

The Subversive Victim: The (D)Evolution of the Rhys Heroine through *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*

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Heroine through *Voyage in the Dark, After Leaving
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Abstract

Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*, when read as a trilogy, detail the linear trajectory of one woman's life through the characters of Anna, Julia, and Sasha respectively. Through the novels' progression, they unveil a deeper analysis of the psychology motivating the characters' often troubling behavior. Anna, Julia, and Sasha all subject themselves to extreme victimization in their struggle for survival; however, they are able to use their victimization to subvert the patriarchal power structures they inhabit. Their social, financial, and physical weaknesses are compounded by their identification with frequently marginalized minority groups. They choose to fail rather than succeed in a system that continues to oppress them. In order to survive, they depend on the financial support of men, typically lovers or former lovers. These characters capitalize on social expectations for women in the early 20th century; by doing so, they address the systemic flaws created by these societal norms. By reading Anna, Julia, and Sasha as points along the life of a single character, the progress of their collective life is made clear. Through Anna, the reader sees the original cause for the troubling behavior Julia exhibits, which eventually leads to the repercussions from this behavior that Sasha must suffer.

Introduction

Born in 1890 on the British colonized Caribbean island of Dominica, Jean Rhys is one of the most prominent female voices in both modern and post-colonial literature. At the age of 16, Rhys moved from Dominica to England where, following the death of her father, she “drifted into a series of jobs – chorus girl, mannequin, artist’s model” (Rhys, *Smile* 1). Only after the failure of her first marriage did Rhys seriously begin writing. Her first four novels, *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*, published in 1928, 1930, 1934, and 1939 respectively, were unsuccessful both critically and financially. After the critical failure of the final novel of the four, *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys disappeared; however, in 1966 she reemerged with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel to Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* told from the perspective of Antoinette/Bertha, which was by far her most critically acclaimed novel. The majority of Rhys scholarship was, and remains, focused primarily on her final, and most critically successful novel, while the preceding four receive comparatively little scholarly treatment; despite the lack of attention they receive, it was in the first four novels that Rhys developed her voice and most closely examined the lives of women in pre-war England. In *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys uses Anna, Julia, and Sasha, each novel’s respective protagonist, to examine the treatment of women by the patriarchal society of early twentieth century England. Reading these three novels as a sequential trilogy allows readers to see the protagonist age and become more jaded by the patriarchal society they inhabit. Anna, newly arrived in England, is the youngest and most naïve, but by the novel’s dark and ambiguous conclusion, she begins to understand the way society functions and how she must behave if she is to survive. Julia, the older, more experienced woman caught in a hiatus between financially supportive lovers, follows Anna. From Julia’s

sadness and desperation, Sasha emerges. Sasha is the darkest, most cynical of the three. Sasha's depression and alcoholism, combined with circumstance, causes her to devolve into madness. Because of their age and experience this linear progression of Rhys's women offers criticisms of patriarchal social structures that differ throughout the course of a lifetime. Society does not treat Anna, Julia, and Sasha in the same way; Rhys uses these women to illustrate that, though age and circumstances change through the course of a life, a society predicated on patriarchal concepts will always find a way to keep women oppressed.

Despite these characters' failure to thrive, analyzing them to fit into a frame of success negates their purpose. Unlike Edna Pontellier's suicide in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*,¹ their failures are not meant to be seen as a subversive form of success or emancipation from the restrictive systems prompting it: if they are measured in that manner, they lose their meaning. Viewing these characters as successful nullifies their resistance to the patriarchal paradigm they inhabit. When viewed as successful, the innate helplessness of these characters is undermined, which means they would no longer be standing in opposition to the power structures in place, but rather they are seen as simply unable, instead of unwilling, to abide by them. Attempting to redeem these characters as victorious eliminates the social criticisms behind their failures. They do not fail because they do not know how to succeed; they fail because they do not want to succeed in a system where female success is defined by oppression and submission. If they were to triumph in the confines of the patriarchal social structures – marry, raise children, and live with the promised financial stability of marriage – their failures would no longer represent the subversion of the social power structure. By not even attempting to achieve this kind of success,

¹ Gray, Jennifer B. "The Escape of the 'Sea': Ideology and *The Awakening*." *The Southern Literary Journal* 37.1 (2004): 53-73. Gray suggests that Edna's "only escape from [patriarchal ideologies] is death, and hence, Edna commits suicide" (54). Though critic's opinions of Edna's suicide vary, it is important to differentiate this view from considerations of Rhys' protagonists' failures.

the Rhys heroine demonstrates the dangers of defining success by the values of a patriarchal society that does not allow women to create their own means and method of success. The socio-economic structure of the world they inhabit has prohibited them from crafting a meaningful definition of success because it has strictly confined the definition to meet the needs of the patriarchy. Had they been successful, socially and economically, they would have failed to critique the socially crafted impossibility for independent female success; rather, they would have demonstrated the chance for women to create self-defined success within the system.

Living without the possibility of success brings the realities of the social and financial restrictions of the 1930s into sharp focus. It is only through their failure that these women can criticize the societal structures that have restricted them to such an extent as to make that socially defined success undesirable.

The Rhys Heroine

Anna, Julia, and Sasha are archetypal Rhys heroines. These women are portrayed as “small, physically fragile, languid and exotic in the English context” (Brandmark 22). As Erika Smilowitz claims in her article, “Childlike Women and Paternal Men: Colonialism in Jean Rhys’s Fiction,” these women become defined as the product of “the men they subordinate themselves to” (93). These women are cast as “daughter or child – economically dependent, helpless, powerless – and the opposite forces as male, wealthy, powerful, paternal and protective” (Smilowitz 93). They find themselves forced into a “trap of false protectionism,” wherein the women feel secure through the monetary gifts they receive, but are still subject to the whims of their lovers. Smilowitz argues, “In novel after novel, helpless women seek out powerful males for protection – but the men ultimately fail them” (102). By placing their financial security in the

hands of those who have no obligation to see that they are cared for, these women are eventually abandoned, leaving them emotionally broken and economically destitute.

By formulating her characters in this manner, Rhys comments on a social structure that echoes the Victorian “separate spheres” ideology, where men act as representatives of a powerful economic security and women become subservient to them in order to survive in a society that restricts their social and financial independence. The power of economics is clear through Rhys’s narratives; her protagonists often portray a childlike vulnerability that prompts them to rely on the financial security of a male lover. To continue to secure the gifts of money that men provide, these women are willing to undermine their autonomy, which eventually leads to psychological instability. Though they alter themselves to meet the expectations of their male providers, Rhys’s heroines are unwilling to fully submit themselves to the social structures that would have them be wives rather than lovers; instead they choose to live outside the boundary of convention. Though they sacrifice their autonomy to their lovers, this sacrifice is temporary. Unlike wives, they maintain the ability to leave when they choose, though they rarely do so. Through their refusal of conventional romantic relationships – and the greater level of security that would come with marriage – they are left even more vulnerable to abandonment of the men they rely upon for support. When she does marry, the Rhys heroines’ marriage is brief, bleak, and ends in deep emotional trauma; for these women, such relationships are avoided, as they will never render the support anticipated.

Rhys’s heroines’ rebellion against social norms does not end with their refusal to marry. These women also refuse to participate in a society that actively oppresses them. They prefer to become victims of the same society and preserve what little independence is grudgingly afforded to them. By rejecting the limited confines of conventional feminine roles, these women are

deemed “failures” by the standards constructed by the society around them. Roughly the same time these women were failing, the definition of failure for the majority of the population was undergoing revision. Scott Sandage asserts in *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* that the idea of failure took on a different meaning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He suggests that a question asked by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1890, “to what do you ascribe your failure in life?” was the catalyst for this ideological change. Instead of failure being reserved only for “bankrupts and drunkards,” it was now marked by a “dread of stasis and stagnation, a moss-grown existence” (253-254). He states, “Failure had become modern, a low hum rather than a loud crash. It meant a fragmented life, not necessarily a shattered one” (256). A lack of social mobility and continued financial stagnation now defined failure, rather than more obvious and explosive failures, like bankruptcy or homelessness.

Sandage suggests it is not one event that leads to failure; rather, those who are termed failures become caught in the middle ground between success and death. Rhys’s women have become the picture of “stasis and stagnation,” never truly advancing their financial or social standing; however, they do grow in age and experience. The first hint of this cyclical pattern of survival appears at the closing of *Voyage in the Dark*, when Anna, ill and delusional, states, “I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again [...] starting all over again, all over again...” (Rhys, *Voyage* 188). In the original text, Anna dies of the botched abortion, but Rhys changed it, though not without protest, at the request of her publisher, thus forcing Anna into the liminal space between survival and death (Rhys, *Letters* 25). Sandage’s argument reinforces the idea that instead of being released from suffering, Anna, and consequently Julia and Sasha, becomes trapped in the failure of stagnation and will never be afforded the chance for the conventional ideals of success because they refuse to submit to social norms.

Anna, Julia, and Sasha could indeed be viewed as failures due to their rejection of the molds society has cast for them; however, they have not entirely stagnated. Financially, they remain destitute through the trilogy, but psychologically they undergo extraordinary changes. Cycles and repetition are frequently used motifs in the three novels, but these cycles focus on the economic pattern the women fall into with their series of lovers and ignore the changes that take place internally. By reading the novels as a trilogy, readers see Anna's naiveté develop into Sasha's detachment and the process by which this evolution takes place.

Regardless of their more personal, private growth, their social identity as failures forces them to "the extreme edge of multiple axes of exclusion," argues Maren Linett (347). Their social status causes these women to appear weak and powerless in the face of those who fit more neatly into societal boundaries. However, as Linett posits, "when we look only to social factors to explain their helplessness, we miss symptoms of what we would now call posttraumatic stress disorder" (347-48). These characters should never be considered mentally unsound or weak. Rather, they have had weakness thrust upon them and, though it is a learned behavior, they endeavor to make the most of it.

The three women use their imposed victimization as a tool toward ensuring their survival. They project the image of a victim – a true image, but a projection nonetheless – in order to evoke a sympathetic response from the men they come into contact with, primarily lovers, in order to secure money from them. These women are victims of the society they inhabit and they make efforts to project this victimization so others will not overlook it. Rhys's women make ends meet by repeating the process over and over again, reflecting the theme of repetition and cyclical fates found in the novels. Because they are designated failures, the Rhys heroine is subjected to marginalization by those who choose to adhere to the constraints of patriarchal

society affording others the opportunities for success these women refuse. They are forced into a sort of social isolation to be pitied and reviled by others, particularly those who chose to live within the boundaries society has deemed acceptable. However, their victimization should not be misinterpreted as weakness. They inhabit a kind of virtuous victimhood, one that could only stem from the rejection of the restrictions imposed by patriarchal society on women's identities. By avoiding the confines of such an oppressive system, Rhys heroines simultaneously fight against it, while becoming victimized by the trap their society has laid for all those who would oppose it.

In order to survive outside the confines of society, Rhys's protagonists must rely on the charity of lovers as their primary source of income; by doing so, the Rhys woman claims a status akin to that of a prostitute. Consequently, she is cut from the society and loses the ability to form emotional relationships outside of those with the lovers who provide for her. In "Women Must Have Spunks," Lucy Wilson defines the Rhys protagonist as a "social outcast cut off from meaningful contact with other human beings" (440). Her only social contact becomes transactional: her lovers giving her what she needs to survive and she in turn providing some sort of gratification, typically sexual. Because she does not allow herself to take part in emotional relationships, she becomes isolated. The Rhys heroine is "abandoned but not free, she is powerless to alter her condition" (Wilson 440). Wilson argues these women are unable to find new ways of supporting themselves and, as a consequence, will continue to be financially destitute and emotionally ostracized.

Wilson's assertions do not account for the variety of more socially acceptable jobs Rhys's women take as chorus girls or shop workers. These women clearly contain the capacity to work, but they choose instead to live on the sporadic generosity of their lovers. At the time of the novels' publication, the careers available to women were unsustainable as an independent means

of support. Chorus girls only stayed in work if the show continued to run and the wages of shop workers assumed they were not the only pay earners in a household, i.e. husbands were the primary source of income. By choosing to live in such a financially precarious fashion, the Rhys heroine rejects the economic system that would place her in a submissive, inferior position, either as a wife or a prostitute. Rather than accepting a role in perpetuating this system of oppression, Rhys's women discard it, preferring instead to gain their independence from a male-dominated financial structure. If they were to assume a position as a wife or a conventional prostitute, these women would necessarily be accepting a role in the patriarchy, though prostitution is perhaps preferable as it is more a transparently male dominated, transactional system.² The marriage market become essentially equivalent to prostitution in its formulation for the women involved; however, its subtlety in this regard allows it to remain a socially acceptable option for women. Thus Rhys's protagonists refuse to adhere to either potential position, but they do not reject the prostitute label as sternly. By refusing to adhere to the social and economic structures that would have allowed for conventionally acceptable forms of success, these women claim their autonomy and live with a greater degree of independence, though this independence comes at a cost: they become outcasts.

Unable to advance their financial standing in a more socially acceptable manner, these women commodify their sexuality as a means of support. Though they do not become prostitutes in a conventional sense, they do exchange intimacy or the suggestion of sex for financial support. By considering sexuality only as an integral part in a financial scheme, Rhys's women develop intimacy issues and have difficulty connecting with others on an emotional level. These protagonists have a tendency to emotionally disconnect from sexual situations. While this

² Though not completely condoned by society, prostitution still worked within the patriarchal code of male dominance; it was, therefore, tolerated.

dissociation protects them from the potential trauma of an emotional experience, it can deepen the passivity and helplessness these women feel in their everyday lives. They extend their own dissociations by projecting it on to others they encounter in intimate situations. When Anna sees a couple embracing in a park she actively dehumanizes them, seeing them as “beetles clinging to the railings” (Rhys, *Voyage* 34). Anna is unable to attach emotion to the couple’s embrace; she cannot consciously accept that they may be in love or, at the very least pleased with their kiss. Instead, Anna regards them as inhuman, engaging in acts of intimacy only out of necessity or instinct. She forces her perspective on others, believing that all acts of intimacy are only a means to an end. This perception, first expressed through this encounter, is not only reflected upon strangers, but also plays a major role in the women’s lives as they pass through a variety of intimate and romantic encounters.

Rhys’s protagonists’ disdain for intimacy is derived from the systemic oppression of women under the patriarchal society these characters inhabit. These women are not financially or emotionally successful; they refuse to flourish in their environment, but in so doing, “they reveal a critique of patriarchal femininity” (Cunningham 373-74). They attempt to achieve success by their own means, but the androcentric structure of society restricts them too closely to allow for success on their own terms. In the time Rhys was writing, “to be a white female [was] to base an identity on privileges that one has no expectation of achieving for one’s self” (Cunningham 380). Cunningham concisely expresses the position of women in the early twentieth century. They were given standards of success that were only attainable through the successes of their husbands. By attempting to subvert this notion and base their identity on what they alone have achieved, these women are undone. They are forced again and again to seek out men for support, but they continue to refuse to align their success with those of these men. They refuse to conform to the

standard measures of success for women – marriage, children, titles – and are punished for it, while never being rewarded for the successes they believe they have achieved independently. These women choose to live beyond the confines of the social space defined for them, and are therefore rejected from society and doomed to social and economic destitution. They resort to the standard means of financial support for women – through men – but they approach it in a manner that is not the conventional choice, i.e. through lovers instead of husbands, which causes them not only to fail economically, but to be ostracized socially as well. They attempt to achieve social and economic freedom, but they will never be allowed to succeed in that venture. However, these characters do not fail in their quest for independence. They are never truly beholden to the will of the men in their lives and always have the opportunity to escape. Though they fail, they are still free.

