Lights* (1923), by Dorothy Richardson, Mary Datchet in *Night and Day* (1919), by Virginia Woolf, or Olivia Curtis in *The Weather in the Streets* (1936), by Rosamond Lehmann. Rhys portrays the counterparts to the well-educated and professional women entering urban spaces in the early decades of the twentieth-century (Parsons 145). In terms of social status, most of the heroines in English novels are from the English upper-middle class, financially solvent, determined in their desire for independence, and supported by family or friends. By contrast, Rhys's heroines are abandoned or rejected by reasonably well-off families and are financially insolvent. They do not search for their identities or independence from patriarchy. They are alone and completely alienated from secure living conditions imagined by other female novelists.

Without the protection of a father or husband, Rhys's urban *flâneuses* are degraded into lives of poverty, drunkenness, and inept prostitution, with neither the determination nor the resolution to prevent this. In financially desperate conditions, they trade their bodies and must maintain their beauty in order to remain in sexual circulation and financially sustain themselves. They have temporary jobs as mannequins, models, and chorus-girls, for example, which seem to sell women's appearances and youth. Rhys demonstrates how their bodies become sites of economic transaction. They walk the streets, not quite as prostitutes, yet live on the edge of respectability, sanity, and dignity (Emery 418). The *flâneuses* in Rhys's novels are still public women, in the Victorian sense, as they walk the nighttime city, sit in public spaces, and pick up unknown men.

Discussing the characteristics of Rhys's heroines, Deborah Parsons identifies them as "vagabond by nature" (132), and V. S. Naipaul labels them as "inexplicably bohemian" (qtd. in Parsons 137) because Rhys's heroines of the first four novels have spent their hours aimlessly walking on the streets in Paris or London. On the first page of *Quartet* (1928), for example, we learn that beautiful and young Marya gets up from her table at the Café Levenue in Montparnasse after having sat there drinking, smoking, and reading for an hour and a half. Likewise, other heroines spend a lot of time on the streets sitting at a table in some café with a drink and walking on the streets regardless of passers-by. Deborah Parsons explains their sauntering on the streets demonstrates their seemingly fatalistic acquiescence to the tawdry monotony of their lives (132). Their wanderings emphasize their rootlessness.

However, Rhys's *flâneuses* are classified as "conditioned wanderers" rather than "natural wanderers." They are driven to be wanderers due to their instability in lodgings, employment, and relations with men and family. What makes the heroines drift is mainly the fact that there is no comfortable and solid home for them, unlike other heroines in English novels who are provided with stable and residential places. They shift from one grubby lodging-house or cheap hotel to the next. A hotel room is only for a temporary stay, not for settlement. Marya Zelli in *Quartet*, for example, as a chorus-girl, spends nights at cheap boarding houses travelling the country before her marriage. She has drifted from place to place depending on her economic situation, and she seems to never have a home during her life. She realizes that her

existence is “haphazard” (8). After she gets married, she moves to Paris, but still stays at shabby hotels with her husband. Marya reflects that her life in Paris lacks solidity: “it lacked the necessary background. A bedroom, balcony and *cabinet de toilette* in a cheap Montmartre hotel cannot possibly be called a solid background” (8). The heroines live in transitory, anonymous boarding houses and hotels, strangers to those who surround them. Rhys hints at a lack of fulfillment in urban modernist bohemia.

In this sense, Rhys’s *flâneuses* do not leisurely observe the urban scenes as a male *flâneur* would. They do not enjoy their freedom in cities, hiding in the crowd at a detached position, as Benjamin describes the *flâneur* in Paris. As objects of the male gaze, they cannot hide in crowds. Moreover, they do not feel comfortable on the street because they are regarded as street women, unrespectable and fallen. In particular, Rhys’s *flâneuses* are always aware of the gaze of others, not only because they are women possessed of self-surveillance, but also because they are exiled both culturally and sexually. They are West Indian Creoles living in Europe, especially London and Paris. In addition, they do not fulfill what society requires of a woman in many respects; thus, they cannot respond to the other’s gaze. They try to avoid others’ critical views of them and often hide in cafés, lavatories, or hotel rooms.

