CHAPTER V

VOYAGE IN THE DARK

Voyage In The Dark, published in 1934, is Rhys’s first West Indian novel. Voyage In The Dark is the story of Anna Morgan, an eighteen year old West Indian Creole, who is transplanted into an alien soil i.e. England, by her English step-mother Hester after the death of her father. The novel is an account of Anna Morgan’s struggle to establish her existence in an unsympathetic and hostile environment to whose rules she is unfamiliar. The novel inexorably depicts the perennial conflict between nature and culture as represented by two diverse countries- West Indies and England. The supremacy of nature, as represented in the character of Anna Morgan, is asserted throughout the novel. The novel shows young Anna’s visit to a foreign country whose social values she is ignorant of; but on a deeper spiritual level, the novel depicts a deep-rooted conflict in Anna’s consciousness, her struggle to free herself from the English civilization and to establish her Caribbean identity and her passionate longing for her lost paradise in the island of West Indies. The theme of homelessness, which is Rhys’s principal pre-occupation, re-emerges even more dominantly in Voyage In The Dark. The title of the novel itself suggests the themes of dislocation, transplantation, and mobility. The title’s voyage symbolically suggests Anna’s voyage into her Caribbean self-hood and consciousness which she attempts to regain in the darkness of the country where she is transported. The loss of the Caribbean home and identity and the necessity
of survival in an alien country essentially lead Anna to take up the challenges of a spiritual voyage into her self-consciousness.

Soon after the death of her father, Anna Morgan is taken by her English step-mother Hester to England. Anna Morgan is born in a hot place in the West Indies and she loves her birth place so intimately that the memories of her childhood days spent on the island continuously haunt her. Anna is transplanted into the metropolis civilization of England at the age of sixteen; she is uprooted from her Caribbean home and brought to England in order to be civilized. Anna’s step-mother Hester is English and she wants to impose the English social values upon Anna’s Caribbean sensibility. Hester wants to make Anna a lady; but Anna desires to retain her West Indian identity by refusing to participate in the non-natural process of education and civilization. The identity conflict begins precisely at the moment when Anna realizes that her Caribbean sensibility is being threatened by her English step-mother, Hester, who persistently attempts to impose her English value system upon Anna. Hester’s endeavours to define Anna’s life according to her English values, which are crushed by Anna who rebelliously attempts to safeguard her Creole origin. The personal suffering of Anna resulting out of homelessness, disorientation, and isolation is pointed out right in the opening of the novel. Anna’s transplantation into England marks a destructive rebirth: it makes Anna conscious of her loss and introduces her to the darkness of a foreign land. The theme of Anna’s destructive rebirth is announced in the opening lines which refer to her perception of England. Anna’s comment on her
dislocation and new home shows a rather bewildered state of her mind. Anna says:

It was as if a curtain had fallen; hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, gray. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn’t like England at first. I couldn’t get used to the cold.  

The feeling of ‘being born again’ has no religious or spiritual connotations in this context; it rather suggests the loss of origins and the original mother followed by a kind of devastating rebirth in the foreign land of a step-mother. The end of Anna’s life on the island of Dominica signals the growth of her inner life to be started in a foreign land. Deprived of the pleasant patterns of natural life in Dominica, Anna’s life ceases to be beautiful. The experience of ‘being born again’ indicates the beginning of Anna’s inner growth.

Anna’s displacement from the West Indian background entirely changes her life in a huge manner. It leaves her completely bewildered, confused, and frightened. Anna has spent the first sixteen years of her life on the green, young, and vibrant island of the West Indies. She experienced peace, happiness, and perfect harmony with nature in the childhood; but her two years’ stay in England has to a great extent damaged her Caribbean sensibility. Anna has been in England for two years now but she has failed to accept the English value system. The new social environment of England, its civilization, and its economic value system are in sharp contrast to Anna’s simple, care free, and happy life spent in the
company of nature in West Indies. Anna thinks of England as a cold, gray country, as if England were a dream. Soon after her arrival in the cold country of England, Anna feels like a fish out of water and tells herself: "oh I'm not going to like this place. I'm not going to like this place. I'm not going to like this place." [15] Even after two years' stay in England, Anna has not been able to adjust herself to the coldness of England which depresses her. The more she stays in England the deeper she is lost in the memories of her Caribbean home. Anna's abhorrence of her step-mother Hester's England is presented throughout the novel. England is not Anna's birth place; it is the country of her step-mother. The problem of identity rises up in Rhys's novels to an intense altitude because her protagonists decline to live in others' background or country or home. Marya Zelli in *Quartet* is in quest of her own 'necessary fixed background,' Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* constantly changes her places and Anna Morgan in *Voyage In The Dark* hates England because it is the country of her step-mother. Rhys's women feel disheartened and suffocated in the places constructed or established by the others and they persistently try to escape from their depressing situation. Anna cries: "I don't like England. It's an awful place; it looks horrible sometimes. I wish I'd never come over here at all." [39] For Anna Morgan, to deny one the right to live in his own place is to deny one's capacity for growth; it means committing the self necessarily to an abstract social system that is distinct from the existential dimensions of human personality.

Anna Morgan's hatred of England is due largely to the haunting memories of her childhood enjoyed on the exotic island of West Indies.
Anna’s Caribbean identity is at odds with the hypocrisy and respectability of the English society. Anna thinks of her new country as “loathsome London, vile and stinking hole ... .” [40] Anna tells her lover Walter Jeffries that West Indies is a lovely place and that she is “a real West Indian” and “..... the fifth generation on my mother’s side.” [46] The contrast between England and West Indies is shown throughout the novel: Anna represents the island of West Indies where as her step-mother represents England, Anna likes hot places where as Walter Jeffries prefers cold places, England represents culture and Anna’s West Indies represents nature. The novel irrevocably depicts the conflict between nature and culture. It is through the medium of step-mother Hester that culture i.e. England tries to suppress nature i.e. West Indies or Anna. But Anna’s recollections of her early childhood spent in the West Indies and her bold refusal to become a ‘lady’ is the victory of nature. The more Hester tries to make Anna civilized, the more Anna associates herself with her Caribbean identity. ] Anna thinks of England contemnuously and says sardonically, “This is England, and I’m in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed.” [26] The memories of the West Indian island excite Anna Morgan, the company of her friend Francine made her perfectly happy in the childhood. Anna passionately expresses her desire to preserve her West Indian Creole identity and says, “I wanted to be black, I always Francine was there ..... Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad.” [26] Anna’s desire to be black reveals her longing for a racial heritage which seems in harmony with nature and it also shows her rejection of European sophistication and objectivity in favour of the vitality
of the black Caribbean culture. The whole of Anna's emotional experience is contained within her own imagination. Capable of great vehemence of feeling, yet, mistrustful of mankind, she deliberately chooses to seclude herself in a visionary world of Caribbean memories where the power, the joy, the destiny are all her own. She is ecstatic when she conjures up the vision of Dominica. Here, unchecked and uncontrolled, she can follow the dictates of her sensitive nature, and expose her wild spirit to the unlimited joys of the island. Anna is a passionate being, capable of startling vehemence of feelings, who asserts her true 'self' by penetrating into the innermost recesses of her being. Anna associates England with death, unhappiness, and sadness and West Indies with joy, health, and the warmth of life.