These women tend to make themselves passive in sexual situations to avoid emotional availability and the psychological, sometimes physical, violence they associate with romantic, or more specifically sexual, relationships. This is perhaps most clear in the closing of *Good Morning, Midnight* when Sasha invites a mysterious man into her bed. The man, though not explicitly described, is most likely the *commis voyageur*, for whom she has expressed nothing but disdain, even then referring to him as a “poor devil of a human being” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 190). The scene preceding the *commis voyageur* is one of Rhys’s most distressing: the attempted rape of Sasha by Rene, a gigolo who has been accompanying her around the city. Even in the midst of sexual violence, Sasha only struggles briefly before giving in and convincing him not to rape her by offering him money (Rhys, *Good Morning* 181). Sasha distances herself emotionally from what is happening to her physically. When she is relieved of the traumatic situation, she creates a new one by inviting a stranger into her bed. By taking this action, Sasha reasserts her

autonomy by finding another sexually exploitive situation, but this time she has willingly entered it and therefore maintains some kind of power over her situation, an idea that will be addressed again later. Without that semblance of power, Rhys's protagonists would feel completely helpless and would be unable to control any aspect of their lives, throwing them deeper into the destructive depression that is already prevalent.

Owing to their status as single women navigating a decidedly androcentric society, the victimization the protagonists take on, and, at least partially, their categorization as prostitutes, Rhys's novels are often the subjects of feminist scholarship.³ Rhys stylistically enhances her texts with modernist elements such as fragmentation and dream sequences in order to challenge "Victorian values and assumptions" (Cunningham 376). Rhys's women portray a feminism that revolves around their refusal and their failure. They do not succeed as feminists in the contemporary sense; rather, Rhys's characters demonstrate their subversion of the patriarchy through their actions and illustrate that failure as "preferable to the prescribed choices available to women – even, and perhaps especially, to those women who have a privileged relationship to a largely white patriarchal system" (Cunningham 376). Through their survival of adverse situations they demonstrate their strength. Their failures represent the failure of the patriarchal system to support women who desire independence.

In the trilogy, Rhys displays a fascination with women who are unable to make enough money to survive. In the 1930s, when Rhys was writing and publishing these novels, women were forging a new path of social independence, but were still beholden to the financial institutions of society at that time. Because of their financial destitution, these women become obsessed with the perception of others and strive to maintain the appearance of prosperity, or at

³ Notably, Nancy R. Harrison's *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* and Sylvie Maurel's *Jean Rhys*, a part of the *Women Writers* series, approach Rhys's works from a feminist perspective.

least hide their poverty. The women show their preoccupation with money through their obsession with clothing and makeup. Rhys uses clothing in particular as a marker of affluence. Anna, Julia, and Sasha's frequent concerns about their clothing illustrate the importance of appearance for women. Lacking the capacity to achieve independent success, they use their appearance to physically mark their accomplishments, namely marriage to a wealthy husband. Though these women are not financially secure, they still actively work to project that false image to strangers through their youth, beauty, or clothing. They must maintain this appearance in order to squelch the judgment of strangers and to remain attractive to potential lovers. The youngest of the three, Anna from *Voyage in the Dark*, despairs at the state of her clothes. In an internal monologue, Anna thinks:

About clothes, it's awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. Jaw, jaw, jaw... "Beautifully dressed woman..." As if it isn't enough that you want to be beautiful, that you want to have pretty clothes, that you want it like hell. As if that isn't enough. But no, it's jaw, jaw and sneer all the time. And the shop-windows sneering and smiling in your face. And then you look at the skirt of your costume, all crumpled at the back. And your hideous underclothes. You look at your hideous underclothes and think, "All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything – anything for clothes." (Rhys, *Voyage* 25)

In this passage, Anna concisely points to the key issue underlying Anna, Julia, and Sasha's desire for nice clothing and the meticulous care of their appearance, like Julia's kohl eyeliner, constant making up, and repeated checks of her appearance (Rhys, *After* 14). They are intensely concerned with how they believe strangers will perceive them. Anna does, however, briefly

come to terms with her situations: “‘Yes, that’s all right. I’m poor and my clothes are cheap and perhaps it will always be like this. And that’s all right too.’ It was the first time in my life I’d thought that” (Rhys, *Voyage* 26). Though at times she may be naïve, Anna is not altogether unaware of the way the world works. She realizes that she may never be wealthy enough to afford the kind of lifestyle she desires because of her unwillingness to align herself with the limited options available to women at the time. She begins the life-long process of reconciling her desire for clothing and prosperity with her financial destitution, the continuation of which readers witness through Julia and Sasha.

Unfortunately, this self-satisfaction is quickly lost whenever Anna has money in hand. As soon as Walter gives her money, Anna goes shopping for new clothes. She becomes so engaged and enthralled with the idea of new clothing that she forgets “about feeling ill” (Rhys, *Voyage* 27). However, as soon as she has purchased new clothes and the money is gone she “began to feel ill again” (Rhys, *Voyage* 29). Anna’s mysterious illness seems to be brought on by financial anxieties and subsequent concerns over her appearance, perhaps compounded by her poor living conditions. This illness is based on the conflict these two ideas represent. If Anna wants to keep the money she will appear just as poor as ever, but if Anna buys new clothes, she believes she will appear more prosperous even without possessing extra money. Anna is unable to resolve this conflict mentally and her body responds with physical illness at least in part brought about by that anxiety. None of Rhys’s women ever fully reconcile with this conflict, which in part accounts for their somewhat sickly appearance and their belief they do not look or dress nicely enough to be respected by others.

These women project an image of themselves as objects of sexual desire through their clothes and makeup in order to fully use the power of female sexuality on their male counterparts.

Anna, Julia, and Sasha make themselves into commodities to be traded for money because their meager income does not allow them to survive independently. They make a financial transaction with the men in their lives in order to supplement the money they do earn and continue to live a certain kind of lifestyle. Though they may not begin by manipulating their lovers with a conscious, systematic approach, they have found a pattern that allows them to survive in a system that actively works against their success. They have turned the oppressive power of the male gaze against the men who would be the aggressors by blatantly selling themselves to lovers and becoming *temporarily* submissive to their sexual desires. By taking this step openly, they avoid the necessity of discreetly doing the same thing in a marriage market and becoming *permanently* submissive to their husband's desires, sexual and otherwise. The inversion of conventional forms of sexual relationships allows these women to use men for their money, even while these men are using the female protagonists for sex. Rhys's heroines subvert the conventional dynamics by objectifying the men who objectify them.

Unlike the heroines of the novels, other women frequently attempt to align themselves with the conventional definition of success: whether they fail or succeed is not for a lack of trying. Other female characters in Rhys's novels – Hester, Maudie, Norah, and a variety of other nameless strangers – do not fail in the same way as the protagonists. The protagonist views these women as representations of the kind of femininity they seek to avoid and criticize; these women are self-serving, cold, and judgmental, or at least the Rhys heroine believes them to be so. Women who play supporting roles in Rhys's novels are “not up to the task of providing anyone with sufficient protection,” including the variety of mothers and mother figures Rhys presents (Smilowitz 94). Consequently, the protagonists view other women as antagonists who actively work against their own success by clinging to the society Rhys's women attempt to escape. This

view demonstrates the Rhys heroine's disdain for women who participate in and implicitly, though passively, support the social structures that are detrimental to female autonomy and independent happiness.

This tense relationship between the heroines and other women becomes particularly visible in mother-daughter interactions. Readers see both Anna from *Voyage in the Dark* and Julia from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* interact with mother figures. Rhys's protagonists reject the mother-daughter bond and choose to live outside hereditary connections, even though that will force them to remain in poverty. For the Rhys heroine, poverty is preferable to "maintaining familial ties that ensure that the daughter inherits the legacy of the mother and reproduces her relationship to patriarchy" (Cunningham 384). Preferring to live without the comforts their mothers or stepmothers could provide, Rhys's women subject themselves to the oppression that necessarily arises from living a solitary life devoid of familial security. Even though these women do not succeed in providing for themselves, they see this failure as preferable to success through the oppressive, patriarchal society their mothers or stepmothers implicitly champion. Women are systematically oppressed through the patriarchal society they negotiate. Being considered a success in such a society necessarily leads to their subjugation to a man and the repression of social, financial, and emotional liberties. These female protagonists refuse to succeed in this manner and mark their escape from it the greater success. Rhys's heroines are emotionally distressed by the dichotomy between conventional measures of success and the independence they desire. They begin to feel marginalized and oppressed by a society that will not allow them to achieve success without acting through the success of others.

The emotional suffering caused by the oppressive nature of English, patriarchal society is illustrated in another distinct way in the novels. Though Rhys's protagonists are not themselves

black, there are a small number of people of color represented in the novel. Rhys's heroines, particularly Anna, reaffirm their undermined and ostracized status through their identification with black society and the individuals therein: in Anna's case, her nanny. This desired familiarity is not predicated on the urge to reform racial divisions or compare the position of people of color to that of women of either race; rather, it is accepted out of a desire for the warm and loving community that these characters' white subjectivity assumes the black experience provides and an urge to reaffirm the heroine's status as outcast and outsider. The experience of racial minorities in the time Rhys was writing was not the warm experience Rhys portrays in the memories of her characters; when Anna becomes depressed from the cold monochrome of England, she thinks of the warmth and vibrancy of Market Street in her Caribbean home as a source of comfort (Rhys, *Voyage* 7). Rhys uses the experiences of the people of color her characters interact with to illustrate the depth of her protagonists' exclusion. Rhys's characters make the experience of people of color, a group to which her white protagonists can never belong, appear warm and inviting, while the white people she interacts with are cold and unwelcoming. Rhys's characters become excluded both from the warmth she imagines in the black community and the coldness she perceives in the white experience, leaving her in the empty void between. These women become social outcasts because they are not welcome in any community they could align themselves with; they are excluded from the black community due to their race, and they are equally excluded from respectable white society because of their desire to be in the black community. Their inability to conform to the social, or indeed biological, standards necessary for inclusion to either community further solidifies these characters' status as outcasts.

Rhys uses the relationship between these racial minorities and her protagonists to “illuminate the psychic distress of English women” (Abravanel 96). Rhys is not attempting to equate the female struggle against patriarchy with the black community’s struggle against racial oppression, but she does call attention to their similarities. Rhys’s protagonists’ identification with and wish to join the black community stems from Rhys’s portrayal of people of color. For Rhys, the black characters “seem to thrive on adversity and to draw strength from their opposition to the prevailing power structures” (Wilson 44). Though the power structures that oppose the Rhys heroine are based on a patriarchal gender dichotomy rather than a racial one, these women idolize the black women in their lives for their perceived strength and ability to subvert oppressive power structures. Despite their exclusion, the black community continued to survive and, in the idealized lens through which Rhys was considering them, did away with all pretensions as unnecessary. Rhys saw black women using their strength and independence to fight against the racism that maintained their oppression; strength and independence are exactly the characteristics her protagonists desired. Unlike their black role models, Rhys’s heroines use their helplessness rather than their strength in order to subvert the structures that keep them oppressed.

Because of this use of racial imagery and a colonial setting to indicate the oppression of her characters, scholars such as Urmila Seshagiri and Genevieve Abravanel categorize Rhys’s novels as post-colonial. These white protagonists hail from colonized, West Indian countries and become social outcasts on their arrival in their theoretical country of origin, despite never before seeing it. They exist both within and without the dominant, white culture; they are included because of their race, but excluded because they no longer behave in a way that was considered proper for young women, having been corrupted by spending their youth and early development

in “uncivilized” countries. In turn, these women become isolated and subjugated to the colonial systems of oppression as well as those inherent to the patriarchal system more broadly.

Abravanel suggests this alienation based on gender “strongly resembles racial alienation” as women are unable to become a part of the dominant power structure based on situations entirely beyond their control, i.e. genetics (94). However, the white protagonists’ identification with black culture serves to reinforce their marginalized status and the systems of oppression that affect both these women and racial minorities, but do not necessarily equate the two. Their identification with racial minorities serves, yet again, to underscore the failure of these women to belong; they are not welcome in the society they desire to belong to and refuse to join the society that would have them.

Instead of allowing their victimization to defeat them, these women use their status as victims in order to reassert the power that has been taken from them by the pattern of socially enforced male superiority that pervades their environments. Rhys’s women are unwilling to conform to the social practices that would allow for their success and are therefore left destitute. Their failure to achieve success through the lens of financial independence rejects the accepted mode of measuring success and questions the system in which it is normalized. These women use their victimized status, inaction, and passivity as tools to oppose the masculine form of social rigidity.

Each of these women employs their economic and social victimization in order to subvert the authority of the patriarchal society that originally victimized them. Unfortunately, this act of transgression is not without deep emotional consequences; each of these women present signs of trauma, and a deep distrust of those around them, leading to a variety of intimacy issues. Through the trilogy of *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning*,

Midnight readers see the progression of this course of action as the protagonist matures, ages, and inevitably declines. In *Voyage in the Dark*, the reader sees the psychological trauma that leads Anna to pursue a series of lovers. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia has mastered the art of manipulation, though it is becoming more difficult as she ages. Finally, Sasha, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, is declining; she must suffer the deep consequences the actions her past two selves have brought on as she leaves her sexual prime. Though it could be suggested that this interpretation stands in opposition to some feminist interpretation of the novels, it does just the opposite. Rhys uses these heroines' failures in order to underscore the problems with the place of the modern woman in mid-century, English, patriarchal society by illustrating the impossibility of success as a fully actualized, independent woman and the harsh consequences for the women attempting to achieve it. Anna, Julia, and Sasha represent one woman's struggle against the systemic oppression that has thwarted her attempts for success and the consequences of these inevitable failures.

Anna in Voyage in the Dark

Voyage in the Dark, released in 1934, was the second of the trilogy to be published, but the first Rhys began writing. It focuses on the youngest of her characters, Anna, who is 18 and recently arrived in London from her Caribbean birthplace. Urmila Seshagiri states the novel "anticipate[s] the *ressentiment* that surges through subsequent fictions about Western imperialism's various legacies" (489). However, Anna acts as a response not just to the imperialism, but to patriarchal society as well. Imperialism and patriarchy are both perpetuated by the same people – white, typically affluent, men who benefit most from the continuation of these structures - and both act as systems of oppression that continue to keep Anna objectified. Through the novel, readers see Anna's development, though it does not have the positive

trajectory of the Dickensian *bildungsroman*. Rhys inverts the traditional ideology of the *bildungsroman* – that with knowledge comes power – by leading Anna to the knowledge that she is powerless. Initially, Anna’s naiveté leads her to a youthful optimism about her future, but by the novel’s close she has resigned herself to the fate that her life will be a cyclical series of failures. Anna begins the subversion of power dynamics continued in Julia and finished in Sasha by first relinquishing her autonomy. Without this loss of power, the other characters would not have the opportunity to use their powerlessness against the patriarchal system that works against them; through Anna, the cause of Julia and Sasha’s failures is exposed. Like all of Rhys’s heroines, Anna faces financial, gender, and racial oppression that keeps her powerless, and this lack of authority is seen distinctly in her relationships with her lovers and other women, namely her stepmother Hester.

A significant portion of Anna’s powerlessness stems from her destitution. Her wages as a chorus girl are hardly enough to support her necessities, much less for her to acquire the things she desires, particularly clothing. When Walter Jeffries asks Anna how much she is making as a chorus girl and she tells him “thirty-five bob a week, and of course extra for extra matinees,” and he is astounded: “‘Good God,’ he said. ‘You surely can’t manage on that can you?’” (Rhys, *Voyage* 21). Anna assures him she is “getting along all right,” which may be the case, particularly when compared to other woman in her position, but it could also be a proud exaggeration as she is by no means thriving – she is constantly cold and hungry. Her situation can first be seen in her purchase of stocking early in the novel. She deliberates and agonizes over the stockings until “the man [she] had been walking with offered to pay for them and [she] let him” (Rhys, *Voyage* 11). Cunningham interprets “Anna’s temporary failure to be fashionably dressed” as a form of “refusal” of the patriarchal power structures; however, these failures are

not as indicative of conscious refusal as Cunningham suggests, as they are, more aptly, the result of her economic situation (387). Nevertheless, they do give rise to a more pronounced subversion. Instead of refusing to become objectified by the male gaze, Rhys's heroines use it to their advantage. They use their sexuality to assert their authority over men, which they hope will persuade these men into giving them money. Anna is not yet worldly enough for this act to be one of willful manipulation or subversion, but it does plant the beginning of the idea in her head; she realizes that she can use men to acquire the things she desires if she wields the tools in her arsenal correctly.