Rhys’s manner of relating to urban space resonates with the idea expressed by Michel de Certeau in his seminal essay, “Walking in the City.” In this essay, he focuses on a pedestrian’s resistance to the planned city, “the Concept-city” as he calls it, organized by urban planners (95). He suggests that the act of

walking is a way of negotiating the city differently mapped by urban planners, a way of escaping the mechanisms of power imposed by "the Concept-city," of reinventing urban space as "lived space" (96). Observation and walking always go together with contemplation. Observing and walking in the city brings new experiences; thus, images of experiences and of the city are layered upon and juxtaposed to one another. The spectators can re-imagine themselves when imaginatively transported beyond the actual, "real" time and place. As Rhys's *flâneuses* walk the streets of the metropolis, fragments of the past are assembled through recollection while geographical and psychological spaces become overlapped. That is, in Rhys's fictions, the spaces of the *flâneuse's* mind and the city are overlapped, and in this way, the experience of the *flâneuse* becomes increasingly interiorized. As the city is the spatial ground to walk upon for streetwalkers, the mind is also a place one metaphorically wanders in.

For Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight*, all of the Paris she experiences in the present is available to trigger simultaneous memories of the past. For two weeks, as a tourist Sasha goes back to Paris where she has lived with her husband. Sasha walks through the streets she knew in earlier days, and the familiar places and even remembered faces bring back the fragments of the past. She remembers incidents of her life piece by piece. Throughout the novel, Sasha cries or tells of her past alone in her room in the middle of the night or in café lavatories about her marriage or intermittent jobs. Her memories resound like a bittersweet melody about the harsh present. Sasha's past mixes with the present, and she experiences her past and present

simultaneously. She cannot be free from her past and is trapped in an enclosed space in material and psychological ways. The ghosts of heroines' past and present selves mingle and merge with the women in the streets like doomful prophecy.

III

Voyage is the bitterly ironic story of a young, bewildered, and inexperienced Creole girl's fall through economic and sexual manipulation and control into a life of idleness. *Voyage*, Rhys's third novel, portrays the seemingly private tragedy of a young girl's seduction and abandonment in 1914 London. Anna Morgan in *Voyage* is an 18-year-old girl born on a West Indian island. Her mother and father are dead, and her stepmother, Hester, an English woman, has brought her to England and practically abandons her. Left penniless by her late, alcoholic father, Anna lives the transient and unstable life of a chorus-girl. The indifferent metropolis brutalizes her through the seductions of consumerism and the ease of anonymous sexual encounters. Anna inevitably goes down a dismal path into prostitution, pregnancy, a late and almost fatal illegal abortion, and profound hopelessness.

In many ways, *Voyage* is shaped by the contrast between metropolitan bleakness and Anna's nostalgic memories of her Caribbean childhood. England is a place of gray streets and dark houses while her home, Constance Estate in the West Indies, is a place full of warm and bright colors: "The colours are red, purple, blue, gold, all shades of green. The colours here are black, brown,

grey, dim-green, pale blue, the white of people's faces—like woodlice" (54). When Anna arrives in pre-War London at the age of sixteen, it is a city of gloom. Anna perceives London as a dirty and engulfing fog, which reflects her loathing and experiences of oppression. It is a claustrophobic and confined space rather than a site for exploration and expansion. There is no air in Anna's London. She is appalled by what she sees as a dehumanizing labyrinth:

[T]his is London—hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning down one after the other all alike all stuck together—the streets like smooth shut-in ravines and the dark houses frowning down—oh I'm not going to like this place I'm not going to like this place I'm not going to like this place. (17)

The London streets are submerged in fog, both physical and temporal, in which shadows and ghosts walk side by side. She finds the city cold, grey, unwelcoming, xenophobic, snobbish, and misogynous.

Furthermore, the darkness and threat of the houses and street show how difficult it is for a woman to fit into urban spaces. Dark and intimidating images of houses and streets are prevalent in Rhys's world, which reflects the heroine's uneasiness and anxieties in the metropolis:

Then the taxi came; and the houses on either side of the street were small and dark and then they were big and

dark but all exactly alike. And I saw that all my life I had known that this was going to happen, and that I'd been afraid for a long time, I'd been afraid for a long time. There's fear, of course, with everybody. But now it had grown, it had grown gigantic; it filled me and it filled the whole world. (96)

Later, Anna is scared as if the slanting houses bear down upon her or streets might engulf her (178). A similar description of houses as threats is found in *Good Morning, Midnight*: "Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters . . . Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer" (32). In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1934), Julia Martin also feels the dark street of London to be oppressive: "It was heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls round you, and shut you in so that you felt you could not breathe" (85). Anna suffers from claustrophobia and agoraphobia, which demonstrate her anxieties to the world outside and imply that there is no place to let her take a rest: "'I believe this damned room's getting smaller and smaller,' I thought. And about the rows of houses outside, gimcrack, rotten-looking, and all exactly alike" (30). There is no place inside or outside that is free from mock, humiliation, and anxiety to the heroine and, further, she feels she cannot even breathe.