Anna Morgan, originally uncommitted, wanders through the streets of London looking for some value to which she can attach herself, seeking to discover who and what she is. The novelist informs the reader that Anna has travelled extensively - Wigan, Blackburn, Bury, Oldham, Leeds, Southport - from Dominica to England - it is, indeed, a voyage in the darkness. The image of 'mysterious' passage to England has stray reverberations of meaning. Travelling and journeys are an effective and exhilarating metaphor in art for imagination and aesthetic experience as well as 'soul-making' or 'self-development'. In *Voyage In The Dark* Jean Rhys has exploited the journey metaphor in all its richness. Literary critics have also emphasized specifically its value as an image for expressing exploration into the realms of the unconscious and the unknown. Travel is also a metaphor for the passage from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to
experience, from sanity to madness and from life to death. The metaphor of voyage or journey also expresses the process of the discovery of the ‘self’ and of love and sexuality. Through the metaphor of journey Rhys explores the nature of Anna’s self, emphasizing her multiple, ever-changing selves which inhabit her mind. It is through the travel metaphor and dream sequences that Jean Rhys stresses the importance of individuality as something to be desired and created through imaginative and creative living and artistry. Thus, the voyage metaphor takes on further connotations as an image for an existential longing to raise oneself above the given situation. According to existentialist thinkers, genuine individuality is established through creative acts of the imagination and the will. Anna achieves individual dignity by undertaking a voyage in the dark and by imaginative act of remembering the past Caribbean memories.

Homelessness or the loss of family home, a key issue in modern fiction, is Jean Rhys’s primary concern in all her novels. The loss of mother country creates serious psychological and emotional complexities, thereby preventing the overall growth of an individual’s personality. Anna Morgan is uprooted from her Caribbean surroundings at a very tender age of sixteen and the consequences of her disorientation are too complex and grave. She is not mentally prepared to accept England as her new home nor is she prepared to forget the emotional significance of her past spent on the Caribbean island. Anna’s dislocation largely prevents the growth of her individuality by creating serious identity crisis which she undergoes in an alien country. Anna’s movement from West Indies to England is a voyage in the cold, dark, and grey country; but it is also a movement backwards as
it makes Anna conscious of her vital links with the Caribbean birth place, which once made her happy. Writing about the inevitably sad fate of Rhys's homeless, alienated women, V.S. Naipaul comments:

The Jean Rhys heroine of the first four books is a woman of mystery, inexplicably bohemian, in the toughest sense of the word, appearing to come from no society, having roots in no society, having memories only of places, a woman who has "lost the way to England" and is adrift in the metropolis.²

Anna Morgan is one of Rhys's most alienated, sad, and bohemian heroines whose roots are not struck in just one soil. She grows fatherless, her real West Indian mother dies, and she is emotionally threatened by her English step-mother Hester who takes charge of her life. Anna Morgan lives much within her 'self' and in her imagination and consistently remembers her family home -Morgan's Rest -and her childhood friend Francine. As V.S. Naipaul puts it rightly, Rhys's women have vivid memories of the places which they visit and these memories constantly haunt their consciousness, thereby intensifying their quest for home, background, and individuality. A lack of home or permanent physical background leads Anna to preserve her Creole identity in the hostile atmosphere of England. Once Anna becomes conscious of her West Indian roots, her struggle to establish her existence and individuality becomes even more authentic. Anna is sensible enough to understand the existentialist secret that she can establish her individual dignity only by asserting her Creole identity and not by sacrificing it at the altar of her step-mother's English civilization. Anna is frightened by the English society in which she feels a dreadful sense of emotional and physical insecurity. She,
however, succeeds in escaping the agonizing fear of insecurity and uncertainty by doggedly thinking of her birth place. Anna thinks that she is a real West Indian, she always wants to be black, she remembers her mother's family place - Constance Estate - and her father's Morgan's Rest, thinks of her West Indian childhood friend Francine affectionately and vividly remembers the days spent in a school in West Indies. The interior movement in Anna's mind between the Caribbean home land and England is so frequent and her memories of the latter so vivid that present and past seem to operate on the same front. The memories of the past cause nostalgia and the alien and life-denying condition of England affects the motion of her life. Anna's mind oscillates between the two worlds, incapable to reconcile her past with the present, remaining a fish out of water. The memory images of childhood reveal an organic connection of the self with the Caribbean nature that once gave her an identity - the identity which refuses to be crippled in the urban world of London. The interior flash back in Anna's mind also shows her pre-occupation with physical and psychological existence. These memories of the Caribbean island provide Anna with peace, happiness, comfort, and emotional fulfilment. They, moreover, intensify her struggle for individual dignity and recognition in a foreign country.

What led to Jean Rhys's pre-occupation with the precariousness and dangers of identity crisis? It was, perhaps, her experiences as an uprooted, alienated woman of the colonial times and her intellectual responses to the situations in which she was plunged. Rhys' novels depict her own personal
suffering through which she passed at different stages of her bohemian, directionless, vagabond life. Rhys experienced the anguish of being homeless, the suffering of isolation and the agony of being alienated and “her fiction, dealing as it does with those who belong nowhere, between cultures, between histories, describes and existence which is becoming paradigmatic of late twentieth-century life.”3 [xiv] Anna Morgan originally belonged to the Caribbean island, but her transplantation into the European culture has proved to be a devastating restart for her. She is torn between two cultures and is frightened to find that she does not belong to either of them. The West Indian paradise to which she once belonged is lost forever and England is a place which she can never accept as her home. Anna Morgan, however, establishes a possible connection with her Caribbean origin through dream sequences and imagination which are significant aspects of her consciousness. Jean Rhys addresses, in this novel, not just the problem of moneyless, victimized females in European society; Voyage In The Dark is Rhys’s discourse on identity — that of the colonial subject, black and white, and the conflicts experienced over acquired, or imposed, identity. The confusion of identity leads to a split within the self creates an insecure identity and renders an individual incapable of functioning in the “other” home. The nature of identity conflict is shown in Anna’s response to England, to which she comes as an immigrant: “Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was
the dream, but I could never fit them together." [78] The despair over the irreconcilability of identities is, thus, expressed in this statement. The two identities – the Caribbean and the British – would remain fundamentally opposite and different.

Symbolically, in *Voyage In The Dark*, Jean Rhys makes a voyage into the troubled and divided psyche of an individual woman at a very particular historical and social nexus. *Voyage In The Dark* appeared, by no means coincidentally, at the time when the possible existence of something called West Indian literature was first being acknowledged. Kenneth Ramchand’s phrases “alienation within alienation” and “terrified consciousness” introduced in his *The West Indian Novel And Its Background* are widely applied to the predicament of Rhys’s women who are torn between two worlds, finally belonging to neither. V.S. Naipaul was one of the first critics to suggest that all Rhys’s writing should be understood in the light of her colonial/Caribbean origins:

She was outside that tradition of imperial – expatriate writing in which the metropolitan outsider is thrown into relief against an alien background. She was an expatriate, but her journey had been the other way round, from a background of nothing to an organized world with which her heroines could never come to terms.

This journey, this break in a life, is the essential theme of her five novels.

V.S. Naipaul and other Caribbean writers/critics have focused on Rhys’s concerns such as homelessness, alienation, journeying, an absence of home or society or nation, decadence, loss, identity and existence.
Naipaul emphasizes Rhys's honesty and courage rather than her victimhood: he maintains that it was out of her painful, deracinated existence that she had come to write fiction that was so ahead of its time. Naipaul wrote:

Out of her fidelity to her experience, and her purity as a novelist, Jean Rhys thirty or forty years ago identified many of the themes that engage us today: isolation, an absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence, loss. Her achievement is very grand. Her books may serve current causes. What she has written about she has endured, over a long life; and what a stoic thing she makes the act of writing appear.