Walter Jeffries is the first of these men; he becomes Anna's lover and a major figure in her development. After he purchases the stockings for her, he says that Anna "looked awfully pathetic" and agonized "so anxiously" that he was compelled to buy them for her (Rhys, *Voyage* 22). Walter continues to feel a great degree of pity for her and leaves her a short note and a small amount of money to express his feelings: "'My dear Anna, I wish I could tell you how sweet you are. I'm worried about you. Will you buy yourself some stockings with this? And don't look anxious when you are buying them, please. Always yours, Walter Jeffries'" (Rhys, *Voyage* 26). Anna receives the money from Walter because he feels compelled to assist her. Having money is a powerful feeling, one to which Anna becomes "accustomed" immediately (Rhys, *Voyage* 27). It is not unnatural for Anna to receive money from men that believe she is a prostitute, but this is the first time Anna realizes that she can manipulate these men into providing for her by looking "pathetic," so they will pity her, and utilizing her sexuality, so they will desire her. The lack of ability to maintain an appearance these women feel is presentable without the support of men is indicative of their financial station.

Anna's fellow chorus girl Maudie is the first person to show Anna the possibility of using men to secure financial assistance. When Anna first starts seeing Walter, Maudie, no longer subject to the youthful naiveté that affects the protagonist, tells Anna, "the thing with men is to get everything you can out of them and not care a damn. You ask any girl in London – or any girl in the whole world if it comes to that – who really knows, and she'll tell you the same thing" (Rhys, *Voyage* 44). Maudie's advice suggests that for women in their position, the manipulation of men for financial assistance is a widespread and necessary practice. Of course, Maudie knows that Walter will not marry Anna and advises her to get as much out of him as she can, while she can. She continues, "If you don't swank a bit nothing's any use. If he's a rich man and he's keeping you, you ought to make him get you a nice flat up West somewhere and furnish it for you. Then you'd have something," implying that without these financial holdings Anna has nothing, which is not far from her financial reality (Rhys, *Voyage* 45). Considerations of love, or emotional attachment, are absent from Maudie's advice, despite her own continued romantic connection to Vivian Roberts, whose infrequent, but expensive gifts sustain their relationship (Rhys, *Voyage* 16). As Paula Le Gallez suggests, "[Maudie's] function in this first chapter is not only to give Anna the benefit of her advice on the subject of attracting men, but also to provide a practical example of it" (86). Maudie encourages Anna to "swank" because the possibility of a lengthy, emotionally fulfilling relationship with Walter is just as likely as her obtaining one with Vivian: negligible. Maudie gives Anna advice in order to save her from a relationship like her own, while becoming a physical example of the emotional destruction such relationships can cause. Though Anna does not at the time seem to believe Maudie, she does appear to take the advice and never rejects any of Walter's monetary gifts in return for sex or companionship.

Anna, in her young naiveté, believes that this kind of financial compensation expresses a deeper emotional connection. After Walter leaves the letter and money for the stockings, Anna becomes concerned because he “doesn’t say anything about seeing me again” (Rhys, *Voyage* 29). Consciously, Anna is worried that their interaction was only fleeting, which is emotionally traumatic for her, but beneath that lies the worry that the financial support he had provided will end. Anna’s worries, paired with her physical frailty, cause her to fall into a deep illness, which serves to temporarily alleviate both of these problems. She informs Walter that she is sick and he purchases a new blanket, some food, medicine, and a doctor to care for her (Rhys, *Voyage* 33). The illness is at least partially psychosomatic; the stress of losing the emotional and financial support of Walter is too much for Anna’s body to handle, as she is already vulnerable due to her transplantation from the dry warmth of the Caribbean to the wet cold of England. Instead of relinquishing herself to the sickness and attempting to overcome it independently, she exploits it to manipulate Walter into continuing his support. For the first time in her life, or at least the life the reader sees, Anna deliberately uses her poverty to secure pity and therefore assistance from the men around her. If she had money, Walter certainly would not have felt the need to care for her; this caretaker mentality, in both the literal physical and metaphorical financial senses, is only heightened by her illness. Anna is able to use her financial and physical illness to secure the means to be rid of both impairments, at least temporarily.

Like illness and poverty, Anna’s gender is another characteristic she is able to use to manipulate the men around her and undermine the patriarchal structures that have held her back particularly because she is a woman. Anna is repulsed by modes of British femininity as outlined by the patriarchal codes of proper behavior for women and refuses to adhere to them. Cunningham posits that in rejecting this model of womanhood “Rhys narrativizes negative

feminism” by having Anna choose to “disintegrate, rather than to activate, the self under the models of femininity available to her” (390). Anna fails at every feminine role she encounters: lady, chorus girl, mistress, and prostitute. These failures do not stem from a lack of ability to succeed; rather, they are grown out of dissatisfaction with the society that thrust these titles upon her and severely limited the avenues through which she, as a woman, could become successful. Through her failure to take on an accepted model of femininity, Anna critiques the limited options available to women at the time: marry or attempt to earn a living at a low-paying job or as a prostitute. Anna then uses aspects of these positions and her failure within them to craft her own form of self, both within and without these structures. By employing some of the expected behaviors for women while rejecting others, Anna is able to secure the financial and emotional support that she could not acquire for herself if she were willing to adhere to models of British femininity in a more conventional sense.

The most obvious of the models of feminine behavior Anna rejects is prostitution. Anna is frequently mistaken for a prostitute by those around her, be it landladies or lovers; though she is not technically a prostitute, the label is not unfounded. These women hardly flinch when the assumption is made and decide to use it to their advantage. Anna is first mistaken for a prostitute while working as a chorus girl as she and one of her co-workers are evicted from their rooms. When they inquire as to why they can no longer stay there, the landlady responds, “I don’t want no tarts in my house, so now you know” (Rhys, *Voyage* 30). Though she is not a prostitute, the very idea that she could be was enough for her to face serious repercussions. Anna’s assumed position of prostitute has a very different effect on men she comes into contact with. Initially Anna is a bit shocked when a man first mistakes her for a prostitute and tucks money into her purse; however, before the words have even left her mouth, she quickly recovers from her shock:

“I mean to say, ‘What are you doing?’ But when I went up to him, instead of saying, ‘Don’t do that,’ I said. ‘All right, if you like – anything you like, any way you like.’ And I kissed his hand” (Rhys, *Voyage* 38). Even though she does not initially have sex with Walter on their first encounter, he assumes that she is a prostitute and gives her money for her time, which Anna readily accepts. Anna follows a long history of women who forgo legitimate employment and accept the benefits of prostitution,⁴ i.e. the money, without offering any protest, which is unsurprising from a young woman struggling to maintain financial independence.

What is surprising is Anna’s assertion of a masculine dominance after she accepts the money by kissing his hand, a gesture culturally recognized as male. The kiss signifies Anna’s victory in the encounter. Anna has gained what she desired and now has no reason to stay. She kisses his hand to show readers her dominance over him and subvert conventional gender expectations. Anna adopts the language of a prostitute, recognizing what she has done, but instead of being ashamed of the social stigma of the label, she embraces it. She sees its potential toward fulfilling her financial needs and uses it to subvert the conventional gender expectations by partially adhering to them while never fully giving in to them.

Because Anna is not a prostitute in the conventional sense, she does not feel the need to disappear from Walter’s life after their initial meeting. She seeks him out again, which he finds a startling departure from the typical interaction between prostitutes and their male clientele: “‘When I sent you that money I never meant – I never thought I should see you again’” (Rhys, *Voyage* 36). Unlike what a prostitute would do, Anna does not sleep with her john nor does she consider the transaction finished; rather, she seeks him out because she “‘wanted to see [him]

⁴ Novels like Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Emile Zola’s *Nana* (which is directly referenced in *Voyage in the Dark*), and Fantine from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, to name but a few, present women forced into prostitution by society and circumstance. Unlike Anna, all three women die at the end of their respective novels.

again” (Rhys, *Voyage* 36). Anna uses Walter’s assumption that she is a prostitute against him; she inverts his expectations in order to startle him by not adhering to the conventions he assigns to her as a prostitute, which allows her to repeatedly secure support from him.

Anna refuses to sell herself as a prostitute and she also refuses to sell the one thing socially proper ladies have to sell: virginity or virtue. She repeatedly denies that she is a virgin, even though it has become her nickname among the other chorus girls (Rhys, *Voyage* 16). Anna’s virginity becomes a source of heightened “outsider-ship.” The constant taunts from the other chorus girls with the “emphasis on her sexual innocence also confirms her alienation from the fellow members of the chorus,” which means she is never able to develop meaningful relationships with her peers (Le Gallez 89). When she does finally submit to Walter’s sexual advances, she is horrified that he believes she is a virgin, saying, “then he started talking about my being a virgin and it all went – the feeling of being on fire – and I was cold” (Rhys, *Voyage* 36). Anna is embarrassed by her virginity because it forces her to unwillingly conform to the patriarchal standards for young women at the time. This embarrassment highlights the social importance placed on women’s, particularly unmarried women’s, sexuality. Walter does not believe her denial of her virginity and Anna responds by saying, “I’m not telling lies, but it doesn’t matter, anyway...People have made all that up” to which Walter responds, “Oh yes, it matters. It’s the only thing that matters” (Rhys, *Voyage* 36). Here, Walter represents the dominant social ideology that turns virginity into the only commodity that is under the sole control of women. Though Anna is willing to reap the benefits of being mistaken for a prostitute, she is unwilling to exploit her virginity because it is an aspect of her that still conforms to the patriarchal modes of femininity she wishes to subvert. It becomes clear that Anna was indeed a virgin; after she sleeps with Walter, she says, “I thought that it had been just like the girls said,

except that I hadn't known it would hurt so much" (Rhys, *Voyage* 38). Instead of utilizing her virginity to her benefit, as contemporary women would have done in the marriage market, Anna is embarrassed by it and refuses to use it to her advantage because that would mean conforming to conventional modes of femininity to support herself.

Anna fails to "commodify" her sexuality with Walter as a virgin, but convincingly does so when mistaken for a prostitute. He first responds in the manner Anna desires, but eventually he is so confused by her identity, or rather her lack of identification, that he abandons her. However, he has left with Anna the lingering association of sexual intimacy with financial and emotional support. Before they have sex, Anna tries to remember, "that the first time I had met him I hadn't liked him. But it seemed too long ago, so I stopped trying" (Rhys, *Voyage* 35). Once she begins to associate Walter with financial support and security, she develops affection for him and is willing to submit to him sexually in order to maintain that relationship, an idea that carries over into her subsequent relationships with men.

Anna's lack of identification is not the only aspect of her character that excludes her from society. Anna, more than either Julia or Sasha, has a strong desire to be black and integrate herself into what she perceives to be that culture. When she is in the midst of the illness that eventually returns Walter to her, she thinks of a childhood illness and Francine, a nanny, in the Caribbean: "And the heat was pressing down on you as if it were something alive. I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there, and I watched her hand waving the fan backward and forwards and the beads of sweat that rolled from underneath her handkerchief. Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" (Rhys, *Voyage* 31). Anna does not suggest that being black is inherently "warm and gay," rather she associates, counter-intuitively, blackness with freedom from the social structures that she must work within

because she is white. Even though she cannot be black, Anna's association with the colonized Caribbean means that she is subject to the ridicule of those on the mainland. In explaining her to their male companions, Maudie says of Anna, "She's always cold... She can't help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies somewhere ... The girls call her the Hottentot" (Rhys, *Voyage* 13). Anna becomes associated with an African woman who was displayed and objectified for the entertainment of white witnesses, and a Hottentot is exactly what Anna becomes: exotic and objectified. She allows this to happen in order to secure a livelihood. Where perhaps others would have been insulted by the nickname, Anna sees it as an opportunity to differentiate herself from others, become more desirable through this distinction, and eventually find the means to preserve and support herself through it. Anna ignores or is ignorant of the historic violence and oppression people of color, particularly black women, faced in order to continue using her idealized vision of black women for emotional support. She idealizes black women in order to use their example – though it is an example she has assigned to them – to subvert the structures that continue the oppression of the distinctly more privileged white women.

These characteristics – financial insecurity, pseudo-prostitution, and the identification with an idealized vision of people of color – can be seen to develop in the relationships she maintains in the novel. Anna has two lovers: Walter Jeffries, who has already been briefly addressed, and Carl Redman, a married American businessman. Anna's relationships with her roommate and friend, Maudie, her stepmother, Hester, and Ethel, her employer, are important to Anna's development and, consequently, the lives of Julia and Sasha. Her interactions with other women begin Anna's process of distrust of and distaste for others of her gender.

Anna has a tendency, particularly with her lovers, to alter herself based on their needs or impressions of her. Her pliability and willingness to alter herself based on the will of others is not due to a lack of personality or unwillingness to assert herself; instead it is a function of her personality itself. Her personality cannot change; rather, it is changeable. Early in her relationship with Walter, Anna becomes flustered and states, “He’ll be different and so I’ll be different. It’ll be different. I thought ‘It’ll be different, different. It must be different’” (Rhys, *Voyage* 24). Her need for difference is both internal and external, but the external must come before the internal. Anna is only able to make the changes to herself she sees as necessary when the external situation, and the people therein, change. She hopes the next time she sees Walter he will treat her differently and she will then be able to alter her personality to meet his expectations in a way that she finds more comfortable or attractive. Since she has no expectation, or indeed desire, of earning a living through the sparse options available to women, she feels compelled to modify herself, her appearance and personality, based on Walter’s ideal vision of her in order to become desirable to him and thus gain the financial security he provides.

Similar to Anna’s initial distaste for Walter, when Laurie first introduces Carl Redman to Anna, she does not want to meet him and tries to pull away from Laurie’s grasp; however, after Carl speaks, Anna changes her mind, noting, “he had a calm way of talking, as if he were very sure of himself” (Rhys, *Voyage* 114). At that, Anna’s methods change and she states, “Only I’ve been ill and I still feel a bit seedy,” to explain her hesitance (Rhys, *Novels* 71). After her experience with Walter, Anna begins reemploying the same technique to seduce men into providing for her. Unfortunately, Carl leaves abruptly and Anna is left, drunk, with Laurie and Joe Adler, another American, unable to use her tactics on Joe, at least while Laurie is present.

Shortly after their first meeting, Carl and Joe come to see her under the ruse of getting a manicure from her, as she has taken that on as a new occupation. She trembles while filing Carl's nails and begins the process of bodily dissociation, characteristic of Rhys's heroines. When he tells her to return because he wants only to talk to her, she claims, "my mouth smiled at him," taking no ownership of the actions of her body (Rhys, *Voyage* 154). When Carl begins to more actively seduce Anna, she thinks, "When he touched me I knew that he was quite sure I would. I thought, 'All right then, I will.' I was surprised at myself in a way and in another way I wasn't surprised" (Rhys, *Voyage* 154). She is surprised by her actions, but not at all surprised that she would take them to gain Carl's favor. Anna allows herself to become what Carl imagines she is, or will be. In order to secure the support she needs from him, she is willing to change her personality and relinquish her physical body without feeling the emotion that is generally involved in sexual activity. Carl once stated to Anna, "I like you best when you laugh a lot," to which she responded, "I'll be nicer still when I've had a bit of practice," suggesting that she consciously develops her personality (Rhys, *Voyage* 159)

Anna also projects her own vision of Carl onto him, believing that in the future he will discuss their encounter and say, "I picked up a girl in London and she... Last night I slept with a girl who... That was me"; however, she does alter it, "Not 'girl' perhaps. Some other word, perhaps. Never mind" (Rhys, *Voyage* 157). Even in her imaginings, Anna does not present herself in the most favorable light, but instead allows herself to be mistaken for a prostitute. She does not allow herself to linger on this idea, though. She forces herself to move on from imagining others think of her as a prostitute or "tart" with the ardent "Never mind." Her relationship with Carl ends so abruptly readers may not notice it: "The last time I went out with

him he gave me fifteen quid” (Rhys, *Voyage* 159). As quickly as it began, her relationship ends; Anna has accomplished her goal with Carl and feels no need to dwell on the details.