Rhys's antipathy to England is imbued perhaps with a sense of being particularly inferior and "other," as a colonial and a woman, to the imperial and patriarchal capital city in England. It is a place where the inhabitants, customs, and conventions are

antithetical to those of the other on its margins. Urmila Seshagiri explains that “[t]o be Creole is to be born displaced, to label as not-home the land of one’s birth” (488). As Judith Raiskin points out, Creole identity encompasses “the white native who lives in a cultural space between the European and black Caribbean societies and the native of mixed racial ancestry living in the islands and in England after World War II” (qtd. in Seshagiri 488). Their status in society is as permanent outsiders accepted neither in their native countries in the West Indies nor in England. As Ford Madox Ford makes clear in his introduction to *The Left Bank*, the reason that Rhys’s Caribbean origins give her a “passion for stating the case of the underdog” is that those origins in themselves mark her as unacceptable; they link her to the prostitutes and lawbreakers who engage her sympathy. Rhys profoundly understands and represents the social prejudices against the Creole identity, especially in terms of sexual laxity and social marginality.

Anna is marked as a tart and a prostitute by society due to her Creole identity even though she has not yet become a prostitute. She finds herself caught in a bohemian lifestyle of promiscuity, which links her to prostitution, miscegenation, and sexual perversity. Due to her West Indian origins, her fellow chorus-girls call her the “Hottentot,” supposedly the lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder. One of Anna’s London flatmates unintentionally strikes at the heart of Anna’s cultural and familial anxieties when she sneers, “You’re not all there; you’re a half-potty bastard. You’re not all there; that’s what the matter with you” (145). Adlai Murdoch claims that “The implicit

discursive and thematic conjoining of the creole subject to an inferior heredity and an indiscriminate sexuality through this trope is thus increasingly apparent" (261). Murdoch continues: "Thus we see the beginnings of Anna's textual assimilation to the otherness and unbridled sexual desire that metropolitan societies associated with tropical climes. This process of othering through a doubling of the gaze, of constructing the self as implicitly that which the other is not, is an integral part of constructing metropolitan subjectivity" (261). Anna is surprised to find herself violently alienated from the white English people she encounters, whether they are her working-class flatmates, her wealthy lover, or well-heeled shop girls in London's department stores. Her English stepmother Hester, her lover Walter, and other people she has met in England express their prejudices against the figure of the Creoles, and these prejudices unconsciously affect Anna's life as a chorus-girl-turned-prostitute.

Becoming a chorus-girl is a definite downward step because performers of these sorts of jobs, such as acting, dancing, and singing, were at the time always suspected of sexual laxity. Rita Felski points out that the actress could be seen as a "figure of public pleasure" like the prostitute. Their cosmetics and costume render the artificial and commodified forms of contemporary female sexuality, which is appropriated as "a symptom of the pervasiveness of illusion and spectacle in the generation of modern forms of desire" (19-20). The performance and the performers, including chorus-girls and actresses, are commodities to be paid for and enjoyed by the audience. They provide the audience with enjoyable, lavish, and visual sexuality. They are the

commodities of show business, exchanging their appearance and performance for lodging and money. Apparently, Anna has slipped further from the respectable middle class into the interstices of the English class system. Anna's English stepmother disapproves of Anna's gadding about on tour and considers her to have disgraced the family. Later, Walter asks her if her stepmother thinks Anna has "disgraced the family or something" when they have dinner for the first time (21). Walter's reaction leaves Anna humiliated. In fact, English landladies often reject Anna and other chorus-girls as boarders in their houses, treating them like prostitutes: "No, I don't let to professionals'. . . Then the second day we were there she made a row because we both got up late and Maudie came downstairs in her nightgown and a torn kimono" (8). People regarded chorus-girls as easily turned into prostitutes due to their flamboyant dress and their performances in front of male audiences.

Despite shining on the brightly lit stage, the life of a chorus-girl in actuality was pitiful, spent in a series of ghastly chorus-girls' hostels and eating bad food. Anna earns "[t]hirty-five bod a week," which is very small wages to manage on (25). Moreover, when she gets pleurisy, the company leaves her alone at a shabby room. Nobody takes care of her even though chorus-girls work and live together during the tour. It seems a typical way for a young chorus-girl to turn into a prostitute, as people said. Her co-worker, Laurie lives as a prostitute and introduces men to Anna. Vincent says pretty chorus girls become hard as they age when he sees Laurie's photograph: "'She really is pretty. But hard—a bit hard,' as if he were talking to himself.