The theme of loss of nationality, identity, lovers, fathers, mothers, family home and virginity is central to Jean Rhys's fiction. This theme occurs persistently in Rhys's novels as it constituted her own personal experiences of the external world. The theme of loss emerges in her fiction out of her emotional and psychological understanding of her own loss of vital connections with her Caribbean mother-country. Identity crisis, which is a major aspect of Rhys's women's chemistry, is the direct outcome of the loss or absence of some vital ingredient of human life. The presence of a society or community or nationality, the physical existence of family home or background, and the support of parental figures give an individual a sense of being a complete and dignified existent; and, on the other hand, the loss or absence of these vital parts of life creates a psychological void in an individual, finally leading to a mental and emotional crisis and eventual disintegration of personality. Analysing the theme of loss in Rhys' fiction, Deborah Kelly Kloepfer in his article, *Voyage In The Dark: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the mother* comments:

Jean Rhys's fiction operates around an economy of loss—loss of language, loss of homeland, loss of economic and sexual power. It is also a fiction of surrogates, bartering, and exchanges where what women "want"—echoes of Freud's famous query—is never "there" and is instead displaced or represented in some kind of substitute. One of the most interesting novels in this regard is *Voyage In The Dark*, a novel whose very history reflects a series of substitutions and displacements.
Marya Zelli in *Quartet* undergoes deep mental agony and emotional turmoil due to a loss of lover-husband and an absence of 'necessary fixed background' i.e. nationality, Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* suffers the same fate as she loses her mother, and is rejected by her sister and friends and belongs nowhere. Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* suffers the lose of her family estate and finally loses her cool and mental balance, and Anna Morgan in *Voyage In The Dark* is disconnected from her Caribbean island of Dominica, she is plunged into a confrontation with a foreign culture and eventually loses her virginity and ends up in being a tart. Jean Rhys associates England with hypocrisy, immorality and corruption. It's a morally bankrupt country that forces Anna lose her virginity. The issue of loss of virginity is emphasized through an ad: "What is purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa." [50] It can be observed here that Rhys's novels are about women's painful struggle for belonging – for some connection or association which, they think, would provide them with security and emotional fulfilment. Rhys's women have a deep sense of loss which ultimately gives their struggle a vibrant intensity, passion, and authenticity. Rhys's women try desperately to bridge the gap between their nothingness and being by becoming conscious of the loss of their nationality and personal identity. Like most Rhys heroines, Anna lives in exile a solitary life, walking the streets, and occupying shabby hotel bed-rooms, she characterizes the typical Rhys woman. She belongs neither to the private world of Caribbean domesticity inhabited by respectable but confined wives and mothers nor to the public world of masculine power and
business in England. Thus, she embodies a loss of personal identity central to modern social experience.

Jean Rhys's uniqueness as a twentieth century novelist lies in her depiction of young, modern, sensitive women's confrontation with a new, alien culture in which they are abruptly plunged by some inevitable circumstances at home. Their efforts to bridge two cultures are largely unsuccessful because of the inability of their mind to forget the original background to which they are emotionally attached and due to the hostility of the new environment from which they are psychologically distanced. In this respect, Rhys's responsibility as a colonial novelist is vastly increased because "her contribution to literature bridges two traditions, the British and the Caribbean, but she does not rest securely in either, as her work is at its best when it considers those who do not belong and who spit in the face of respectability."8 It is, indeed, true that Rhys's novels assume greater literary significance when they depict the existential struggle of young, sensitive women who do not belong to any nationality and who rebel against the corrupt, amoral and insensitive world of English respectability.

All of Rhys's five novels deal with modern, young women's preoccupation with the problem of identity in the wake of an absence of parental figures. All her works are located around dead mothers, dying mothers, absent mothers, step-mothers; and surrogate mothers; her novels are also preoccupied with abortions and infant deaths. Thus, the women who populate her novels can neither find mothers nor can they be mothers; at every conjuncture, maternal contact is subverted. Marya Zelli of Quartet
has no parents, Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* visits her bedridden dying mother in England, Anna Morgan in *Voyage In The Dark* constantly dreams of her original West Indian mother and her mother’s family home Constance Estate and refuses to be controlled by her English step-mother Hester’s code of behaviour, and Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is totally devastated by the loss of her family estate and parents. Anna Morgan of *Voyage In The Dark* is left in charge of her step-mother Hester after the death of her father. Anna’s loss of her real West Indian mother symbolically suggests the loss of her childhood joys, simple pleasures of life, and innocence. Anna’s movement from Dominica to England demonstrates her voyage from innocence to experience. Anna’s step-mother Hester represents the corrupting influence of the English civilization upon the natural beauty and innocence represented in the character of Anna. The theme of loss of mother-figure corresponds to the loss of child: at the end of the novel Anna secretly undergoes an abortion which metaphorically indicates that the West Indian life and sensibility cannot grow or thrive in the basically corrupt and life-denying atmosphere of England. The memory of her original West Indian mother provides Anna the strength to fight against the English culture that her step-mother Hester wants to impose upon her. Anna’s step mother thinks of imposing her English civilization upon Anna’s Caribbean life style; but Anna strongly denounces her attempts by vigorously asserting her original Caribbean identity. The loss of Anna’s child, seen in a different perspective, suggests Anna’s refusal to carry a child that she conceived from an English seducer. Anna’s abortion, viewed in this perspective, must
be seen as her refusal to support the growth of anything that is even slightly associated with Englishness.

The twentieth century critics such as Elizabeth Abel, R.D. Laing, Carol Hagley, and several others delve into the psyche of Rhys’s detached, alienated women torn between two worlds, two cultures, two homes, two backgrounds, yet belong to neither. Elizabeth Abel adopts a psychological framework to explain the sensitive and aggressive reactions and responses of Rhys’s women who experience the world as a hostile environment and lead lives of physical isolation and psychic alienation, detached from family and friends, unable to establish real contact with others. The particular approach to schizophrenia formulated by R.D. Laing is especially useful in interpreting a varied level of responses of Rhys’s heroines. Laing’s “existential – phenomenological” approach, his attempt to “characterize the nature of a person’s experience of his world and of himself” makes his descriptions of schizophrenia especially appropriate to the analysis of literary characters. Moreover, Laing’s argument that schizophrenia is a legitimate and not uncommon response of a sensitive individual to certain interpersonal interactions provides a clue to understanding Rhys’s protagonists and, thus, forms the nucleus of Rhys’s fiction. Laing’s account of the dynamics of schizophrenia, thus, provides a helpful insight into certain enigmatic features of Rhys’s fiction.

In his first book, The Divided Self [1960], Laing describes the fundamental split that develops in the individual lacking ontological security, the sense that his or her existence or identity is acceptable to
others. Anna Morgan in *Voyage In The Dark* conjures up imaginary doubts and fears in her mind that Francine, her childhood Caribbean friend, dislikes her. Fearful of her rejection and denied the basic security, Anna takes refuge in dreams and memories and desires to protect the 'real' self from attacks on its identity. This division between a real internal self and a false external one widens as the real self becomes increasingly associated with the mind and the false self with the body. Anna is physically transplanted into England, but she emotionally and psychologically remains intact and deeply rooted into the Caribbean soil. Because Anna's real 'self' attempts to remain embodied in order to escape the threats to its identity, it increasingly grows disassociated from concrete things. In *Voyage In The Dark* Rhys suggests that Anna suffers from a sense of internal division between a responsive inner self and a mechanical external self. Anna's real self is the product of her happy childhood in the Caribbean Zeitgeist, but a split is wrought upon her by the forced participation in the mechanical movement of life in England. Because of this split between the true self and the world, Anna experiences the physical world as flat, empty, and meaningless. Anna's mind is profoundly fixed in the Caribbean memories and experiences a strange stability, but her body wanders aimlessly in the new setting. The conflict between Anna's two halves and the gradual loss of her authentic, original self are mirrored in the novel's narrative technique. The first two pages of the novel contrast Anna's recollection of her Caribbean home with her impression of England. On her arrival in England, she observes that her new environment has made difference not only to the way of her physical existence, but also to the way of peaceful
life. Anna’s opening comment on her dislocation, “it was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again,” [07] sufficiently reveals the split between Anna’s two lives. In brief, it is the relationship between Anna’s exactly two opposite and conflicting selves that constitutes the psychological interest of her *Voyage In The Dark*.