Other women in Anna’s life play a more important role in her development than even her lovers do. Joe addresses the peculiarities of female relationships most concisely when, after Laurie has insulted the women at the table next to them in the restaurant, he ironically claims, ““Oh, women. How you love each other, don’t you?”” (Rhys, *Voyage* 119). He points to the deep hostility between women, and the judgment women, even strangers, pass on one another. After Laurie’s overt antagonism, the group asks Anna to provide her own opinion of the women, to which she responds, ““I think she’s terrifying”” playing, yet again, to the group’s expectation of her response (Rhys, *Voyage* 119-120). The group laughs at her hyperbole, but internally she addresses the cause of her terror:

But I was thinking that it was terrifying – the way they look at you. So that you know that they would see you burnt alive without turning their heads away; so that you know in yourself that they would watch you burning without even blinking once. Their glassy eyes that don’t admit anything so definite as hate. Only just that underground hope that you’ll be burnt alive, tortured, where they can have a peep. And slowly, slowly you feel the hate back starting....(Rhys, *Voyage* 120)

Anna’s proclaimed terror of other women stems from her perception of their judgment, a characteristic she has seen vividly in her close acquaintances, like Laurie, and then projects on strangers. This concept of this relationship between women is one that has been pervasive through history, extending into modernity. The suggestion of the jealousy women feel for one another, be it for appearance, money, personality, or the lovers they attract, leads to distaste for

other women that is not present in male relationships. Anna conforms to this highly gendered stereotyping; however, as with all other stereotypes she aligns herself with, Anna inverts it. She does not dislike women because she is jealous of them, as the structure of the stereotype would claim, rather she is fearful of them because she believes they see her in the disgusted and judgmental way Laurie sees the woman in the restaurant. She does not attempt to adhere to the social norms that would alleviate these judgments, but she is fearful of the repercussions and, therefore, avoids forming intimate attachments with other women because of it.

As Maudie's relationship with Anna fades, Laurie, cold, crass, and a noted "tart," becomes the most prominent female influence in Anna's life. Laurie is depicted almost solely with men, or associating with men, to whom she introduces Anna; it is through Laurie that Anna meets Carl. Laurie is never ashamed of her association with men and the finances they provide her, even bragging about it to Anna: "D'you know...I never pay for a meal for myself – it's quite the rarest thing" (Rhys, *Voyage* 115). Even when Anna is warned against Laurie's influence, she defends her behavior. After she gets quite drunk and goes to a hotel with Laurie and Joe, Joe attempts to kiss her and she rejects him. After her rejection, Joe asks, "Why do you go around with Laurie? Don't you know she's a tart?" (Rhys, *Voyage* 127). Anna defends Laurie, asking Joe, "Well, I said, 'why shouldn't she be a tart? It's just as good as anything else, as far as I can see'" (Rhys, *Voyage* 127). Anna directly addresses the position of women in the Madonna/whore ideology, associated with patriarchal society, that would have all women function either as housewives, with "proper" employment, or as prostitutes, with less "proper," but still acceptable employment. When Anna rejects the role of prostitute with Joe, he assumes that she is a Madonna figure, which Anna also refuses to accept. She supports Laurie's brazen refusal to conform to more proper and acceptable modes of survival, but because it is still an

occupation supported, if not happily, by the patriarchal structure, she refuses to adhere to it herself. Even though she and Laurie had just fought, through her defense of Laurie, Anna makes clear that she would prefer to align herself with a disagreeable woman who lives within the societal norms than a man who would push those norms upon her.

Despite Anna's preference for Laurie over Joe, she is not free from her paranoia regarding the judgment of other women in her relationship with Laurie. When they have made up to the best of their abilities, they leave Joe and share a cab back to Laurie's room. In the cab, Laurie states "Swine!" in reference to the cabby, but Anna's reaction conveys her distrust of Laurie: "D'you mean me?" (Rhys, *Voyage* 128). Laurie first alleviates Anna's fear, but then immediately returns them by passing judgment on Anna:

What you do doesn't concern me ... I think you're a bit of a fool, that's all. And I think you'll never get on, because you don't know how to take people. After all, to say you'll come out with somebody and then to get tight and start a row about nothing at all isn't a way to behave. And besides, you always look half-asleep and people don't like that. But it's not my business (Rhys, *Voyage* 128)

Of course, Laurie has made Anna's personal life most distinctly her business by deciding to become so actively involved in it and pass judgment upon it. In many ways, Laurie's claims about Anna's failure to "get on" become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. The criticisms point to Anna's rejection of social conventions when she mentions Anna going out with them. Laurie's criticisms move from the specific to the broad, pointing to flaws Laurie finds in Anna's character, which suggests her "essential difference from others...that idiosyncratic withdrawal from the world" (Le Gallez 107). This lack of adherence to societal norms is the cause of the protagonists' failure to get on. Anna does not only fear the judgments of women necessarily, she fears they are

correct. She does not want to believe that women who are unwilling to fight against their oppression will be more successful than she will and, more importantly, they would be able to identify the causes of her own lack of success. Laurie criticizes Anna's personality and appearance: the only two things Anna can rely on as a means to secure success, both in and out of patriarchal society.

Anna's relationship with Ethel Matthews presents an entirely different set of circumstances than her friendship, if it can be termed as such, with Laurie. On their first meeting, Ethel and Anna go to the movies to see an actress Ethel says she knows perform. When they do see her Ethel, like Laurie, passes severe judgment: "'D'you see that girl – the one with the band round her hair? That's the one I know; that's my friend. Do you see? My God, isn't she terrible? My God, what a scream!'" (Rhys, *Voyage* 107). Ethel is highly critical of every woman, even those she describes as friends. The antagonism between Ethel and Anna develops rather slowly. Anna moves in and begins working, under Ethel's tutelage, as a manicurist and their relationship seems to be cordial, if occasionally uneasy, at the outset of their friendship; however, Ethel's frequent outbursts of disdain for "dirty foreigner[s]," perhaps unaware that Anna herself is foreign, begins the low thrum of antagonism that arises later in their acquaintanceship (Rhys, *Voyage* 139).

After Anna makes a mistake, one in which a client burns himself with scalding water, Ethel demands that she move out because she "'wanted a smart girl... who'd be a bit nice to people and the way you seemed I thought you were the sort of kid who'd take the trouble to be nice to people.... And as a matter of fact you're enough to drive anybody crazy with that potty look of yours. And then you clear off with your friends and you don't even ask me to come with you'" (Rhys, *Voyage* 145). Ethel's insults, referring to Anna as a "half-potty bastard," are, like

Laurie's comments, directed out of a sense of jealousy (Rhys, *Voyage* 145). She is upset that Anna has gone out with her friends and not come to do her work, but she is more upset that she was not invited to go with them. At the end of her tirade, Ethel seems to realize that she and Anna are, more or less, in similar situations. She, like Anna, feels that her life is “always the same thing... Trying to keep up and everybody else trying to push you down and everybody lying and pretending and you knowing it. And then they down you for doing the same things as they do” (Rhys, *Voyage* 146). After Ethel arrives at this conclusion, she begs Anna not to leave, because she is afraid of the loneliness that has been so persistent in her life thus far.

Ethel, like Anna, appears to be running a bit of a racket. She is a masseuse, with Anna as her manicurist, and leaves a suggestive, though not explicit, advertisement for their business in a newspaper. Men arrive expecting sex, but when they do not receive it there is nothing they can do except pay their fee and leave. With the promise of sex, even if it is not fulfilled, Ethel is able to support herself financially. When she discovers Anna is using a similar tactic on the men in her life she is disgusted, as she states in a letter to Laurie after Anna moves out. In the letter she tells Laurie, who is almost certainly engaged in a more legitimate prostitution, that “It is one thing for a girl to have a friend or two but it is quite another for it to be anybody who she picks up in the street and without with your leave or by your leave and never a word to me”; this letter also exposes Anna's pregnancy (Rhys, *Voyage* 166). Ethel and Anna both use the implication that they are prostitutes to their advantage, but it is Anna's openness and lack of denial about what she is doing that is the source of Ethel's disgust. Ethel subverts the social norms in a similar, though more subtle way than Anna does, but Ethel uses the façade of societal standards and acceptability to maintain a belief in her own respectability. It is this sense of respectability, which she refuses to extend to Anna, that causes Ethel to so aggressively rebuke her. Even

women who similarly subvert social standards refuse to accept Anna because she extends their subversion in a way they are unwilling to, most likely because they recognize the inevitable failures it will bring. The rejection of these women is one of the causes of Anna's distrust of and refusal to rely upon others of her sex for support, whether emotional or financial. Though Anna has never been treated well by the men on whom she relies for financial support, the women she hoped would provide her some kind of emotional consolation have treated her even worse.

Anna B. Simpson claims in *Theories of the Psyche: The Fiction of Jean Rhys* that Anna's struggle for emotional and financial health stems from the missing relationship with her mother and her relationship with her distant, if not outright antagonistic, stepmother Hester. Anna's biological parents have both died, leaving Hester the only living family that remains to her. Simpson claims the emotional absence caused by this abandonment forces Anna to "attract men to fill the empty space within her" (21). Hester even attempts to emphasize and exacerbate Anna's emotional pain concerning the death of her biological mother. In the only passage to mention Anna's mother, Anna becomes angry with Hester for implying that her mother was not white, saying, "you're trying to make out that my mother was coloured... You always did try to make that out. And she wasn't"; despite Anna's potential desire for that to be the truth, she is unwilling to tolerate any claims that would belittle her biological mother (Rhys, *Voyage* 65). Hester pities Anna for her missing mother and for her "coloured" blood; in turn, Anna rejects Hester as a substitute mother figure and defends her mother from Hester's insinuations. Because of her rejection of Hester and her desire to defend the virtue of her mother from the only family she has left, Anna becomes unable to engage with her own feelings of abandonment, which only serves to emphasize and extend her lack of familial connection.

Anna does not simply reject Hester because of Hester's insults directed toward Anna's mother; she rejects Hester because of what she represents. Hester's heritage, as a white, aristocratic, British woman cannot be questioned; because of this, for Anna, Hester comes to represent the British patriarchal and colonial systems of oppression that Anna actively seeks to reject. Hester even bemoans what she sees as her failure of her role in Anna's development: "I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants'" (Rhys, *Voyage* 65). Anna firmly rejects Hester's insistence that she act like a lady, instead preferring to adopt the characteristics of the black servants on the island. She disdains Hester for bringing her to England and first introducing her to the restrictive society that she would necessarily have to fight against if she were to attempt to live outside the life it has preordained for women. Hester and Anna's relationship begins to mirror the relationship between Britain and the colonies more broadly through Hester's insistence on "proper," that is British, behavior, and Anna's staunch rejection of these ideals in favor of those that are "native" to her. Anna's rejection of Hester disrupts the subjugation of colonized people and their colonizers, and, by extension, the oppression of women in a patriarchal society.

The conclusion of the novel, Anna's botched abortion, again emphasizes her rejection of the mother-daughter bond. Anna rejects this bond, not just externally in her relationship with Hester, but internally as well, in her relationship to her unborn child. Anna refuses every conventional female role thrust upon her, including that of mother. This rejection and subsequent emotional vacancy destroys a fundamental part of her being to the point where she is almost unable to carry on; however, it is only through her strength and determination to subvert the society that made it impossible for her to avoid torment without it that she is able to survive

the ordeal. She does not die, instead she is left to a perhaps more tortuous fate: “starting in all over again, all over again...” (Rhys, *Voyage* 188). The implication of Anna’s dark future is also a warning of the dangers of rejecting the female roles as they stand under the early twentieth century patriarchal structures. Women who refuse to adhere to these tropes are unlikely to prosper in such an environment. Even so, Anna refuses to be beholden to such structures and takes the consequences of defying them, rather than living under the thumb of the society into which she was thrust.

Some critics assert that through the novel Anna’s will is never crushed or diminished; according to one, “there is no evidence that she ever possessed an assertive nature” to begin with (Wilson 443). However, the systems of oppression and belittlement that have kept her from the ability to assert herself are so deeply ingrained in Anna from long term societal influence that she can lash out in the only way she knows, by allowing objectification, abuse, and failure to define her and using these characteristics to her advantage. In so doing, Anna subverts the power structures that have held her in her demeaned position since her arrival in England. If she cannot break free from the socio-economic bonds that restrain her, she will at least use the shackles to inflict pain on those who tied her down. Through the relationship that allowed her, or more realistically, forced her, to grow and develop, she paves the way for Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* to continue using the systems of oppression and victimization in order to solicit money from her lovers.

Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*

Like Anna, Julia relies on money from lovers to support herself. For six months she had been living on an allowance provided by a former lover following the conclusion of their relationship; abruptly, the allowance ends when a letter arrives announcing “our cheque for three

hundred francs,” triple her normal receipt (Rhys, *After* 18). This money has come from Henri Legros, the eponymous Mr. Mackenzie’s solicitor. After he ceases sending Julia money, he reflects on their relationship and on Julia’s personality, saying, it is “against my code to believe that any female existed without a sense of self-preservation” (Rhys, *After* 27). When he applies this “code” to Julia, he assumes that she wants to advance in life and conform to the conventional, that is British society’s, standards of success. However, what Mackenzie fails to realize is that Julia wants to sustain herself without becoming a part of the system that made her survival so difficult. He refuses to recognize that the appearance of vulnerability is a tool Julia uses in order to evoke a sympathetic response that she knows, through experience, will elicit the money she requires from lovers for survival. Though the vulnerability is very real, Julia emphasizes it as much as possible in order to use its effects, namely pity, most efficiently to sustain herself. Due to his “code,” Mackenzie becomes the perfect target for Julia’s ploy because he refuses to see through it and recognize it for what it is: Julia is using him for money, just as he used her for sexual gratification. Mackenzie is only the most recent in a string of men Julia (taking her cue from Anna) has manipulated into providing for her financially. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* readers are able to see what Anna’s maturation has come to: Julia. She has more or less successfully used the tactics Anna first develops to eke out a living, while remaining free from the constraints of a conventional female social position.

Unlike Anna, Julia’s identification with minorities or any thoughts on people of color that had been so prevalent in *Voyage in the Dark* are noticeably absent from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. This absence is suggestive of Anna’s evolution into Julia. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna wishes to return to the comfort of her black nurse, Francine, but Anna realizes the futility of her desire and resigns herself, though never embraces, indeed actively works against, the

white, western world she now inhabits. After the traumatic experiences Anna was subject to, she begins to realize that she will never again be able to rely on others, particularly women, for any kind of support and abandons the notion as folly. The warmth she experienced from Francine came from her belief that her nurse truly cared for her wellbeing as an individual, but now, more worldly and experienced, Julia realizes that people will only care for her for what she can give to them: sexual gratification.