'They get like that. It's a pity'" (174). There is striking comparison of prices between women and clothes, which reveals materialistic views on women. Maudie, Anna's roommate and coworker, delivers that a man says a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them: "You can get a very nice girl for five pounds, a very nice girl indeed; you can even get a very nice girl for nothing if you know how to go about it. But you can't get a very nice costume for her for five pounds" (46). This shows the extreme commodification of women compared with non-living materials. Anna and Maudie are angry and shocked, but it is not a lie or false conjecture in a materialistic society, where women are items to be bought and discarded easily.

Clothes are very important to Anna relative to her self-esteem; wearing good clothes seems the only way to escape from her wretched situation. She is always in distress over money and is in terror of poverty: "The ones without any money, the ones with beastly lives. Perhaps I'm going to be one of the ones with beastly lives" (26). Anna, like other teenage girls, is humiliated by her shabby clothes: "When I thought about my clothes I was too sad to cry. About clothes, it's awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed" (25). Like many young girls, Anna slides into seduction for the sake of a costume for which she longs. Anna thinks, "All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything—anything for clothes" (25). The affairs with Walter Jefferies, who is old enough to be her father, show how Anna turns herself into sexual commodity for clothes and money. Rhys writes "poverty is the cause of many compromises" in *Quartet* (16). Walter gives

Anna money to buy beautiful stockings and clothes in exchange for her virginity. While on tour in Southsea, he picks up Anna on the street, and at first buys her two pairs of cheap white lisle stockings. After their intimate act, he gives Anna five five-pound bank notes to buy herself a new pair of silk stockings. Anna sometimes feels guilty, but soon gets over her depressed mood and enjoys spending money. When Anna goes out with him, she can buy a lot of beautiful clothes including luxurious fur coat and she is very happy.

Anna thinks wearing a good dress makes her look different from the reality of her situation, in that what she wears defines her meaning and class position. Maroula Joannou contends that "Fashion in Rhys is a marker of changes in women's symbolic lives, bringing women new performative possibilities for sensual self-expression in the form of scopophilic pleasure and somatic fantasy" (464). Anna believes that good clothes can change her situation and fulfill her wishes to be a member of a glittering world. While looking at the clothes in a shop window, Anna thinks:

The clothes of most of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future. 'If I could buy this, then of course I'd be quite different.' Keep hope alive and you can do anything, and that's the way the world goes round, that's the way they keep the world rolling. So much hope for each person. (130)

However, after Walter leaves her, she is unable to buy clothes and

wears torn clothes: "I can't come in this dress. It's torn under the arm and awfully creased . . . That's why I kept my coat on. I tore it like that last time I took it off" (117). There seems no more hope to change Anna's future with good clothes because the story never mentions that Anna buys beautiful clothes or anything else any more. The rest of the story describes a series of men and Anna's downfall.

Rhys depicts Anna's fear, disgust, victimization, loss, and pain in her hallucination. As people consider Anna a lax Creole, she will pick up any men on the street after Walter leaves her. Anna manifests her disgust with her life as a prostitute by destroying a hated picture of a dog in the room she rents from Ethel. The picture over her bed is called "Loyal Heart," and it shows a dog sitting up begging. Anna believes that "the dog in the picture over the bed stared down at us smugly (Do you know the country? Of course, if you know the country it makes all the difference. The country where the orange-tree flowers?)" (161). Anna regards the dog as herself sitting and begging for an English man's love. The dog's loyalty to a British master reminds her of her painful love affairs and makes her disgusted. She throws her shoe at the picture and smashes the glass. After this she vomits and realizes that she is pregnant by a man whom she does not remember. Her hallucination peaks when she hemorrhages at the end of the novel, following a botched abortion; she feels the bed ascend with her into the air. The description of Anna's sensation is reminiscent of a surrealistic picture:

I drank the gin and listened to them whispering for a long while. Then I shut my eyes and the bed mounted into the air with me. It mounted very high and stayed there suspended – a little slanted to one side, so that I had to clutch the sheets to prevent myself from falling out. And the clock was ticking loud, like that time when I lay looking at the dog in the picture *Loyal Heart* and watching his chest going in and out and I kept saying, 'Stop, stop,' but softly so that Ethel wouldn't hear. 'I'm too old for this sort of thing,' he said, 'it's bad for the heart.' He laughed and it sounded funny. 'Les emotions fortes,' he said. I said, 'Stop, please stop.' 'I knew you'd say that,' he said. His face was white. (184)

Alcohol functions as an effective catalyst for inducing Rhys's heroines' hallucinations. When they are depressed and want to ward off anxiety, they will drink anywhere, such as in their rooms, cafés, or bars. Rhys's heroines drink easily and often, which sometimes seems to make them alcoholic, but it only temporarily works and often worsens the anxiety.