A sense of uncertainty, or even insecurity, and a division of the ‘self’ into ‘inner self’ and ‘external self’ are the consequences of physical detachment and psychological alienation. In Rhys’s novels, women live in a society or they are part of a community; but they are indifferent to the demands of their society. Rhys’s women are so resolutely preoccupied with their own identity crisis that they hardly participate in the social life, thereby preventing the natural growth of interpersonal communication. V.S. Naipaul’s suggestion that there is an absence of society or community in Rhys’s novels is untrue: in all her novels one finds the consistent presence of the ‘other’ who forms human society; it is, on the contrary, the non-availability of Rhys’s women to their society that leads to their suffering and existential anguish. The themes of isolation, dependence, loss, and the sense of things falling apart, as suggested by V.S. Naipaul, no doubt constitute the chief interests of Rhys’s fiction. It is, however, the disinterestedness of an individual to his society and not ‘an absence of society’ that creates the problems of isolation in Rhys’s all five novels. Rhys’s women are unwilling to participate in the society available to them, fearing that it would blight their individuality - the fear that opens up the chasm of alienation characterized by an increasing withdrawal into the
'inner self.' Rhys's women at times participate in the life of business transaction; but theirs is only a partial participation as they never enjoy the spirit, excitement, and ferment of social life. It is, however, the consciousness of the blessed responsibility of asserting individuality and dignity that largely prevents their entry into the world of the 'other' who is essentially 'unreal.'

*Voyage In The Dark* is an account of Anna's alienated 'self' struggling for human dignity and individual identity in an apparently alien and disoriented social background. The novel depicts Anna's struggle to re-establish her private life in a basically capitalist city of the Stock Exchange, i.e. London - the city that is in sharp contrast to her Caribbean life of simplicity and honesty. The economic values of the city of London isolate Anna physically and prevent her mobility in society. After her uprootedness and the consequent transplantation into a foreign social and cultural setting of England, Anna feels a huge loss of her native Caribbean identity and a sense of alienation engulfs her consciousness. The island of Dominica once represented for Anna a place of life, its excitements, and promises; but the country of her step-mother seemingly has the magical charms to corrupt, not only her existence but her value system as well. The West Indian island represents for Anna a rhythm and harmony of life where she feels attuned to her natural impulse rather than being crippled in a mechanical, dull, life-denying, and suffocating darkness of cold England. Anna's loss of Caribbean home, family, parents, friends, and nationality hurls her into an abyss of physical isolation, which gradually culminates into psychological alienation, or to speak in Kenneth Ramchand's
phraseology, 'alienation within alienation.' Anna struggles with determination to escape the despair and fear of alienation by establishing a personal rapport with young men; but "it is her potential for a sense of personal isolation which lies at the root of her difficulties with developing positive human relationships." Paula Le Gallez's emphasis upon Anna's sense of her personal isolation as the root cause of her suffering in a new society of England is quite appropriate and, hence, justified. Anna's sense of isolation is the result of her dislocation from the Caribbean island and of her abortive and unsuccessful relationships with English step-mother Hester and several hotel owners who ask her to vacate their rooms, for they don't want tarts in their houses and hotels. Anna's sense of her 'alienated self' is reflected in her recurring withdrawal into the recesses of her own imagination. The intensity of Anna's alienation from other people is the proof of the exceptional sensitivity of her mind which marks her out as different from her society and provides her existential struggle in every respect a totally individual flavour.

Alienation, isolation, and exile in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern man the world over. Instead of indicating any exit route from the state of alienation, existentialists make it the permanent foundation of human life. Existentialist thinkers point out how the human communion breaks off and man is condemned to an empty solitude. In this 'place of disaffection,' to use T.S. Eliot's phrase, the only available dispensation seems to be that of loneliness and exile, and it is the clear-headed acceptance of this icy, monotonous alienation as the inescapable reality of human existence that constitutes the specific modern sensibility
which many existentialist thinkers call 'the existentialist experience.' Rhys's heroines, some critics comment, lead lives of complete emptiness and uncertainty, a life of total illusion and solitude spent fruitlessly in a lighthouse absolutely separated from all humanity. Anna in *Voyage In The Dark* is hurled in the dark world of nothingness by her step-mother Hester and is trapped in the world of anguish and contradictions. She looks for her own identity and attempts at locating her own 'self'. Her existence is threatened by foreign forces and the simple process of life becomes dangerously complex as the risk of security grows.

One unique feature of Rhys's novels is the expression of the themes of isolation and alienation through the depiction of solitary hotel bed-rooms occupied by her protagonists. The loss of family home leads them to seek protection in cheap and shabby rooms in bleak and gloomy hotels. Jean Rhys is one of the modern writers who are seriously obsessed with the predicament of young, modern women and, therefore, she concentrates on the problem of identity confronted by women unaided, without protection, and guidance. It is the loss of family, place and nationality that forces them to take refuge in filthy hotel rooms which intensify their sense of alienation.

Virginia Woolf, in the essay on 'Women and fiction,' published in 1929, writes about women whose lives seem set apart, limited, and ultimately unresponsive to the rhythms and harmony of life. She concludes her essay by looking forward to "that fabulous age when women will have what has so long been denied to them – leisure, and money, and a room to
Rhys's women certainly do not have leisure and money; but they have a room to themselves, a series of hotel rooms; but rather than giving them security and privacy, the rooms symbolise the unpleasant, isolated and unprotected life of their occupants. In *Voyage In The Dark*, Anna Morgan's small room on a shabby street of cold England fills her with a sense of imprisonment. The following lines suggest the lifelessness of a living human being:

It was early when I got back, not twelve o'clock. I had a little room on the second floor. Ten-and-six a week I paid for it.

I undressed and got into bed, but I couldn't get warm. The room had a cold, close smell. It was like being in a small, dark box. [21]

The description of coldness in the above passage does not refer just to the temperature of Anna's bed-room; but it is the symbolic presentation of her loss of the warmth of human contact. The isolation of her rooms forces Anna to take up the responsibility of a voyage into her consciousness. Anna's hotel rooms terrify her consciousness and she feels "more alone than anybody had ever been in the world before." [61] It is by revealing this business about rooms that Rhys suggests her heroines' psychological rooms and the rooms of society and attempts to explore the themes of isolation, illusion, alienation, and consciousness. As a central and recurring image, the rooms represent Anna's psychological framework where her consciousness functions on different levels. Through the seemingly endless gallery of rooms passing through her mind, Rhys highlights Anna's wandering, isolation, and her homelessness. The aimless movement of Anna from one hotel to another reflects the instability and
uncertainty of mind and the extent to which her autonomy of spirit and existence has been crippled by the established norms which society forms and celebrates. Valentine Cunningham in *British Writers of the Thirties* observes that "in Jean Rhys’ stories and novels rooms won’t even turn into escape rooms. Her lost girls, commanded like their author [for those stories are hauntingly close to Jean Rhys’ own life story] by financial need and the craving for love and affection, shunt from one claustrophobically lonely and oppressive room to another. Their’s is a Prufrockian world, ‘of restless nights in one-night cheap-hotels’ a sequence of narrowing coffin like cells.”