Objectification has become a natural state for Julia, so much so that she is now associating sexuality with inanimate objects. In her room hangs one of Modigliani's reclining nudes over a sofa, often used as a cover piece for the novel. The painting itself is erotic in nature, depicting a nude female sprawled across a red sofa or carpet, but Julia projects this sexualization on her sofa as well: "But really she hated the picture. It shared, with the colour of the plush sofa, a certain depressing quality. The picture and the sofa were linked in her mind. The picture was the more alarming in its perversion and the sofa more dismal. The picture stood for the idea, the spirit, and the sofa stood for the act" (Rhys, *After* 11). Julia has come to see even the most mundane objects in a sexual context, depleting them of all other significance or utility. Julia identifies her own body in a similar way: it is there for another's sexual gratification and other uses are incidental. Julia feels the painting is both mocking her and *is* her; through this identification Julia becomes engaged in what Genevieve Abravanel terms an "abdication of subjectivity," relinquishing her autonomy in order to become more readily objectified (93). When she describes the woman in the painting to Horsfield, she says, "'This picture is of a woman lying on a couch, a woman with a lovely, lovely body...And a face like a mask'" (Rhys, *After* 52). The idea of the mask is important: the face is meant to convey a meaning that goes beyond the strictly physical sense of a person into their character, stemming back to the pseudo-

science of phrenology. By seeing the woman's face as masked, Julia further places the woman as an object to be viewed purely for her body without consideration of her person or selfhood more broadly. The woman in the painting has been objectified in the literal sense: her body has been turned into an object. Julia's objectification is more metaphoric; she has been used, like an object, for sexual gratification and has abandoned her own subjectivity in the process. Though she never rejects this objectification and the inevitable financial support it will bring, the psychological effects of this oppression remain.

As Julia's objectification and sexual relationships take the place of the female dominated world of the chorus girl, the female acquaintances of *Voyage* are usurped by the importance of lovers and family, with the men emerging in significance. The first of these men is Mr. Mackenzie, the man Julia claims has "finished her" (Rhys, *After* 13). The naïve optimism Anna had brought to her romantic encounter has evaporated in Julia: "Nowadays something had happened to her; she was tired. She hardly ever thought of men, or of love" (Rhys, *After* 12). Julia believes she will never be able to love a man because they are only using her as an object of their desires; likewise, she has been using them for the support they provide and is no longer able to see them as men deserving of love. She is also becoming increasingly aware that her age will make it harder for her to find a man who will provide for her because her looks will wither with time. The possibility of sexual reciprocation would no longer be desirable to the men she hopes will provide for her. She takes on a new kind of relationship with Horsfield, a much younger man and one in no financial position to support her. In Horsfield, Julia encounters a man who attempts to engage in the same ploy she is: arousing sympathy for support. Julia had been living in Paris, but returns to London to see her ailing mother and self-martyred sister. While in London she visits the first of her lovers, Mr. James, who is, perhaps, a reiteration of Walter Jeffries from

Voyage in the Dark after they have been separated for a number of years. As in the previous novel, it is through these relationships that the reader becomes aware of Julia's development; instead of her growth from naiveté to utilitarianism, readers see the cynicism these tactics have instilled in Julia and the beginning of her refusal of the cycle of lovers and manipulation she became accustomed to.

When the reader is first introduced to Mr. Mackenzie, he describes the reasons for his attraction to Julia, saying there was something in his nature "which morbidly attracted him to strangeness, to recklessness, even unhappiness. He had more than once allowed himself to be drawn into affairs which he had regretted bitterly afterwards, though when it came to getting out of these affairs his business instinct came to his help, and he got out undamaged" (Rhys, *After* 24). In addition to describing his attraction to Julia, he explains that he has a systematic recourse for extricating himself from these relationships unscathed, though it can be assumed the women were not always so fortunate; like Julia, others too may have felt "finished" by their affairs with Mackenzie and the precise way he cast them off. Mackenzie is attracted to dangerous and dissatisfied women, again working within systems of power dynamics. He has an innate desire to be dominated by these dangerous women, akin to what could be seen as the dominant-submissive relationship or the avocation of the dominatrix. He becomes embarrassed when he recalls a letter he sent to Julia, in which he expressed this desire to her: "I would like to put my throat under your feet" (Rhys, *After* 28). Julia works to exploit this desire to her advantage. After he has broken off their relationship and the financial support he had been providing, she sees him in a restaurant and, with a "cunning expression" on her face, slaps him with her glove and states, "I despise you"; when he is unresponsive to her provocation, she says, "all right. Have it your own way" with a "mournful and beaten expression" on her face (Rhys, *After* 34). This interaction

suggests that Julia, in an effort to remind Mackenzie of the services she had once provided, recreates some of their previous sexual interactions to arouse his desires and thereby elicit continued financial support. Julia is never truly angry with him for breaking off their relationship, at least not enough to become physically violent, but she does become disappointed when her tactics to win him back fail.

Initially, this reversal of power dynamics could be understood as a continuation of the subversion of patriarchy Rhys's heroines attempt to achieve and perhaps even Julia sees their relationship in a similar manner. Unfortunately, by the end of the encounter, the reader and Julia both recognize the power of the submissive – the safe-word – in their ability to at any time terminate the encounter. As Anne Simpson concisely states, “A woman’s direct claiming of power will not result in a transfer of power, but rather is prelude to abandonment”; this idea holds firm in Julia’s relationship with Mackenzie (34). When she slaps him with her glove, she is attempting to reassert the powerful, sexually violent authority he had once desired of her; however, his sexual attraction to her has dissipated and he no longer requires her services. Her sexual authority no longer elicits the same response and, like a prostitute, she has fulfilled her purpose (sexual gratification), is paid for her services, and cast aside. Mackenzie emphasizes his power and reasserts himself when he says of Julia, “Even she must see that she was trying to make a tragedy out of a situation that was fundamentally comical. The discarded mistress...A situation consecrated as comical by ten thousand farces and a thousand comedies” (Rhys, *After* 31). By allowing Julia to believe that she has at last successfully subverted the oppression of patriarchal dynamics only to steal the victory from beneath her and laugh while he does it, he has made a comedy of a tragedy: *her* tragedy, that is, her belief that she had succeeded on her own terms when no such possibility exists and her realization it is impossible “finishes” her.

As Julia slaps Mackenzie with her glove, Horsfield watches the interaction from across the restaurant as it is reflected in a mirror. Watching lovers quarrel, and then becoming sexually interested in one of the participants and receiving some kind of gratification from the display suggest a kind of pseudo-voyeurism. Immediately Horsfield objectifies Julia by seeing her in the mirror; in his view she is literally two dimensional, lacking any substantial form or core character. Because he does not see Julia as possessing any kind of characteristics of her own he becomes free to impose his own identity upon her. He, like Mackenzie, becomes interested in her because he sees her victimization; he follows Julia out of the restaurant in order to become acquainted with her simply because she “looked pretty lonely” and he felt “detached and ironical” (Rhys, *After* 39). Horsfield sees his detachment from reality and intimacy reflected in Julia’s loneliness. He states that “the habit of wanting to be alone had grown upon him rather alarmingly” and he sees this same characteristic in Julia (Rhys, *After* 36). He becomes attracted to the idea that they could maintain each other’s company while continuing to remain emotionally isolated. Julia has given up her usual strategy in her relationship with Horsfield, not even attempting to emphasize her victimization; instead, she is more realistic about her position and her isolation from others, and it is this very real kind of victimization that attracts Horsfield to her.

To maintain this connection, Horsfield offers Julia money to secure her company; in return, he is willing to claim the role as representative of the patriarchy and the colonial, British male against whom Julia fights. Horsfield’s support of Julia should not be mistaken for altruism; he is supporting her so he can support himself vicariously through her. Both begin to vie for the position of the bigger victim, constantly attempting to outdo each other to lower themselves. As they engage in this competition, Horsfield exhibits signs of sexual arousal. Even though he claims he was not “the least drunk,” “to his own ear his voice sounded slightly thickened” (Rhys,

After 41-42). Later, Horsfield claims his “mouth and throat were dry. He felt he wanted a long cool drink” (Rhys, *After* 46). When Julia emerges victorious in their rivalry, Horsfield is forced to support her in order to raise her up so he can again occupy a void below her. Horsfield can only be viewed as a pillar of emotional and financial stability in relation to Julia when she is more victimized than him. When he provides her with financial support he believes that he only will then be pitiable, but he has underestimated Julia’s skills and her ability to manipulate others with her victimized status.

Horsfield also encourages Julia to return to England, and provides her with the funds to do so. He becomes so frustrated with Julia’s constant superiority at inferiority that he can no longer bear seeing her; he hopes that while in England she will seek alternate forms of revenue in order to raise herself out of her pitiable state and allow him to usurp the position. At first, seeing Julia in the mirror was exhilarating and gratifying, but now that he begins to see the reality of the image she is reflecting back at him instead of the one he imposed on her, he loses interest. In the place of reflecting aspects of himself in which he took some kind of pride – his victimization and loneliness – she is reflecting back the image of someone who has gone beyond the pitiable to the simply pathetic. Unlike Mackenzie, Horsfield cannot specifically articulate the reasons he was drawn to Julia, but he still provides her with the money she needs and a task to complete with the money. He does not abandon her; rather, he encourages her to abandon *him*.

Julia obliges Horsfield’s wishes and returns to England. While there she seeks out her first lover: Mr. James. Julia finds James because she has always believed that he would help her if the “worst absolutely came to the worst” (Rhys, *After* 109). James and Julia’s affair had ended “quietly and decently,” again lending credence to the suggestion that he is reminiscent of Walter: though for Anna the end of their affair was not “decent,” from Walter’s perspective, it was. Julia

believes he will still provide for her because she did not humiliate him both publically and privately as she did with Mackenzie. Her relationship with James was very different than with Mackenzie. She was most definitely the submissive one: “he never used to talk to me much. I was for sleeping with – not for talking to” (Rhys, *After* 173). Julia knows that with James she was objectified and used solely for sexual gratification. Still, she believes that she will be able to manipulate him by using the emotion that had been absent from their affair.

While in his company, Julia reverts to a former self, a self very much like Anna; she becomes coquettish and flirtatious. Similar to her tactics in slapping Mackenzie with her glove, by reverting to a former self, Julia hopes to remind James of their previous relationship and coax him into supporting her as his former self had. This sort of coquettish behavior does come with a risk. Women deemed coquettes frequently meet dark ends; Eliza Wharton in Hannah Webster Foster’s sentimental novel *The Coquette* dies giving birth to a child conceived out of wedlock in a manner similar to Anna’s bungled abortion. Unlike Eliza, Julia constantly attempts to manipulate her situation to her advantage. James’s love for photography gives Julia good reason to believe that her tactics to elicit support from him will be successful. His interest in photography is indicative of a deeper nostalgic nature and an interest in history and the past; fortunately for Julia, she is a part of his past. Julia plays off this nostalgia in an attempt to remind him of the reasons they had originally become lovers, but she is left with a false feeling because she is no longer that person. Anna has grown into Julia and Julia recognizes the dishonesty of her return. This reversion is degrading; Julia loses an integral part of her independent being and belittles the struggles that have changed her and brought her to this point in her life. Instead of taking pride in her survival through horrid circumstances, she pretends they never occurred and she remains the same naïve, childlike woman she once was.

Julia details the travails of her life since she and James had parted in order to manipulate him into giving her the money she desires through pity, even though she maintains the façade of the self, prior to the occurrence of these events. Julia's history includes a failed marriage and the death of a child. Arnold Davidson claims that Julia's confession of her past is "a possible preliminary to some form of absolution" (224). However, Julia's reversion dissociates her from her sins and, by reclaiming a previous identity, she has not experienced her failed marriage and her child's death yet, making absolution impossible. Though the death of a child because of an inability to care for it financially is a tragic loss, she is now using this loss to provide for herself in the only way she knows how and a way that was not available to her while the child was alive.

Mr. James is most likely the wealthiest of Julia's lovers mentioned in the novel, though it is not explicitly stated. James comes to represent the association between masculinity, power, and money, while Julia reflects the opposing virtues: femininity, vulnerability, and poverty. Julia's emphasis of these qualities, represented by her womanhood, works to oppose James, while categorizing her in exactly the way that will act as the impetus to coerce him into giving her money. Julia recognizes that "because he [James] has money he's a kind of God. Because I have none I'm a kind of worm" (Rhys, *After* 112). Socially, Julia understands her inferior position to James. However, she uses this position to play out a sort of God complex by giving him the opportunity to display his benevolence and financially assist her in a time of need. She emphasizes her tragedy, the child that died because she could not provide for it, and plays to James's nostalgia and ego in order to manipulate him into assisting her. Through her interaction, the reader sees more of Julia's past, namely the intervening years between the end of Anna's story, and the events that have continued to push her into the position she is in now. The interaction between Julia and James reveals more of Julia's past and helps the reader understand

the events that led her into poverty, while displaying the skills she has acquired in her life and her adeptness for manipulating lovers into becoming means of financial support.

The final man Julia approaches for money is her Uncle Griffiths. Because he is not a lover, and can never be due to their familial relation, Griffiths exposes the necessity of sexuality and the promise of gratification in Julia's manipulations. Uncle Griffiths represents the patriarchal social structures and the necessity of respectability in modern society to an even greater degree than Julia's lovers. When she first approaches him, Uncle Griffiths insists they leave the communal living area: "No use talking in there, with people listening to every word you say" (Rhys, *After* 80). He is disappointed in the way Julia has lived and does not want others judging him for his association with her. Highly influenced by the opinion of society and social norms, he refuses to believe that Julia left her husband, not the other way around. When Julia defends her husband, claiming that her poverty is not a result of their separation, Griffiths states, "he married you and left you stranded, and then you tell me that he wasn't a bad lot?" When Julia attempts to clarify, saying, "He didn't leave me...I left him," Griffiths simply claims it is, "nonsense" (Rhys, *After* 80). Griffiths attempts to dissociate Julia from behavior he views as oppositional to the social structures by which he conducts his own behavior; however, internally he believes that Julia has "forgotten how to behave among respectable people," deeming himself the standard of respectability in British society (Rhys, *After* 136). Though Griffiths does assist Julia by providing her with negligible amounts of money, he is unwilling to assist her in any meaningful way because he cannot and will not approve of her behavior.

Like Horsfield, he cannot state with any kind of certainty why he would help her at all. The only solution he can develop is his feeling of "some vague sense of responsibility" for Julia due to their familial relationship. Griffiths cannot respect Julia, but he does feel some indefinite

sense of protective paternalism for her that forces him to make sure she has just enough to avoid dying due to a lack of finances. Julia recognizes this paternalism and recalls an incident in her childhood when “he had said that she was pretty, and this had thrilled her” (Rhys, *After* 80). Though he did not do so intentionally, Uncle Griffiths could manipulate Julia when she was a child. Because of their past and his former ability to manipulate her, it is now impossible for him to fall victim to her manipulation now. Recognizing that her typical methods of manipulation will be ineffectual against Griffiths, Julia invokes his paternal instincts to acquire any money she can.

Unlike Mackenzie and Horsfield, Uncle Griffiths is related to Julia and therefore is not subject to her seductions, disarming Julia of the one surefire weapon in her arsenal: sexual power. Griffiths’s rejection of Julia’s attempted manipulation is trifold. First, she violates the social codes he holds so dear. Julia states, rather dramatically, “If all good, respectable people had one face, I’d spit in it. I wish they all had one face so that I could spit in it” (Rhys, *After* 135). Griffiths disdains this rejection and therefore disdains Julia. Second, he cannot take her seriously enough to pity her in any real sense. He sees her as pathetic, a cast off of a system to which she refused to belong. Because she rejected her opportunity to garner any kind of success or security, Griffiths cannot feel that she has been victimized by the system she willfully cast aside, especially since he adheres to it so ardently. Finally, Julia can hold no sexual power over Griffiths and he then has no reason to assist her. Griffiths does not refuse Julia purely out of his disdain for her, but rather because she will not accept the social standards he, as a representative of the patriarchy, holds before her, and she cannot employ the promise of sexual gratification in order to manipulate him. Fortunately, her attempt to coerce him into providing her with money

does not cause Griffiths to disdain or resent her; unfortunately, this is primarily due to his preexisting dislike for her.