Anna's abortion in the last part of the novel implies her giving up being a mother and her rejection of delivering another Creole into cold England. Anna is scared that the baby might be an eyeless or limbless monster, a primal anxiety about her own racial heritage of the Caribbean Basin. According to Urmila Seshagiri, Anna's baby "will inherit not only the Caribbean's centuries-long 'crisis of filiation' represented by the unresolved identity of Anna's late mother, but also the detotalizing experience of metropolitan modernity represented by its anonymous, absent

father" (499). Elgin Mellown points out the following in Rhys's work:

These tortured women cannot reach maturity by giving birth to a child which, depending on them, will force them into adulthood; and, having no husbands to provide for them and with no way of earning a living other than by selling their bodies (which must thus be kept free of a dependent child), they must abort any life that may spring in their wombs. If they do give birth . . . they are unable to keep the child alive. (464)

As Kristin Czarnecki states, Rhys denies women's experience of their own maternity (75). Rhys's heroines are forever alone, outside the realms of every society, and cut off from the ordinary patterns of life.

Anna acts naively, resulting in the unintended consequences of a reversed outlook in the conclusion. She wishes that her wretched life were a dream because it is so abominable. Her experiences of failed love destroy her romantic dream and cause anxiety, which drives her into self-destructive ways such as drinking alcohol, sleeping with a chain of men, having an abortion, and succumbing to hysteria. Rhys's heroines are disillusioned with love of men and with life. Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, for example, finds that men are like numbing drugs such as alcohol, which provides temporary soothing, but soon turns into another life catastrophe. However, there is no possible way for Rhys's heroines to be rid of numbing drugs, and the negative *flâneuses* cling to them as an illusion.

IV

In the voice of a disempowered heroine, Rhys shows that the logic of gender relations based on transactions and the city's hostility to vulnerable women. To be a woman on the street is to be constantly scrutinized and evaluated by the male gaze. In this culture, the look is largely controlled by men while women are usually subordinated to male appreciation and, further, turned into sexual commodities by exchanging themselves for money or financial security. Their dependency upon men for economic survival inheres within their status as sexual commodities. The values of independence, respectability, and public visibility have confusingly collapsed for the single woman in the city (Parsons 146). While Rhys recognizes that all migrants to Paris face a cold and empty city, she knows from her experience that women living alone face an even worse, more vulnerable situation. Not only do they lack the traditional support systems best exemplified by the extended family, but they are also entering a space where their social and economic options are limited. Helen Carr contends, "In Rhys's analysis, metropolitan society operates . . . as a 'huge machine of law, order, respectability' that destroys or maims those who do not fit in, whether they are misfits for reasons of race, class, nation, sexual mores or poverty" (51). In Jean Rhys's world of the city, the heroine's struggle to win security and rest becomes futile; rather, the dimly lit streets position women as sexual prey. The experiences of Rhys's negative *flâneuses* end in confusion and bewilderment, and they constantly attempt to retreat. Through the female drifter's urban experiences, Rhys exposes the interrupted

existence that allows for no progress, but merely for fleeting moments of meaning, in which it is often impossible to distinguish between new possibilities and dead ends. Anna is circulated in a consumerist society as a sexual commodity by the insatiable longings of men and her own desires.

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The Negative *Flâneuse* in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*

Abstract

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This paper examines Jean Rhys's negative *flâneuse* and how it is embodied in *Voyage in the Dark*. Rhys explores the physical and psychological experiences of marginal urban women. Rhys describes how they are driven to position themselves as sexual commodities due to their deplorable conditions, while also addressing the fear in urban spaces experienced by her abject *flâneuse*. As a Creole immigrant and a chorus-girl, Anna Morgan in *Voyage* is exiled culturally and sexually. She is labeled as the embodiment of Creole laxity and is marked as a tart and a prostitute even before she enters prostitution. Anna slides into seduction and is degraded into poverty, drunkenness, and inept prostitution with neither the determination nor the resoluteness to prevent it. Anna is circulated as a sexual commodity through consumerist society by the insatiable longings of men and her own desires. Rhys depicts Anna's fear, disgust, victimization, loss, and pain in her hallucinations. Rhys emphasizes the city's hostility to women, which drives them into self-destructive ways such as drinking alcohol, sleeping with a chain of men, having an abortion, and succumbing to hysteria.

Key Words: Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, *Flâneuse*, Creole, Sexual Commodity, Metropolis

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