Rhys’s heroines, it must be noted cautiously, do not think of their existence in shabby rooms as a means of escape from the outside world of physical realities; nor do they want it; but the solitariness of their rooms provides them an opportunity to meet their own ‘inner self.’ It is only in the solitary hotel rooms that Rhys’s women confront their own ‘self,’ it is in the moments of peace and isolation that they have their first appointment with their own selves. It is after becoming conscious of their state of imprisonment and isolation that they dream of coming out of the rooms and launch their lives towards ‘self-liberation’ and freedom of the body.

For Anna, the room is not only, “a place where you hide from the wolves outside,” but a means through which she seeks to intensify her confrontation with the social system by becoming aware of what she is and what others think she is. Rhys creates psychological conflict between Anna’s desire to protect her inner self and expectations of society by describing Anna’s constant movement from one hotel to another. The
isolation of bed-rooms initiates the inner struggle in Anna for identity and liberation. It is the unpleasant and wretched atmosphere of dirty bed-rooms that create in Anna a curiosity and anxiety to recognize the outside world. Anna desires to spend most of her time outside the shabby and drab atmosphere of her rooms- the desire which metaphorically opens up her inner door to the life of human society.

Anna succeeds in liberating herself from the isolation of her solitary hotel rooms; but she is soon disappointed in the external world which is as monotonous as her miserable existence within the four walls of her rooms. For Anna, life within the walls and outside them is exactly the same - without a slight difference. The following passage indicates not only the monotony of Anna's physical existence, but also the fact that life offers no change to Anna's grieved and fractured 'self.' Anna grumbles:

> Everything was always so exactly alike - that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike.[154]

This passage makes an appropriate comment on the isolation, monotony, and lifelessness of Anna's existence in England - a place far away from the excitement and zest of life that Anna experienced on the Caribbean island of Dominica. The passage also suggests Anna's certainty about the absurdity of her existence. In her fiction, Jean Rhys depicts the existential anguish and despair of young women torn between two worlds by employing not only "the mise en scène of the continent, but also the European Zeitgeist - its new ideas in psychology, its aesthetic implication of certain philosophical ideas, and most of all, its between -the- wars
appreciation of the plight of the individual, the isolation of Existentialism.\textsuperscript{14} Elgin W. Mellown's understanding of the two major themes in Rhys's fiction—the plight of the individual and the isolation of existence—deserves to be appreciated because these two themes emerge over and over again in Rhys's novels, and they form the very essence of her heroines' existential quest. For existentialists, human alienation and isolation are not a historical phenomenon; but a metaphysical fate. Rhys's heroines' condition of alienation has neither beginning nor end. It is a primordial, indestructible feature of their existence. Rhys's free and conscious women are irreconcilably estranged from the world and try to interject meaning, value, and usefulness into it. This does not, however, efface its alien and absurd nature. The existentialists believe that the sources of alienation are inextinguishable and wisdom lies in trying to overcome it in ways most suitable to the individual involved—there lies his glory.

The chief value of alienation is that it gives a sense of identity to the individual and creates in him the therapy of self-consciousness and self-analysis. Consciousness is the faculty of an alert and aware mind that facilitates the process of transcendence. The search for identity is probably the most characteristic obsession in twentieth century literature. The searcher is aware of his lack or loss of affinity with his society, place, and time. He is alienated in his own society. In such an alien and hostile condition of life, self-consciousness and self-affirmation become the essential existential pre-requisites of the individual. Anna Morgan's frequent act of looking back into the Caribbean past is not altogether
useless; it is rather a creative act of ensuring the movement forward. The more Anna looks back nostalgically, the more is her intensity to free herself from the pathetic condition of her life. The predicament of psychological alienation creates in Anna a profound longing for self-liberation and participation in the external world. The past, rather than providing solace and comfort to man, becomes a burden. Anna Morgan in *Voyage In The Dark*, however, finds the past very dear to her heart for it goes into the making of her emotional life and mental make up; Anna is at the same time determined to escape into the present because it offers her a chance to prove her own potentiality and the futility of the others. Anna’s interest in the present symbolically indicates her willingness to accept the reality of external forces and the challenges that they pose. The following lines, written on a wall-picture in Anna’s room, sum up Rhys’s heroines’ attitude towards time. The psychic awareness of the present initiates in Anna a desire for transcending her given situation.

The past is dear,
The future clear,
And, best of all, the present. [127]

For Anna Morgan, as for Sartre, temporality is evidently an organized structure. The three so-called ‘elements’ of time—past, present, and future are not a division or collection of eternal time; but rather the structured moments of an original synthesis. The originality of Rhys’s women as solid, independent individuals lies in their psychic ability to project themselves into the womb of ‘clear future’ by boldly accepting the challenges and threats of the present without ignoring the nightmare sleep of the past. Anna Morgan’s attempts to attach herself to some individuals
show her desperate longing for self-liberation from the horrible and traumatic world of the past memories. For Anna, her availability to the present is her presence to being. The being which appears to Presence is a being in the Present. It is a revelation of being. It is only by being available to the Present that one can hope to achieve one’s ‘self’ or ‘being’.

In *Voyage In The Dark* Anna achieves authenticity and dignity by her conscious decision to join the external world and by consciously refusing to submit to its forces. Authenticity is not something one is born with or possesses automatically; one earns it by making conscious choices, by leading a life of commitments. Anna creates her individuality by way of sharpening her focus on external world – an act that provides her an insight into the affairs of the physical world and into her own situation. Rhys’s women are forced into an agonizing exercise of maintaining a balance between personal responsibility and social pressures – a point which is crucial to all Rhys’s texts. Nearly every character in Rhys’s novel is balanced on this double-edged situation that life inevitably offers. Anna discovers her ‘true self’ by way of establishing her relationship with the external world – the relationship which is largely characterised by conflicts and hostility. Rhys seems to suggest that it is only through conflict, and not compromise, that one can hope to maintain one’s dignity and individuality and achieve self-liberation. It is only after confronting external forces that an individual can make a genuinely committed decision about his relationship with himself and to the universe. Anna’s abortion at the end of the novel is a metaphorical representation of all her abortive
relationship with the characters such as her step-mother Hester, Walter Jeffries, Francine, Vincent Jeffries, and several land ladies.

Anna Morgan is caught up in the social machinery of hostility, money, sex, power, and respectability. She is brought to England in order to be plunged into the complex and mysterious process of civilization. Hester wants to transform a negro into a lady; but Anna refuses to accept the English definitions of life that her step-mother Hester wants to thrust upon her. Hester rejects Anna as a nuisance and a burden and makes a pompous, queenly speech about having done more than her duty. Anna is disillusioned by both Hester and Uncle Bo who fight for an escape from the responsibility of Anna's support and make silly excuses and accusations: Uncle Bo accuses Hester of robbing Anna of her inheritance from her father and Hester calls Uncle Bo "a gentleman! With illegitimate children wandering about all over the place called by his name ....." [54] Hester further speaks:

"I'm not going to argue with you," she said; "My conscience is quite clear. I always did my best for you and I never got any thanks for it. I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and not like a negro ... That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a negro you talked - and still do ....." [55]

Anna outrageously refuses to follow her English step-mother's pattern of life, her code of behaviour. Hester's attempt to convert a West Indian negro into an English lady is an assault on Anna's Caribbean identity. Anna's disillusionment with the English way of life is revealed in her speeches which express her disobedience, contempt, and disregard for it. Anna wishes she had never come over to England and calls London as
loathsome, vile, and stinking hole. Anna derives great pride in associating herself with the West Indian way of life and claims that she is a real West Indian. It is by way of associating herself with home island of Dominica that Anna tries to liberate her ‘self’ from the devastating impact of Englishness. Anna achieves self-liberation while living in England itself, by way of looking back into the past- a kind of emotional reaction that characterises the existential struggle of all Rhys’s heroines. Anna rejects Hester’s concept of a ‘lady’ and, thus, preserves her own Creole identity. This sense of self-preservation and survival opens up the promising world of freedom. The mark of freedom, according to Sartre, is the individual’s “conscious refusal to submit to any externally imposed condition of life. The authentic person will pass from total negation to self-affirmation in action, from nay-saying to yea-saying. Individuals forge genuine selves by bucking against the “practico-inert” around them and surpassing their given situation through involvement in a characteristic venture—a cause, a future.”* Anna achieves liberation and authenticity by asserting her individuality and by boldly refusing the English respectability imposed upon her by Hester.