The women Julia interacts with are, like Uncle Griffiths, family. Julia approaches her sister Norah to ask her for financial assistance, or at least a place to stay while she is in England. However, Julia did not account for the depth of Norah's bitterness and Norah responds tersely and harshly in the negative, forcing Julia to find a different place to stay. Julia's attempt to acquire money from Norah ends explosively, with Norah in tears and Julia being coolly escorted from her childhood home. The conflict between the sisters is deeply rooted in Norah's resentment. When their mother became ill, Norah stayed behind to care for her, while Julia forged on independently. Norah regrets spending her youth caring for their mother and blames Julia for the loss of the opportunity to live and grow. Abravanel states, Norah is "not bound to any single hardship[;] despite caring for her ailing mother, she is subject to the general condition of being a woman" (95). That is, Norah does not necessarily have to take on the responsibility of their mother's care and abandon her youth, but she views it as her social duty and is unwilling to reject it in the same way Julia had; she did, of course have the opportunity to do so, but she instead prefers to blame Julia for her self-inflicted martyrdom. Norah takes sadistic pleasure in the pain of her sister because of this bitterness: "[Norah] enjoyed seeing her sister grow red and angry, and begin to talk in an incoherent voice" (Rhys, *After* 135). This intense hatred is one of the few ways Norah can still assert herself over others, saying, "she hated [Julia], but she felt more alive when her sister was with her" (Rhys, *After* 106). Norah is only revived from the emotional death caused by her perceived loss of youth by her blame of and hatred for Julia. Norah again thinks of Julia, "She is disgusting, that's what she is. She's my sister, and she's

disgusting” (Rhys, *After* 135). Norah continues to fill herself with this rage toward her sister because it is the only way she can feel alive.

As with Horsfield, Norah and Julia seem engaged in a competition to determine who is the greater victim and, as before, Julia is almost wholly unaware of the situation. Norah feels a sense of superiority in her heightened victimization where Julia feels only pity for her sister. In the largest altercation the sisters have, shortly following their mother’s death, Julia confronts Norah on her attitude toward her:

‘You don’t know anything about the way I’ve gone on,’ said Julia. ‘Not a thing. What do you know about me, or care? Not a damn thing. Listen! When I saw that you’d changed and that you looked older, as if you’d had a rotten time, I cried, d’you see? I cried you’ve never once looked at me as if you cared whether I lived or died. And you think I don’t know why? It’s because you’re jealous. That’s the bedrock. All you people who’ve knuckled under – you’re jealous. D’you think I don’t know? You’re jealous of me, jealous, jealous, jealous. Eaten up with it.’

(Rhys, *After* 136)

Julia acutely assesses the situation with her sister. During their first encounter, Norah mentions that Julia is better dressed and therefore must be in no position to ask for money or assistance from her (Rhys, *After* 75). Clothing, the one social standard to which Julia clings, causes her sister’s ultimate disdain and hatred. Conversely, Julia pities Norah because she has “knuckled under” and lived in accordance with the social standards that would rather see her become a spinster than allow her to seek her own happiness. Julia’s outburst does not cause Norah to reevaluate the way she has chosen to live and the pain it has caused her, rather it solidifies the

family's perception of Julia as the social outcast and sinner of the family and Norah as the socially acceptable saint.

Norah relishes her martyrdom, reveling in the attention she receives as the more upstanding and ethically righteous of the two sisters; Norah is pitied and revered by their family and friends while Julia is looked down upon as a sort of social disgrace: the black sheep. Norah and Julia both pity and loathe each other. In their competition for greater victimization, even Julia must concede that Norah is the victor, ignoring that she has brought it upon herself. In this sense, Julia has been beaten by her own game and will never be able to receive any financial support so long as she continues to live the free, independent life her sister only dreams of rather than pursuing; however, Norah does not consider the consequences living the independent life she dreams of brings because she cannot recognize Julia's pain through her own. Like Uncle Griffiths, Norah will never pity Julia or see her as a victim, because she can only see herself in those positions. Recognizing Norah's victimization, Julia cannot, in good conscience, for she most certainly has one, continue her attempts to acquire money from her.

Rhys's heroines' rejection of the mother-daughter bond is directly responsible for their constant need for paternal, romantic relationships. With Julia, readers witness, for the only time, the interaction between biological mother and daughter. Throughout her life, Julia has seen the metaphoric impotence society has forced upon women; very few women in *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, or *Good Morning, Midnight* appear to have any independent agency, apart from the protagonists themselves.⁵ Julia's return to England to see her ailing mother exaggerates this metaphoric impotence; suffering series of strokes and possible Alzheimer's Disease, Julia's mother, after years of living with the metaphoric ineffectualness brought about by the structure of British patriarchal society, has succumbed to literal physical

⁵ Laurie, from *Voyage in the Dark*, is one notable exception.

and mental impotence imposed by her illnesses. Julia's independence from this way of life, beginning with her rejection of the mother, successful or no, at least attempts to subvert the social structures that have caused women to remain powerless.

Julia's interaction with her mother is very brief; her mother is dying and slips in and out of consciousness quite rapidly. When Julia enters the bedroom, her mother does appear to recognize her, calling her "'darling'" and saying, "'there's something I want to explain to you. You must listen'" (Rhys, *After* 98). Norah rejects the idea that their mother would recognize the sister she despises when she, the eternal caretaker, is no longer recognized. The sisters begin to laugh in a "high-pitched, hysterical way," at which point their mother again awakens to ask of Julia, "'Is this why you have come back? Have you come back to laugh at me?'" (Rhys, *After* 100). Julia and Norah's mother is only aroused from her stupor by a perceived offense at the hands of Julia. This interaction relays the tension that pervaded Julia and her mother's relationship stemming from Julia's rejection of her mother and desire to live independent of the societal constraints that such a relationship would have enforced. Julia rejects the patriarchal structure of acceptable feminine behavior designated by society, and necessarily must cast off a relationship with her mother through which these standards of proper behavior would be passed on to her.

By rejecting the mother, Julia implicitly rejects standards of conventional, socially designated femininity and allows herself the freedom to create new definitions of feminine success; by doing so, Julia becomes a social outcast, but claims success in negating the effect of the rigid social structures imposed by an androcentric society. By using the victim methodology imposed on her, and vividly expressed through Anna, Julia is able to manipulate her lovers into continuing to provide for her. The society in which she lives has restricted opportunities for

female success so greatly that Julia must work beyond these systems to secure her own independent success and comment on the inherent injustice of such a system. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia has refined her ability to use her lovers to her financial advantage and dissociate herself emotionally from sexual relationships with these men; however, readers see Julia's growing unwillingness to engage new lovers and perpetuate the cycle she previously used to support herself. Her relationships with women begin to fall away as well; Julia comes to see other women as representations of the effects of masculine dominance on women, which she has been attempting to subvert. Julia rejects relationships with women and is unable to develop meaningful relationships with men; she is, therefore, left to reside alone, devoid of the emotional intimacy of others, stuck in a cyclical repetition of all that has come before, though she is now unsuccessfully attempting to extricate herself from it.

Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*

A cycle of loneliness pervades Sasha's life in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha's aging and perpetual isolation have a number of negative effects on her financial, emotional, and social life. In the first chapter of the novel, Sasha's reliance on alcohol and luminal (phenobarbital), an anticonvulsive drug often used as a sedative, becomes apparent. Sasha only feels "sane" when she has had "a couple of extra drinks" and relies on the luminal to help her sleep (Rhys, *Good Morning* 10). Through Sasha, the consequences of the way Anna and Julia lived come to light. As she ages and presumably passes through menopause, Sasha loses the sexual desirability she once used as a means to support herself; the victimization she had previously exaggerated in order to manipulate others for support is now so apparent that additional emphasis is no longer necessary to urge others to provide for her.

In Sasha, readers see the Rhys heroine at her darkest, most desperate end: the consequences of Anna and Julia's subversion. As Sasha states concisely, "When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 91). Sasha has shut herself off emotionally from the rest of the world because of the torment of her past, as witnessed in Anna and Julia. It is revealed quite early on that Sasha is not her given name: "I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder – calling myself Sasha?" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 12). The fluidity of her identity stems from her dissociation with the outside world and a rejection of, or desire to avoid, her past. Sasha recognizes that she has refused to conform to society and that this lack of conformity is what has caused much of her pain. In a dream, she follows a crowd through a subway station in London. The other people in the crowd are on their way to an exhibition, following the direction of the signs, but Sasha is looking for the way out and there are no signs to lead her. She feels ashamed that she does not want to go where the others are going and thinks, "'just like me – always wanting to be different from other people'" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 13). Subconsciously, Sasha associates all other people with the social structures she is attempting to escape from. They continue to push her along and will not offer her a way out. Sasha is trapped in a society she does not want to be a member of and it has killed her inside; this has made her a joke in the eyes of those who did the killing.

Like Anna and Julia, Sasha falls into a cyclical system of her own construction. Sasha appears to regiment her life in order to avoid any situation she views as embarrassing or that has the potential to become emotionally distressing. Though she has only been in Paris for five days, presumably on a vacation from England, she has already "decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 9). By

regimenting her life, Sasha leaves nothing to chance; she knows where she will go and whom she will most likely encounter when she gets there, providing her with a false sense of control over her daily circumstances: “My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don’t, streets that are friendly, streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don’t, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won’t, and so on” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 46). This holds especially true on Sunday, as it is a “difficult day anywhere.” Saturday night, Sasha plans her day: “Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminal. Sleep. Just sleep – no dreams” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 16). This suggests Sasha’s use of Luminal is not necessarily predicated on a chemical dependence, rather it has simply become a part of her routine and in her routine there is comfort. Even at the movies, Sasha follows a routine, like an “automaton” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 10). She acts “according to programme. Laughing heartily in the right places” though she has no emotional connection to what is happening (Rhys, *Good Morning* 16). Sasha disconnects, follows her routine, and stays alive.

The first man readers see with Sasha is Mr. Blank, the British owner of the dress shop where she works. Mr. Blank – whether that is his real name or simply Sasha’s perception of his emotional emptiness is never revealed – is the “real English type. Very nice, very, very chic, the real English type” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 19). He comes to visit the shop and immediately passes judgment on Sasha for her age and fading appearance. When she answers his inquiries, telling him that she had once worked in a similar shop as a mannequin, he states, ““you worked as a mannequin?... How long ago was this?”” implying that, due to her age, it would be impossible for her to work as a mannequin now (Rhys, *Good Morning* 20). Mr. Blank proceeds to mock

Sasha's misunderstanding of him, based on his own mispronunciation of a French word. At his torment, Sasha releases a deluge of emotion and begins crying. When Sasha goes to confront him, she states outright what readers had already suspected, that he is a representation of the patriarchy:

Well, let's argue this out, Mr Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it ... Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple – no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it?

You must despise the people you exploit ... Did I say all this? Of course I didn't.

I didn't even think it. (Rhys, *Good Morning* 29)

Sasha is the first of Rhys's women to articulate and understanding of the dynamics of the masculine, capitalistic society they were born into, and she despises it. She knows that based on this system she is an utter failure, so she refuses to conform to it. Conscious of her shortcomings, she still reserves the right to have her humanity considered, even if she will never be a productive shop girl. Where in the preceding novels the association is less clearly pronounced, here Sasha firmly categorizes herself as the colonized. Sasha knows she has been exploited by the economic systems imposed upon her, depleted of all resources, and then cast aside as worthless and deserving of derision; she also knows that it is men like Mr. Blank that have created and enforced the system that perpetuated her oppression. Her disdain for the system has grown into cynicism, almost to the point where she would speak outright against it and question its validity as the necessary system of economic and social normalcy, but not quite. After her

internal outburst, instead of relaying her rage to him, she says she is not feeling well and quits. After her position as the colonized in their imperialistic relationship has been made clear to her, she becomes sick with the thought and can no longer take part in it, even if that means she will give up her only means of support. Sasha never again encounters Mr. Blank, but the influence he represents remains a constant force in her life.

One of the most powerful male relationships Sasha has is told as a flashback to her past. In part three of the novel, Sasha recalls her marriage to Enno as incidents that happened in the rooms they rented. Rooms appear to be an important part of Sasha's life and become a form of self-identification. Early in the novel Sasha worries about her friend Sidonie's perception of her based on the room she has found for her. The room is dark and red and Sasha supposes that Sidonie believes this is her "atmosphere," but that "it's an insult when you come to think about it!" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 12). The room comes to define Sasha and acts as a representation of her; however, in the vignettes with Enno, the chapters seem to suggest that Sasha also breaks up her memories by the rooms in which they take place. As Enno and Sasha travel, they inhabit a series of hotel rooms and through these rooms Sasha relives her brief, painful marriage and considers the consequences of their relationship.

Enno is perhaps a musician; though it is never specified precisely what he does beyond this, there are insinuations that it is probably something unsavory. When he and Sasha married, it seemed almost accidental. Sasha clarifies by saying, "I haven't any money. He hasn't any either. We both thought the other had money" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 114). Even the beginning of their relationship was predicated on a misunderstanding. Consequently, their relationship is tense both financially and emotionally. They are in constant need of money, always seem to have trouble finding it, and, though she always gives Enno the money she has earned, Sasha does not seem to

trust him fully – and for good reason. Enno is critical of women and not reluctant to share his misogynistic views in front of his new wife. When he meets the wife of their mutual friend Gustave, Sasha notes “Enno had taken a dislike to Gustave’s wife. ‘That to call itself a woman!’ he said” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 122). Gustave’s wife lives in a situation similar to Sasha’s, only more emphasized than Sasha’s own. Gustave’s wife is the one that brought the money to their relationship, and yet she allows Gustave to handle it, often lamenting that she cannot use it to buy the things she desires, namely, like the other protagonists, clothes. When Sasha calls attention to the injustice of this situation, Enno brushes it off, saying, “‘Oh well... he makes very good use of it, doesn’t he? He makes much better use of it than she would’” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 123). Enno is not necessarily wrong, but he is right for the wrong reason. Instead of basing this assertion on the woman’s personality and seeming obsession with clothing that could have led to financial destitution, he bases it solely on her gender, assuming that because her husband is a man he has a better sense of fiscal responsibility. Even in their collective poverty, Enno assumes the dominant role, which is not necessarily unusual in a society still under the rigid gender definition of the separate spheres ideology; however, Enno derives this power not from his gender, but from hers. Though he does not have the money to give him power, he believes women are incapable of handling money and thus believes he has a great deal of superiority over his wife even when she is the one earning money.

As the chapters continue, Enno and Sasha progress through still more rooms in relative monotony until, one day, Enno leaves. He gives reason for his going: “‘You don’t know how to make love,’ he said.... ‘You’re too passive, you’re lazy, you bore me. I’ve had enough of this. Good-bye’” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 128). Enno harshly criticizes Sasha’s appearances and behavior, making her an object whose only purpose is male pleasure, and he casts aside Sasha’s

emotions when he begins to feel that she is inadequate to hold the office he believes belongs to her gender: sex object. Despite the callous manner in which his remarks are delivered, they are probably true. Sasha has lived her entire life being continuously objectified, never expected to be anything but passive. Though she has undoubtedly had sex before her marriage, she has probably never been in a relationship where the distinction between sex and making love is pertinent. In all other relationships, Sasha was, quite literally, an object of sexual gratification, but now that there are emotions and reciprocal feelings involved it is beyond Sasha's world of experience. She does not know how to make love because she has never been in love. At any other point in her life she would have been, and occasionally has been, criticized if she were to be anything but passive, but now that she is married her, sexual passivity is reason enough for Enno to leave her.