The existentialists have frequently used the problem of identity as one of the crucial issues man faces. Sartre often wonders how human beings define themselves and points out that they have difficult times defining themselves within a vacuum. The problem of identity or survival begins for Rhys’s women from within the family. Anna’s English stepmother Hester proves to be a major threat to her Caribbean sensibility. Anna’s consciousness is severely troubled by demands placed upon her by
Hester's colonial culture. Thomas F. Staley describes Hester as "a self-righteous moral villain" whose treatment of Anna tears her away from a culture she knew, understood, and loved. If Hester is the villain or representative of the colonial culture, Anna Morgan is, according to Evelyn Hawthorne Vanouse, "colonial history's tragic victim." Hester wants to break all her ties with Anna, and uncle Bo writes to Hester: "You know as well as I do that the responsibility for Anna's support is yours and I won't tolerate for a minute any attempt to shift it on my shoulders." [51] Uncle Bo wants Hester to look after Anna and Hester shifts the responsibility back on Uncle Bo's shoulders. The conflict within the family, false excuses and futile accusations force Anna to seek love, affection, and protection from a stranger, Walter Jeffries, who is old enough to be her father. Elgin W. Mellown has perhaps rightly understood Anna's drifting into Walter's sexual trap. He writes: "Her [Anna's] love affair with Walter Jeffries springs from an adolescent desire to find that warmth and security which she knew in childhood in the game of sexual love with a partner old enough to be her father." 

Rhys's *Voyage In The Dark* is obviously an attempt to provide a realistic picture of the lives of tarts because, as Maudie makes it sufficiently clear, "a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another." [09] Rhys's novel explores the causes of psychic commotion and turmoil that Anna passes through due to her involvement with certain men in England. Anna Morgan is hopelessly and helplessly at sea in her relations with men, she is a woman leading her wretched life in a foreign land, a fish out of water. Anna Morgan is hurled into the so-called
civilized society of English respectability against her will and with the obvious intention of converting her creole nature forcefully into English culture. But the result of this imposed conversion proves to be a disastrous one as Anna, instead of becoming a lady, becomes a tart. The novel is a shocking account of Anna's suffering and anguish caused by two opposite situations- alienation and involvement. The notion of involvement is strongly emphasized by existentialist thinkers such as Heidegger, Jaspers and Marcel. Heidegger, for example, thinks that no man can exist in isolation from other existent. He maintains that it is impossible to construct a private world independently of the external things. The problem of Anna's existential struggle acquires paradoxical dimensions and complexities because she chooses to make her life happy, protected, and meaningful by way of escaping from the condition of alienation into the world of involvement. But her involvement with the external world is unluckily not a happy one, as it multiplies her grief and threatens her identity, finally leading her to a dark and cold world of prostitution and eventual fatal abortion. Rhys shows her uniqueness as a modern twentieth century writer by way of representing the case of an outsider suffering and existential difficulties faced in a masculine social set up - the treatment is bold and at the same time stimulating. Jean Rhys, as Elaine Showalter puts it, deals with the subjects such as sex, adultery, and prostitution with great ease and extraordinary frankness:

The heroines of women's novels in the 1930s are still passive and self-destructive, but in Lehmann's The Weather in the streets [1936], and Jean Rhys' Voyage In The Dark [1939], After Leaving Mr Mackenzie [1937] and Good Morning, Midnight [1939], there is a new frankness about the body and about such topics as adultery, abortion, lesbianism, and prostitution.19
The existentialist belief that the others are essentially different from, opposed to, and in competition with ‘me’ is the foundation of a comprehensive personal identity. Individualism or individual identity is a sense of self-identity and honour based on exclusion from and opposition to others. One of the principal concerns of the existential thought is the defence and expansion of individuality through consciously chosen acts of rebellion against the others’ hostility. The presence of the others creates in Anna a sense of fear, uncertainty, and even death. The others’ life is Anna’s existential problem: it threatens her life and brings in the inescapable fear of death. Anna expresses her fear of death caused by the others in this manner:

I got outside. I was afraid to cross the street and then I was afraid because the slanting houses might fall on me or the pavement rise up and hit me. But most of all I was afraid of the people passing because I was dying; and, just because I was dying, any one of them, any minute, might stop and approach me and knock me down …… [153]

Anna’s first impression of Walter Jeffries and Jones is that of arrogant and rude Englishmen who pick up helpless, lonely women and exploit them sexually. Anna reveals her abomination for strangers, particularly for men, who assume it to be their right to exploit unprotected women. Anna speaks in a sad, grief-stricken voice: “I hated them both. You pick up people and then they are rude to you. This business of picking up people and then they always imagine they can be rude to you.” [11] Maudie, Anna’s friend in England, also confronts the same fate as Anna does. Maudie’s boy friend Vivian Roberts is definitely one of the others who adopt a cautious and defensive attitude in dealing with girls. He is “the
cautious sort" [38] who intends to free himself from Maudie’s world and Maudie “was sure he was breaking it off, but doing it gradually because he
was cautious and he did everything gradually.” [14] Through the Maudie –
Vivian affair, the novelist intends to explore the difficulties and barriers
placed by men in the way of communication. Jean Rhys’s novels
repeatedly suggest that the cautious and careful attitude employed by men
is a major impediment in the way of development of meaningful rapport
between individuals. Maudie is just twenty-eight years old and “all sorts of
things had happened to her.” [09] Her encounter with the external world
has, however, trained her how to tackle it. She speaks with the experience
and confidence of a great sufferer: “You’ve only got to learn how to swank
a bit, then you’re all right.” [09] After her encounter with the external
forces, Anna is struck with a revelation that the other in its very concept is
the untruth. Soren Kierkegaard writes:

> A crowd—not this crowd or that, the crowd not living or the
crowd long deceased, a crowd of humble people or of
superior people, of rich or of poor etc – a crowd in its very
concept is the untruth.²⁰

The others make desperate attempts to crush Anna’s identity: they
label her as ‘the Hottentot,’ [18] repeatedly refer to her loss of virginity,
treat her as ‘a dirty foreigner,’ [119] and call her ‘a tart’, and a “half-potty
bastard.” [124] The humiliating treatment that Anna receives from the
others hurls her into an abyss of meaninglessness and creates in her a sense
of lost identity and uncertainty. Anna fumbles nervously: “When he kisses
me, shivers run up my back. I am hopeless, resigned, utterly happy. Is that
me? I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely,
none. Just words. But something about the darkness of the streets has a meaning." [48] Anna’s voyage to England symbolically indicates her journey to a foreign land undertaken in order to explore the meaning of the darkness of human existence which necessarily involves a confrontation with the others - the untruth. Ontological insecurity, the existentialists argue, is the realization by the individual that he does not know what he is and what the untruth i.e. the other is. As the feeling of insecurity increases, Anna’s relationship with others becomes only a means of survival, not of gratification. This frantic confrontation undertaken by Anna assumes the significance of the search for ‘self.’ After their disillusionment with the outer physical reality, Anna and Maudie are struck with existentialist realizations that “the world is so-and-so and nothing can change it. For ever and for ever turning and nothing, nothing can change it” [36] and the one’s dignity and honour depend solely upon one’s own inner potentiality.

Rhys was not feminist in the conventional or familiar sense, because she had no single attitude to women, but rather a variety of attitudes to individual human beings. Rhys is often described as a consciously non-feminist writer on the basis of the fact that her heroines suffer at the hands of other women characters: Marya Zelli plays ‘a mistress’ because Lois forces her into an unhappy sexual involvement with Heidler, Julia Martin confronts her own sister Norah’s hostility, and Anna in *Voyage In The Dark* leads a very awful existence threatened by her step-mother Hester, several landladies, and friends such as Francine and Ethel Matthews. *Voyage In The Dark* is feminist in a very sophisticated sense: it exposes the destructive effects of the male dominated social arrangements, while
exposing many women to be as sexist and vicious as men. There is no idealization or sentimentalization of the female sex. For example, landladies are portrayed evicting Anna with scorn and contempt and throw Anna out with outrageous accusations rooted into jealousy. Anna’s friend, Ethel, is the hypocrite of hypocrites whose profession is to pose as a professional masseuse, luring men in for a manicure by tantalizing them with the hope of sex. Ethel Matthews in her letter to Laurie writes that Anna is “a very deceiving girl” [142] with “a lot of lies.” [143] It is, in fact, the others who deceive Anna, and especially the men who lie with her. If Anna deceives anybody at all, it is because she is badly deceived and disillusioned by the urban life of England against which her natural and impulsive Caribbean temperament is placed. Anna engages herself with the world and with the other women whom she meets. But her engagement is not a happy one; for complexities and communicational barriers emerge incidentally as her discourse develops. It is Anna’s sense of being a foreigner which lies at the root of her difficulties in developing positive human relationships with women.

The awfully miserable condition of women in England is emphasized in a passage in which Anna profusely condemns most English men for their inhumane treatment of their female counterparts. The English women are beaten, tortured, and sexually abused because “.... Most Englishmen don’t care a damn about women. They can’t make women happy because they don’t really like them. I suppose it’s the climate or something.” [69] Ethel, a Swedish masseuse, shockingly says that she too doesn’t care for men- men who don’t care for their women.
Rhys's women are very strong in their minds: they adopt 'a tit-for-tat' policy because they know that their survival hangs heavily on their own creative potentiality in confronting the opposition and hostility of men. Ethel hates men because "men are devils, aren't they? But of course I don't really care a damn about them. Why should I...?" [94] Walter Jeffries' act of putting some money in Anna's bag indicates his attitude towards love and sex. He defines Anna's life in terms of economic equations, thereby diminishing her value as a human being. Jean Rhys here seems to demonstrate how men form their own unintelligent definitions of women and fix their own traditional price of women according to their conventional masculine standards, reducing women to the level of a commodity. Men don't give women what they are worthy of - they are deprived of identity, protection, and human dignity. They give women what they think they are used to - humiliation, torture, and exploitation. When Walter Jeffries proudly flaunts money, Anna proves her dignity as a proud human being by burning his hand with the end of her cigarette. This is the act of preserving one's own self-respect and individuality. Anna also rebukes Vincent Jeffries, Walter's cousin, for playing a mediator and for placing her against Walter. The act of burning Walter's hand reflects Anna's ability to live within her self and outside with pride and dignity. Rhys's heroines are often described as 'passive victims' which is, indeed, an inadequate a description for her heroines' condition. Marya Zelli in Quartet hits Heidler, Julia Martin slaps Mackenzie publicly and returns his cheque of weekly allowance, Anna stubs her cigarette on Walter's hand, and in Wide Sargasso Sea Antoinette
bites her husband and threatens him with a broken rum bottle. These are definitely not the acts of passive sufferers but the impulsive reactions of courageous human beings who want to assert their right for that precious shred of dignity and humanity. What Rhys’s heroines learn from their interaction with the others, especially from their relations with men, is not to be afraid of being alone in the hostile atmosphere. Thus, women are seen as achieving balance, self-sufficiency and moral strength which men who exploit them seem deficient in. Rhys’s heroines’ anger, frustration, disillusionment, and eventual rebellious nature are reflected in their bold and emotionally charged reactions against hypocrisy and injustice. To appreciate Rhys’s novels is to acknowledge the intensity of Rhys’s heroines’ longing for survival and dignity.

Rhys’s novels explore the consciousness of women who live between absorption in an inner world of imagination, romantic fantasy, and dreams and awareness of their economic dependence on their sensuous charms and sexuality. The irresistible recesses of Caribbean memories reveal an organic connection of Anna’s self with nature that once gave her existence a proud identity and vigorous solidity – which are now fractured in a world regulated by economic value systems. The Marxist ideal of money and its spell over power, a major theme in After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, also re-emerges in Voyage In The Dark even more forcefully. After her transplantation into the city of Stock Exchange, Anna is dragged into the unpleasant and shabby world of prostitution as a means of economic protection. Rhys points out that money rules supreme in English society, and therefore, it is a cold inhumane society. In white society,
money spells power and people who have no money are invisible and powerless. In England, Anna's sense of economic insecurity engulfs her consciousness and persistently haunts her feminine sensitivity. Anna is constantly reminded of her poverty and economic position by the masculine society of England that holds money in high esteem. Walter Jeffries pretends to be kind to Anna; but his letter containing five five-pound notes is, in fact, an attempt to make Anna aware of her dependence on men for money. Anna thinks, "I'm poor and my clothes are cheap and perhaps it will always be like this. And that's all right too." [22] The lack of economic security leads to a perpetual fear, of some impending, approaching danger or uncertainty. Anna is also tormented by the fear of darkness that her uncertain future holds for her. Her suspicion of the imminent dangers of life grows wild and she mutters: "The ones without any money, the ones with beastly lives. Perhaps I'm going to be one of the one's with beastly lives." [220] Anna understands the value of money for man, especially for unprotected and isolated women, and wishes that "money ought to be everybody's. It ought to be live water. You can tell that because you get accustomed to it so quickly." [23] It is money alone that can make man feel safe and confident, at least, if not happy. The relation between money and confidence is undisputable, as Anna shows it. Anna says:

"Will you lay a fire in my room, please?" I said. My voice sounded round and full instead of small and thin.
"That's because of the money," I thought. [23]

Anna desires to construct her own world of economic independence, which she does by selling her desires and sexual appetite to men who
provide her money for sexual favours. Ironically, she again depends on the same men for money. Jean Rhys here points out how men diminish the emotional significance of the blessed act of sex by paying for it. One who pays for the blessed moments of love and sex is really a fool, making a show of his wealth. Men in Rhys’s novels are rich, wealthy, and ageing who proudly flaunt money at young women whom they sexually exploit and treat as mere objects of sexual gratification. Maudie’s boyfriend Vivian is “one of these stock exchange blokes” and “the cautious sort” [38] who shamelessly says that “a girl’s clothes cost more than the girl inside them?” [39] Vivian Roberts breaks off his relationship with Maudie gradually which makes her think that “men who have money and men who haven’t money are perfectly different.” [14] Vivian is obviously the representative of the masculine brutality that dehumanizes the whole act of living by comparing real human being with her clothes.