Just when Sasha has given up hope of him returning and has gone out to buy herself some food, without first needing permission or waiting for it to be brought to her, Enno returns (Rhys, *Good Morning* 129). Sasha dreams of telling Enno to “go to hell,” but instead she peels the orange he requests and waits for him to act first, still relying on passivity to help her survive potentially traumatic situations. It seems Enno has acquired some money. Sasha does not ask how or where he got it, but Enno believes that the money allows him to return as if nothing has happened. As with all men in Rhys's early novels, money gives Enno power and usurps any Sasha thought of claiming for herself. Even though Sasha is sometimes the one earning the money, his ownership of it, and consequently his ownership of her, allows him to maintain his socially designated superiority.

When Sasha and Enno are stranded in Brussels, Sasha goes to Mr. Lawson for money. Lawson, apparently an erstwhile lover, had once given Sasha his address and invited her to look him up. Unfortunately, he is unable to remember Sasha's name and, in his stuttering, calls her:

“Little miss – .” In a very uncharacteristic manner, Sasha retorts, “Not little,’ I say, ‘not little.’ Because I can’t have a man like that calling me little” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 119). Because Sasha knows her interactions with Mr. Lawson will be limited to this one instance, she does not resist the urge to correct him as she does with other men. She does not see Mr. Lawson as being worthy of offering her insult because he cannot provide for her beyond this limited capacity. She despises him, because he represents the patriarchy, as other men do, and also because he is mostly unnecessary to her. Sasha hates him because she knows what he will expect from her, so she works to resist him and what he represents while she can. Despite her disdain for and defiance of him, she does give in after he has given her the money she requested: “I am standing there with the note in my hand, when he comes up to me and kisses me. I am hating him more than I have ever hated anyone in my life, yet I feel my mouth go soft under his, and my arms go limp. ‘Good-bye,’ he says in imitation American, and grins” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 119). Sexuality is a learned response, much like her helplessness. She does not relish any sexual experience – she is cold, detached, and pragmatic, separating her body and mind. In return for his small gift of money, Sasha reciprocates his small sexual advance, though she does not relish it. The sizes of the gifts will always remain in proportion to one another.

Even though her interactions with Mr. Lawson are quite limited and she has acquired what she and Enno need to survive, and, more importantly, to get back to Paris, she feels the need to lie to him about what occurred. She tells him that the money came from a friend she knew in London, but Enno does not seem to believe her (Rhys, *Good Morning* 120). Eventually, the subject is dropped and, money in hand, Enno forgets his agitation. Though the money should truly be Sasha’s, she gives it to Enno so that he can decide how they spend it. Once he has her money he promises to buy her a new dress when they get back to Paris, something she easily

could have purchased herself had she kept her money. However, Sasha chooses to abide by the standard gender roles of the time and allow her husband to make all financial decisions, perhaps out of a fear that he will leave her for good, which he soon does.

Sasha is so afraid Enno will leave her, even asking him if he will on their wedding day, because he is the only man she has ever loved; though, like as with all other things, the way Sasha loves is not the conventional manner. Sasha recounts the day she first realized she loved Enno:

When I saw him looking up like that I knew that I loved him, and that it was for always. It was as if my heart turned over, and I knew that it was for always. It's a strange feeling – when you know quite certainly in yourself that something is for always. It's like what death must be. All the insouciance, all the gaiety is a bluff. Because I wanted to escape from London I fastened myself on him, and I am dragging him down. All the gaiety is going and now he is thin and anxious....
(Rhys, *Good Morning* 129)

She compares her love for Enno to death because they both encompass a lack of emotion that continues in seeming perpetuity. This lack of emotion is predicated on blame; Sasha blames herself for the difficulties she and Enno are encountering as a couple, never suspecting that his life would still have been difficult if they had not gotten married. She believes that her poverty and depression are “dragging him down,” though she stated previously that he was already down before they had met. Perhaps she thinks that he could have married someone with money had he not married her, which leads her both to this strange type of joyless love and the fear that he could, at any time, come to the same conclusion and leave her. Even a love free of gaiety would be a new experience for Sasha. Early in her life, Sasha has not yet developed the ability to

dissociate emotion from relationships and remain ambivalent about her sexual partners, which is the reason Enno is able to hurt her so deeply.

Despite the detail Rhys provides of their relationship in these rooms, Sasha and Enno's marriage ends abruptly; to Sasha, the death of their child is "everything all spoiled" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 140). Though in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia suggests the death of her child is due to an inability to support the child financially, in *Good Morning, Midnight* it appears the child died before ever leaving the hospital. When Julia recounted the story, it was as a means to eek money out of Mr. James, but now Sasha is not manipulating the story to meet any such defined goals; though it was suggested Julia did so in her interaction with Mr. James to acquire money, Sasha is now reliving and manipulating the memory in an attempt to reconcile with it and come to terms with what her life has become. Earlier in the novel, Sasha recalls the birth of her son, with no mention of Enno; he obviously was not present for the birth. After the birth, a nurse comes and bandages her so she will not have any scars. When her baby dies, Sasha thinks, "and there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease..." (Rhys, *Good Morning* 61). As if the child had never been born, Sasha remains physically and financially just as she had been, but emotionally she will never be the same; she is flung into a greater depression from which she will never be able to recover. Their child's death is a catalyst toward the end of their marriage and, in turn, Sasha's ability to emotionally connect with others, carrying through from Julia and increasing in Sasha.

Sasha's depression and apathy remain a factor in her current relationships. When two Russians approach her in a café, she says, "I say that I am not sad. I tell them that I am very happy, very comfortable, quite rich enough, and that I am over here for two weeks to buy a lot of

clothes to startle my friends – my many friends” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 47). The more optimistic of the two believes her when she says that she is happy, but the more jaded, worldly one cannot believe that she is happy, though he will believe that she is rich based on her fur coat. Sasha’s pliability means that she can project two simultaneous images onto the world, that she is rich and happy. Though it seems no one is willing to accept that she is both, no one suspects that she is neither. She promises to meet them again the following day, but she decides not to go because she does not feel pretty enough; however, she holds out hope that she will be pretty, and therefore happy, tomorrow (Rhys, *Good Morning* 57). She does meet the Russian, Nicolas Delmar, again and he expresses his frustration that she stood up his friend, but he seems to get over it quite quickly, perhaps because he believes she is rich.

Sasha appears ambivalent about Delmar, but develops some niggling sensation of distaste for him, though the feeling is never fully formed. Delmar disapproves of Sasha’s drinking. Though he never says so, he appears “anxious” whenever she orders a drink, which could be a reason for Sasha’s distaste for him. More likely, though, Sasha’s dislike of Delmar is derived from a more subtle and intricate cause: she knows him too well because he is just like her. The way Sasha feels about Delmar mirrors the way others, like Horsfield in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, have expressed their feelings about her, Anna, and Julia. It is revealed that Sasha and Delmar are very much alike and that is most likely the reason a similar sense of vague distaste for each other arises from both of them. Delmar, like the Rhys women, believes that “things repeat themselves over and over again,” and states that he has been very lonely, both recurring themes in the protagonists’ lives (Rhys, *Good Morning* 66). Because she knows he would make decisions and act in the same manner she would, she cannot trust him, but she cannot blame him either. Sasha

cannot connect with Delmar enough to hate him, but she believes she knows him well enough to dislike him.

More important than Delmar's own relationship with Sasha, brief though it may be, is his part in introducing her to Serge, a Jewish painter. Delmar says that Serge "'understands everybody – it's extraordinary'" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 67). Indeed, Serge is able to pick apart Sasha in an unparalleled way by telling the story of a mulatto mistress who used to live above him. Though he says it is not so when Sasha exclaims, "'exactly like me,'" the woman's story is astoundingly similar (Rhys, *Good Morning* 95). The woman feels displaced in Paris, and becomes sad when she sees the faces of people on the streets when they see her; they express hatred and disgust because of her race and her status as an outsider. Julia identifies with her, just as Anna yearned for the warmth of Francine. Cynical and more jaded, Sasha now understands the position of people of color in her society and, though a false comparison, likens their experience to her own. The mulatto woman's lover, a British man, says she imagines it and she should not be bothered by it; he, like all other privileged men in the patriarchal system of power, belittles her pain and uses his dominant position to keep her submissive. He refuses to recognize her oppression because he would then recognize his own part in its continuation and potentially feel guilt from his actions. Better, those in these advantaged positions would think, to instead continue the perpetuation of this pain on others than to feel any remorse, and so they continue to indoctrinate their children, and blame "nature" for the hierarchy they instill (Rhys, *Good Morning* 98). When Serge relays the story, he appears to work beyond the parameters of the patriarchy; however, he ends by reaffirming his position within them: "I knew all the time that what she wanted was that I should make love to her and that it was the only thing that would do her any good. But alas, I couldn't'" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 97). Serge, like the other men Anna,

Julia, and Sasha have encountered, believes that the sexual act has a restorative property for women. He believes sex, like colonization, can impose upon the recipient a greater sense of worth. This relationship is emphasized more distinctly in this case by the woman's nationality. She is from Martinique, a colony that has been historically subjected to this kind of imperialistic ideological imposition. Sasha hints at his cruelty, but, as is her inclination, does not state it outright. Sasha identifies with the woman because she too has been in that position: the displaced property of another, feeling the scorn of others, and being told to rely on sexual intimacy to cure her emotional ills. Like Sasha, Serge is an outsider. He is Jewish, which means he will never be able to ingratiate himself with society proper. Instead of developing empathy for others who have the same outsider status, Serge relies on the supposed superiority his gender affords him to belittle the woman of the story and Sasha. Sasha notes this, but is so resigned to men behaving this way, she decides it is better to ignore it and focus on his art.

Though Serge leaves Sasha to view the paintings, his influence still remains in the art itself. He appears to be a bit of a con with his art; when Sasha comments on the African masks in the studio he says, "yes, straight from the Congo.... I made them" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 91). At first he is going to lie to Sasha because Delmar has most likely told him he believes her to be rich, but Serge changes his mind finding Sasha either unworthy of the effort of deceit or too detached to care. The paintings have a profound emotional effect on Sasha. When they are propped up around the room, she thinks, "now the room expands and the iron band round my heart loosens. The miracle has happened. I am happy" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 92). Where previously Sasha could only say that she was "feeling" happy, she now accepts the feeling in its entirety and becomes it. Sasha decides to buy a painting of an "old Jew with a red nose, playing the banjo," reminiscent of Picasso's "The Old Guitarist," for six hundred francs (Rhys, *Good Morning* 100).

She recognizes herself in the agony of the old man, her hunger, cold, and pain. However, they present another side of life as well. The paintings are described as vaguely cubist. When she leaves, Sasha says, “The pictures walk along with me. The misshapen dwarfs juggling huge coloured balloons, the four-breasted woman is exhibited, the old prostitute waits hopelessly outside the *urinoir*, the young one under the *bec de gaz*...” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 101). The distortion of reality in the depiction of outsiders enlivens Sasha. She sees the subjects of the painting as real and the variety of their dimensions is mirrored in everyone around her. Cubism captures a multiplicity of perspectives in a single image and shows the different angles in which objects and, in this case, people, can be viewed. Sasha’s exultation from the paintings stems from her own sojourn through objectification and all the times others viewed her as a flat image with only one side to project. The paintings allow her to see that there is a possibility that she can display a variety of her multi-faceted personality at the same time and not have to compromise herself to do so, yet she may be seen as distorted by others. Even though she would still be objectified, she sees this multifaceted representation as preferable to traditional, single-sided depictions. The realization launches her from the past into the present because she sees the potential for a new way forward, free from at least some of the constructs that had been restricting her.

After she pays Delmar for the painting, money she thinks may never reach Serge, she is reassured by a letter from him. He says that he is willing to swap paintings if the one she has chosen should start to make her sad. Now she is in the position of power with Serge. She has paid him for his services and is rewarded by his subservience. She does not recognize this role reversal from her previous life, however, and thinks, “he is my friend, Serge Rubin. Well, I’ll have a whiskey on that” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 109). Now happy, she has become the colonizing

force and does not understand the transposition that has taken place. She has subverted the power structures that have abused her and become the colonizer through her empathy with the painting's subjects and her money. Here she misconstrues the meaning of friendship because she does not fully understand it. She is on the receiving end of the emotional exchange she took part in her whole life. She paid Serge and believes they have created a genuine emotional connection from the exchange. Instead of being appalled by this, she becomes overjoyed. Unfortunately for Sasha, this feeling quickly evaporates.

Shortly after Sasha meets the Russians, she is approached by Rene, a young gigolo who is drawn to her for a number of reasons. Sasha believes that he has approached her because she looks like a "rich bitch" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 75). Despite her protestations, he does not seem willing to accept that she is not rich, but adamantly states that is not why he is talking to her anyway. When Sasha asks why he would want to speak with her, she expects one of the lines she has heard before, "'because you look so kind.' Or 'Because you look so beautiful and kind,'" but she does not hear anything of that sort. Instead, he says, "'because I think you won't betray me'" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 73). Sasha wanted him to be just like every other man she had met so that she could hurt him with some barb or dismiss him, but she does not think that it will be so easy now that he has altered her perception of him. Unable to place him in her formulation of masculinity, in a manner similar to how men viewed Anna and Julia's construction of femininity, Sasha is distrustful of him, believing very little of what he tells her. However, her lack of trust does not seem to have any external effect, only the internal acknowledgment that she believes he is lying about his past. He claims he only wants her to comfort him and help him because he has just arrived in Paris after defecting from the Foreign Legion and does not have any papers or anyone to rely on, attempting to evoke the same sympathetic response Rhys's women used for

support. Sasha thinks, “Well, what harm can he do to me? He is out for money and I haven’t got any. I am invulnerable” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 76). She scarcely expects the kind of damage he is still capable of inflicting.

Like Delmar, Rene reminds readers of Anna, Julia, and Sasha. He is a *mauvais garçon*, a bad boy, and a gigolo, living outside the standard societal configuration for a man of his age (Rhys, *Good Morning* 74). He relies on his sexual desirability to sustain himself, leveraging wealthy women into providing for him, in the same way the Rhys heroine does with her lovers. This familiarity is not lost on Sasha and she imposes her thoughts on him, pitying him, because she believes he must be thinking, “No good. Everything’s got to be started all over again” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 77). She knows he must be feeling this way, because it is how she felt at the prospect of finding a new lover to support her and reengaging in the cycle of sexual gratification for money. She does not even attempt to engage him, and regularly rejects his requests to go back to her room, though she would now be on the dominant end of the transaction. Now that Sasha has extricated herself from this pattern, willingly or not, she is able to see the marks of it on others, even evaluating their form. When he remains ironical and is neither kind nor cruel to her as she expects, Sasha thinks, “I’ve got to expect that. Technique” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 179). For the first time in the trio of novels, a Rhys heroine admits to some deliberate strategy behind their behavior, or at least the recognition that a strategy of this kind exists. Still, she continues watching him and when he does treat her poorly she thinks, “You’ve been unkind too soon. Bad technique” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 180). Sasha is able to judge Rene’s form, because she has mastered it, though, because of her age, she is no longer able to use it. Now, Sasha is in the unfamiliar position of having these techniques used on her; instead of falling for them or resenting him, she judges his form, quite ironical and detached from the

situation. Rene is in the submissive position, but Sasha does not take advantage of him or even relish her superiority; instead, she ignores it because she did not wish for it to happen.

Despite her resistance, Rene continues to follow Sasha, showing up at her room uninvited. He comments that she looks frightened, to which she replies that she thought it was the man from next door, but seeing that it is him she is simply vexed. Nevertheless, he says, “Who are you frightened of? Me? But how flattering!” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 150). He takes the opportunity to invite himself into her room and comments on how perfect it is to make love in, with its two beds. Then he begins to tell her about the rich American he has met and runs his technique for picking her up by Sasha. She is fascinated by his skill, but is unimpressed by him. Still, she passively accepts his invitation for dinner and drinks. When they go out, he plays her for her money, saying, “to be frank, when I’ve paid for this lot of drinks I shan’t have much money left” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 155). He requests that Sasha give him her money prior to their arrival at the restaurant so he can maintain the appearance of having money and being the provider, in keeping with societal expectations. However, Sasha is not unaware of what he is doing. She gives him the exact amount of money it will take to eat, buy drinks, and pay for a taxi. He is unnerved by this, but does not show it, as that would throw the game off and prevent the opportunity for acquiring more funds from her. During their meal they discuss his move to London and Sasha reflects upon the difficulties he will find there. He will face the same difficulties she faced everywhere, though in this case, “he’ll find out that he will be up against racial, not sexual, characteristics” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 157). Sasha knows that because of their similarities, namely their similar approach to independence and financial support, he will have difficulty surviving in England. She recognizes her past in this young gigolo, but does not resent his opportunity to learn the things she has learned for himself. He, like Anna, responds in an openly emotive way, not yet as

jaded by life as Sasha: Sasha thinks when Rene feels. Based on her experience, she expects that he will become like her in the end: cold and detached. However, she only briefly considers the benefits society will afford him because of his gender.

After they return to Sasha's hotel, and she once again tells him that he cannot come up to her room, he follows her up anyway. Initially, she is happy to find that he follows her upstairs; however, this happiness soon turns into an ominous detachment from the situation: "We kiss each other fervently, but already something has gone wrong, half of myself is somewhere else," feeling the beginnings of dissociation from a dangerous situation (Rhys, *Good Morning* 177). Rene attempts to dominate her, saying he knew she wanted him to come and disregarding her insistence otherwise. She continues to try and remove him from her room, but he refuses, becoming more aggressive with her every insistence. Finally, he forces himself on her and they struggle on the bed. Sasha argues that they are struggling for a "worthless prize" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 181). That is, she believes her sexuality is not worth fighting for when it can be so easily purchased. This struggle, however, is not for her sexuality. As with most instances of rape, he wants to assert his power over her because he feels he has been belittled by her rebuffs. Where Sasha used more subtle forms of subversion to assert her authority over the men she was using, Rene resorts to violent sexuality, even describing a gang rape he participated in while he was in Morocco. While the struggle continues, he says, "*Je te ferai mal* [...] It's your fault" (Rhys, *Good Morning* 182). He blames her for his behavior, an idea that patriarchal society has imposed on victims of sexual violence for generations. Rene wants to hurt her so he can feel the power and dominance that would come from that kind of sexual authority, but he underestimates Sasha's strength and the armor that has always shielded her.

As Rhys notes, Sasha has the strength of the dead. She has dissociated so dramatically from the traumatic situation that is being imposed on her and the trauma she has been exposed to her whole life that she no longer feels the need for life. When Sasha finally opens her eyes and is launched back into the present, into her reality, she thinks, “My mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive...” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 182). Half of Sasha becomes aware of the situation and is able to dissuade Rene from raping her by offering him money, saying she is simply trying to save him a lot of trouble. When she speaks she does not recognize her own voice. She disowns her voice because it is debasing her. Sasha resents the voice, but does not stop it because it is the only way she can save her body from Rene, though the emotional consequences have already been wrought.

After Rene leaves, Sasha checks her cash and sees that Rene has left her the majority of her money, she thinks, “Well! *What* a compliment!’ [...] I’m not used to these courtesies” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 186). She has become so accustomed to abuse that coming through a traumatic situation so easily appears to be a courtesy. This kindness causes Sasha to vacillate between hating Rene and wishing he would return so she would not be left alone in such an vulnerable state, little recalling that he was the one who pushed her into the trauma initially. She wills him to return to her, watching in her mind as he walks down the street. She has a desire to reclaim the power he has taken from her by willingly allowing him into her bed. When he forces himself on her, she has no power over the situation, but if she were to engage in the exact same thing willingly, she would again be in control and be able to reassert her authority. Rene does not return, but still Sasha is not left alone.

As she is imagining Rene’s return, the *commis voyageur*, the man next door, and the man she has hated throughout the novel, enters her room. He is not violent like Rene; rather, he is

unsure of himself, choosing to simply observe her pain, but not partake in it, until Sasha “pull[s] him down onto the bed” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 190). Sasha accepts him into her bed because now the situation plays out on her terms. In order to regain her independence, she must reengage in the act that originally stole it from her, willingly. Without this active reengagement she would simply be a victim of whatever situation is flung at her, but by reasserting herself, Sasha reclaims her authority and retaliates against the people, and systems more broadly, that would take it from her. Sasha narrates this act: “I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: ‘Yes – yes – yes ...’” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 190). Sasha is revising the concept of womanhood. She is utilizing the tropes that have been set out by other authors in order to give her characters space to subvert them. Sasha is not reveling in a revised version of feminine sexuality as James Joyce’s Molly Bloom does; rather, as Maren Linnett notes, “Sasha’s yeses go beyond irony to invert and even pervert the affirmation Joyce imagined for Molly Bloom,” once again undermining the patriarchal vision of the female experience by playing directly into its most outlandish stereotypes (458). Sasha does what she always has: uses the tools available to her in order to create the most beneficial situation she can. Trauma at an early age stripped Sasha of some of her tools. Though this does not leave her helpless, by believing that it does, Sasha forged a new weapon based on the tools that had been stolen from her. Sasha does not submit herself to the *commis voyageur*’s will; instead, she conquers him, forcing him to do her will by pulling him onto the bed. By becoming an autonomous actor, she shields herself psychologically from further victimization and subjugation, and gains the autonomy to act independently that Rene attempted to take from her.

Sasha embraces the darkness the stranger represents, recognizing that she can no longer live in the same way. She has exploited her scheme for all it was worth, but now that she is aging

and the pessimism has set in, she is no longer able to continue to live as she had. She senses desperation in the *commis*'s taunting and realizes that sometimes people are just as desperate as they appear, and they are willing to feed on vulnerability in order to make themselves whole. Just as these women attempt to emphasize their helplessness to evoke sympathy, the *commis voyageur* seeks out the helpless to exploit them. The *commis* believes he is exploiting Sasha, but in reality it is she who is using him. With this realization, Sasha thinks, "I look straight into his eyes and despised another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time..." (Rhys, *Good Morning* 190). After everything has gone wrong, Sasha, as the last and oldest of the early Rhys protagonists, rejects the cyclical repetition of objectification for support that her predecessors embraced: "all over again" becomes "for the last time." Sasha marks the end of this pattern and embraces the eventuality of her physical death, while resigning herself to the emotional death she established long ago. By embracing death, Sasha ends the pattern and is free of the constraints that bound her to its continuation. Though it is not the first time she has contemplated suicide, this time she is not actively going to try to bring it about, rather she passively accepts her death as an eventuality.

Other women in *Good Morning*, *Midnight* play a smaller role than they do in *Voyage in the Dark* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, but even so, they continue to represent women who have aligned themselves with the patriarchy. However, Sasha does not resent them in the same way Anna and Julia do; she offers a more objective appraisal of their lives, removing the criticism from them and placing it on the societal factors that molded and shaped their development. The mother-daughter relationship remains important and, indeed, the women who interact with Sasha in the most meaningful way are mother-daughter pairs. When Sasha is working in a hat shop, a mother and her daughter enter: "the old lady eager, the daughter very

reluctant” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 22). The mother, as it happens, is completely bald. The daughter is ashamed and embarrassed by her mother’s lack of embarrassment. Sasha notes that the daughter becomes detached from the situation and continues to berate her mother and encourages her to leave. Sasha empathizes with the woman’s strength and acceptance of her appearance. She sees something of herself in the woman and approves of her “calm and completely unconcerned” attitude, as well as her confidence, in a situation that could have been embarrassing and, indeed, was for her daughter because she allowed it to be so (Rhys, *Good Morning* 22). These women, like Mr. Blank, come to represent society and the adversities that face women, especially in relationships with other women. Sasha sees the mother in terms of how she wishes women to be: strong and undaunted by the adversities they face. Unfortunately, the daughter’s constant abuse, as a representation of the hostility women have been trained by society to impose on each other, eventually has an effect on the mother. The old woman changes slightly: “her eyes [are] still undaunted but something about her mouth and chin [is] collapsing” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 23). Sasha knows that the strength of women will eventually be worn down and crushed by others and wishes the woman would embrace joy one last time before it is gone, before her daughter wrenches it from her forever. She knows this is not possible, for in Rhys’s worldview, society prohibits such manifestations of female satisfaction, and bemoans the eventual fate of the woman: “You must have the slow death, the bloodless killing that leaves no stain on your conscience” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 23). Sasha begins to hate the daughter for wishing such an unkind fate on her mother, though Sasha has just imposed it on her psychology and has no way of knowing if these feelings in the daughter actually exist. In the same way, Sasha hates the society that has trained the daughter to think this way and judge the happiness of others so thoroughly they cease to be happy. Through the female interactions in the novel, Rhys

illustrates her belief that patriarchal society trains women to crush other women and drain the strength and satisfaction from them, thus continuing the cycle of oppression that has kept women subservient to men, but allowing women to do the work for them. Rather than having men engage with the abuse in order to secure their superiority, society allows them to keep their hands clean of the business by training women to do it for them. Thus, for Sasha, these women represent both the beauty and strength of female psychology and dark forces of society, which are unfortunately even stronger, that will continue to belittle women until they are compliant enough to accept their assigned roles without too much hassle. The mother maintains the façade of strength and indifference, just as Sasha does, but its maintenance is wearing and she will eventually have to give in to the forces that pull her down.

The most significant woman in *Good Morning, Midnight* is the other woman that lives inside Sasha. Through the novel, Sasha appears to have a strong internal dialogue that helps to make decisions or criticize decisions she has already made. The other woman slowly starts to develop as a unique voice, so slowly that it is not readily recognizable. Early in the novel, Sasha thinks, “Did it bring me any luck, I wonder – calling myself Sasha?” (Rhys, *After* 12). After Enno purchased a coat for her, Sophia, as she was then known, began calling herself Sasha. When Sasha changes her name, she splits her identity into two voices and one becomes dominant over the other, though the subservient one continues to occasionally emerge. The underlying voice becomes particularly clear in times of crisis when Sasha requires an emotional barricade separating her body from her mind.

After Rene leaves, Sasha breaks down while internally criticizing herself for her emotionalism. Linett notes that “these monologues go beyond the fluidity and ambivalence celebrated in poststructuralist criticism; instead they delineate two rigidly opposed fragments of

self: one who feels pain and another who mocks it” (443). Sasha does not appear to identify with this mocking fragment of herself – a representation of how she believes she is being perceived by others – but she can temporarily squelch it: “I’ll have another drink. Damned voice in my head, I’ll stop you talking...” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 188). Sasha refuses to listen to what the alternate version of herself is telling her because it is too painful. By the last pages, Sasha has completely dissociated herself from the voice and the harsher identity that accompanies it. The voice eventually evolves into a fully-fledged form, sometimes directly conversing with the dominant voice. Sasha notes, “she has gone,” suggesting not just the strong dissociation from this internal voice, but its development into a complete, autonomous identity.

Sasha attempts to negotiate the identity Anna and Julia have created. She says, “*faites comme les autres* – that’s been my motto all my life. *Faites comme les autres*, damn you [...] I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don’t succeed, but look how hard I try... Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights” (Rhys, *Good Morning* 106). Her words and actions have become bound to societal expectations and she cannot speak or think without the developing anxiety over the criticisms of static British society. Sasha’s desire to be like everyone else stems from a deeper desire for the comfort and stability that conformity would bring; however, because she is and always has been an outsider, she will never be able to abide by the ideal form of femininity as designated by society. Sasha completely disrupts the relationship between the individual woman and society’s expectations. She emerges victorious in a way neither Anna nor Julia could. She finally rejects the cycle that has kept her victimized and oppressed through her life. Sasha breaks this pattern and is finally free from the bonds that held Anna and Julia. Though this may yet end poorly for Sasha, she is finally given

freedom from society and the clarity of mind that comes with this freedom despite her psychological fragmentation.

Conclusion

By reading *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight* as a trilogy following the life of a single character, readers see in Anna the circumstances that force Julia to act as she does, which in turn leads to Sasha's downfall. Each of these women is constructed upon the same archetype: physically fragile, colonial transplants who use their victimization as a means to support themselves. Contrary to Sandage's claims of stagnation, this woman grows and develops through the novels; however, the growth is not positive and inverts the trajectory of the traditional *bildungsroman*. These characters use their failures and victimization in order to subvert the expectations set for them and the society that perpetuates these standards.

The chronology of their lives is indicative of the dangers of the type of subversion these characters have engaged in. The powerlessness of Rhys's characters does not mean that the characters themselves are without the faculties necessary to support themselves in a manner that adheres to the expectations of society, as a wife, shop girl, or prostitute; rather, they have no desire to participate in a society that oppresses and traumatizes women. Rhys's protagonists must then resort to living in the world of that trauma and using the limited resources available to support themselves. However, the Rhys heroine takes a new approach, avoiding the conventional pitfalls of prostitution; using their vantage point at the bottom of the social ladder, they consciously manipulate others by emphasizing the appearance of their helplessness and destitution. In doing so, these women slowly begin to subvert the patriarchal structures that have oppressed them, while maintaining their status as the victim. Instead of attempting to rise out of

their helpless victimhood, the Rhys heroine uses it to her advantage. Though she will never recover from the trauma that this position and the socio-cultural circumstances thrust upon her, she begins to fight against these systems of oppressions by using the trauma they have given her. Rhys's women are only able to fight back once they have been victimized, otherwise they would have nothing to fight against and no tools with which to do it.

Unfortunately, these women fail in their subversion, but it is their failure that makes them remarkable. If they had been able to succeed, they would have failed in their ultimate goal of criticizing a society so flawed it actively denies female independence and success. Rhys uses this trio of women to illuminate the impossibility of choice under the patriarchal, colonial society of the early twentieth century. Anna's arduous circumstances, Julia's desperate attempts to secure independence, and Sasha's eventual decline into madness are representative of the lives women at the time, women like Rhys, were forced to live. Though they are no less inherently capable of achieving the same degrees of success or, indeed, level of destitution as their male counterparts, they are prevented from doing so by a society that forces them to stagnate in acceptable roles, be it as a wife or a prostitute. These women cannot succeed, but they cannot utterly fail either; if they were to fail entirely, their lives would be seen simply as tragic and not for the critical commentary they offer. Consequently, they are forced in to a middle position wherein they neither thrive nor do they die; rather, they simply exist. This uselessness and hopelessness ultimately forces them into depression and apathy. The Rhys heroine's subversive actions against the society that oppressed them inflicts deep psychological damage, the results of which can be seen most clearly in Sasha's mental collapse.

Though these women attempt to fight against society, they know their fight is useless in bringing about real change. Anna is the first to see the flaws in the system and, knowing that she

will never achieve independence by following pursuits deemed appropriate for women, fights against societal expectation to disastrous ends. Julia, harder and more mature, has learned how to manipulate others to her advantage. She uses the victimization that has been thrust upon Anna in order to secure the modicum of independence afforded to women at the time. For Julia, *La vie est un spiral*, but on each turn she becomes harder, more cynical, and world weary, though she continues to fight until the end. Still, the effects of having to struggle so desperately to support oneself and achieve even the small amount of independence they are able to secure come crashing down. Sasha, working so hard for no return, is emotionally disconnected from the rest of the world, and she has every right to be. The world has rejected her and she has rejected it. Closing herself off from any emotional or social interactions, she becomes a *cerebral*, living within her head, until that too betrays her and the remnants of torment come pouring forth. The effort Rhys's women exert in order to achieve minimal rewards will eventually break them. They have no chance of gaining independence from the emotional and financial traps set by British patriarchal society and the results are decidedly psychological for these characters. These women have no chance to make an independent life for themselves, but that is precisely Rhys's point in presenting them in the way she has.

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