A serious dispute erupts between Anna’s step-mother Hester and her Uncle Bo over money matters, each trying to shift the responsibility of Anna’s support on the other’s shoulders. Uncle Bo outrageously accuses Hester of cheating Anna of her father’s money and Hester’s explanation is that she had to pay Anna’s father’s debts. Hester’s charge against Uncle Bo is that he “always pretended to be fond of” Anna “but when it comes to parting with any money he’s so stingy that rather than do it he makes up all these outrageous lies.” [55] Both Hester and Uncle Bo are clever enough to avoid their share of responsibility and they make clever excuses, leaving Anna as unprotected, penniless, and lonely as before. They, however,
promise to help Anna in whatever way they can. The promise, of course, excludes any financial assistance. Hester says:

“... a question of money, please remember that I’ve already done far more than I can afford.” [56]

As Hester and Uncle Bo unscrupulously shirk their responsibility of Anna’s care, Anna, as a matter of survival, is inescapably forced to accept Walter Jeffries’ machoistic demand for sex. A careful reading of Rhys’s fiction reveals that she has a very frank and open attitude towards sex and morality, and truly, she is perhaps one of the first women writers to express an unabashed, direct acceptance of women’s passion for sexual love. Men in Rhys’s novels, as a general rule, do not fall in love; and when they do so, they unscrupulously pay for it, not knowing exactly the value of their precious gain. Vincent wants to help Anna by providing her some money for immediate expenses and Anna rebelliously rejects it and shouts, “Hell to your beloved Vincent. Tell him to keep his bloody help. I don’t want it.” [84] When Walter Jeffries tries to give Anna some money as a payment for sexual favours, Anna burns his hand with the end of a blazing cigarette. The act of giving money explicitly suggests how the masculine world takes for granted the females as a commodity rather than a graceful, dignified human being. The act of paying devalues the emotional significance of the blissful moments of love and sex, and it obviously reduces the dignity of man-woman relationship to the dehumanized level of commerciality. Money has, in fact, been invented to keep man intact and to promote the mobility of relations among human beings. Money has, in contrast, proved instrumental in erecting barriers in the way of meaningful dialogue...
between two individuals; and the problem becomes even more intense if the transaction involves a woman as a seller and a man as a buyer. In *Voyage In The Dark* the problem of selling and buying "body" or "desires" becomes complex and intricate as it enters the vortex of psychological and emotional turmoil experienced amidst racial complexities and identity crisis. Anna's action is related to the collective sub-conscious of feminine racial memories of which she is the part as an individual unit.

The common readers of Rhys might believe that her heroines' personal identity is determined by their economic dependence upon men—which is, indeed, a harsh reality in the masculine frame work. Rhys's women, however, do not "identity themselves as the owners of plantations in Virginia, or as the mistresses of the Squire's household, positions valued by a money-minded society no matter how they may have been gained. Rather these women find their identity and a truth for themselves by flaunting their disdain for the money upon which society is based."21 On a plain, materialistic level, it can be said that money and gifts represent the man who gives them. Anna's proud rejection of Walter's money symbolically suggests her rejection of the masculine society and the racist British society which Walter's money represents. Anna does not accept Walter's money because he gives it as payment like a client; not as a token of love and affection like a true lover. Anna is devastatingly shocked by Walter's act of flaunting money at her and, therefore, she feels an urgent need to preserve her feminine honour and individual dignity. Anna's act of burning Walter's hand with the end of a blazing cigarette is the form of a
sensitive woman's protest against the masculine assault on womanhood. It is a dignified attempt at self-assertion and self-preservation.

Rhys's heroines are, indeed, involved in the process of becoming, that is, in the act of refashioning themselves and reframing their universe, out of chaos and disorder; and they do this by way of self-assertion and self-involvement. Anna in *Voyage In The Dark* courageously accepts the existential challenges of a foreign, racial, materialistic, masculine and sexist society of England and asserts her individuality in a new brave way. Anna is just nineteen years old and she knows it well that "nineteen is a great age." [35] Anna is so passionately engaged in the act of living that she, in spite of suffering, never thinks of death or suicide. Death puts an end to all possibilities and promises of life where as its unnatural agent, suicide, is a way of escaping from moral responsibilities of existence. Anna is determined not to face death; but to confront the risk involved in the act of living. Anna's existentialist commitments are revealed in her potentiality to affirm her identity amidst dark and chaotic conditions of being. Anna's voyage in the cold darkness of England is the symbolic representation of her quest for spiritual life; it's a search for the essential meaning and essence of life. Even in the darkness of grey England she is groping for the essence of life. England is a new world in which Anna is hurled forcibly; but she proves her strength as a subjective human being by way of rejecting society and then getting involved in the creative activity of making her own world. Anna receives strength and intensity for struggle from her self-assurances made in moments of crisis. She assures herself: "I'm nineteen and I've got to go on living and living and living." [93] Anna
shows overwhelming passion for life, even when it turns black and offers no prospects of a better condition.

The life of intense emotional suffering and mental agony spiritually purifies Anna and she tells herself: "Keep hope alive and you can do anything, and that's the way the world goes round, that's the way they keep the world rolling. So much hope for each person." [112] Anna's confident affirmation of her potentiality that "there was nothing I couldn't do, nothing I couldn't become" [134] shows her desire to surpass all obstacles in the way of self-preservation, and her passion for participation in the creative process of Becoming. Anna is proudly confident of her survival mechanism and she knows well that she can become what she desires to become. She feels confident and relaxed, and has the courage and necessary existential stamina to achieve the 'essence' of existence. Anna is self-assertive, proud of her Caribbean origin, irresistibly fearless, passionately sensitive, and violently rebellious – the existentialist qualities that help her achieve her humanity and individuality. When she feels an assault on her honour and dignity, she pulls herself together and assures herself of some protection. She confidently convinces herself: "I'm quite all right; I'm quite all right of course, everything will be all right. I've only got to pull myself together and make a plan." [121]

_Voyage In The Dark_ concludes with Anna's rebellious, yet conscious and free, choice of aborting the baby conceived from Walter Jeffries. The novel, however, does not depict the end of Anna's suffering and sexual exploitation. Anna's physician, rather ironically, comments that
she'll be all right and "ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt." [160]The physician's comment does not signify a positive or constructive attitude toward the continuance of human existence; but he rather unsavourily represents the masculine society's unscrupulous desire for women's economic, psychological, and sexual exploitation. Rhys's heroines suffer deep mental agony and emotional commotion; but they finally bounce back to life and its infinite promises. Rhys's heroines suffer great losses and defeats; but they, as Anna's physician remarks, do start all over again with greater intensity, passion, and of course, hope. The phase of suffering, in this sense, is the process of awareness of the physical world and of the formation of consciousness.

The act of abortion is Anna's conscious, free choice – it is the act of asserting Caribbean identity and liberating her inner 'self' from the cultural bondage of England. It also shows her contempt for and disgust with the sexist English society that cheapens sex and love, reducing the nobler acts to the dehumanized level of commerciality. Anna's condemnation of the English society is not negative; but it is creative and liberating as it frees her 'soul' from the sickening existence of the others. The choice of dropping the babe is her determined, conscious, and undaunted refusal to support the growth of anything that is even mildly associated with Englishness – the act symbolically suggests the triumph of Anna's Caribbean vitality over the brooding darkness of cold England. Critics of Jean Rhys often misinterpret her women as 'passive victims' and sufferers. Anna's act of losing herself in the recesses of Caribbean memories, burning the hand of Walter with the end of a burning cigarette, and the final brave
act of dropping the baby are definitely not the decisions of a passive victim; but are obviously the acts of assertion of her existential commitments. It is through these passionate, consciously and conscientiously chosen acts of free-will that Anna Morgan earns her individual subjective truth. In this context, *Voyage In The Dark* "constitutes one of Rhys' most passionate artistic achievements" as it shows Anna’s downward path to the wisdom of personal, subjective truth.

*****
References:


5. V.S., Naipaul, p.15.

6. V.S., Naipaul, p.31.


***