THE LITERARY VOYAGE OF JEAN RHYS: CHARACTERISTICS IN MODERNIST WOMEN'S LITERATURE AND ITS REVIVAL IN CONTEMPORARY NOVELS

by

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This project aims to uncover how the modernist female literary imagination persists in contemporary novels today. This will be exemplified through using *Voyage in the Dark* by Jean Rhys as a primary reference and comparator text. Using findings drawn from *Voyage in the Dark,* this project compares Rhys's novel to contemporary novels *Conversations With Friends* by Sally Rooney and *The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimear McBride. These similarities come in thematic forms of women's autonomy, which extend to body and identity. I explain that the structural and thematic elements found in modernist women's literature reflect the negation of women's autonomy over their identities and bodies in exchange for societal survival and how those characteristics recur in women's contemporary novels. Investigations of similar aspects that represent Rhys's modernist influence include forms of deviances in prose and individualism in characters. I argue that despite the modernist and contemporary period being so far removed from each other, women's novels in British and Irish society reflect the negation of women's autonomy over their identities and bodies in exchange for societal survival.

My argument engages the emerging theory of 'metamodernism' and how this analytical frame helps us understand experimentalism in contemporary literature. Specifically, metamodernism refers to how modernism influences the exploration of ambiguity, creative

paradox, and disillusionment in contemporary novels. Through this line of influence and critical thought, I thus argue that a female literary perspective persists from the modernist era that exemplifies how patriarchal structures dictate women's self-identity and reflects on the inescapability of gender-based oppression. This phenomenon is tracked through formal distinctions seen in both the modernist and the contemporary texts I examine. My analysis compares the themes of a woman's arc of independence and individuality in the 19th century versus the 21st in order to reveal how women grapple with their lack of autonomy in identity and body in literature across these time periods.

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Introduction

When looking back at the modernist literary period, author Jean Rhys tends to get lost in the noise of the more popular writers of the time. Unlike Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, her pulse on the modern literary era is subdued, and one might find her novels in the back of a second-hand bookstore, sandwiched in between other forgotten authors. In a way, her life mirrors her writing; fragmented, brutally honest, and difficult at times to trace. But much like her unconventional life, her vision and influence reappear in modern day more frequently with the new age of contemporary novels which beckon an expand creative paradox, ambiguity and disillusionment. In recent years, scholars have characterized these exploratory elements of literature into a genre that is recurring more frequently in the age of contemporary novels, called metamodernism.

Rhys's novelization of her life shows how survival under patriarchy means the negation of oneself. She emphasizes that the tragic female narrative in modernist literature is a reflection of the patriarchal structures that dictate women's self-identity, with the inescapability of gender-based oppression. Due to the Western ideology of the lack of women's autonomy with social identity these characterizations continue into British and Irish contemporary novels, such as *Conversations with Friends* by Sally Rooney and *The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimair McBride. These novels exemplify many traits which I argue qualifies them to be associated with the metamodernism genre, and their themes and characteristics contribute to the progression of British and Irish women's literature.

Rhys's Background and Influences

The name Jean Rhys is a story itself, a fiction conceptualized to represent herself to the public. Born Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams, she grew up as a self-proclaimed outsider, curious

of the world around her. As a child of a busy father and a disinterested mother, Rhys's backyard was the island of Dominica, where she absorbed every aspect of culture and conversation that her hometown of Roseau had to offer. It was in the village streets that Rhys, affectionately nicknamed 'Gwennie' by her father, became acutely aware of what was expected of her; to be shipped off and out of her mother's hands as soon as possible, to a quiet, married life.

Yet through her adolescent years, Rhys became disillusioned with her mother's rigid parenting as it was clear to her that Mrs. Rees Williams preferred her sons over daughters. Mrs. Williams coddled the boys while whipping and beating her daughter for small infractions. Biographer Miranda Seymour's archival work reveals that Rhys documented in a recovered journal that "[My mother and my maid] couldn't bear the sight of me."[1] (Seymour, 22.) This disdain for maternal figures would carry on into *Voyage in the Dark,* as protagonist and narrator Anna Morgan chronicles the soured relationship with her stepmother. Whether Minna Williams purposefully shunned her fifth child or the imaginative child created a disconnect within her mind, Rhys was taught to fear the world around her and further her mother. For an outcast girl with feelings bigger than her thoughts allowed her, daily outbursts of terror, anxiety, and rage was a normal occurrence. Taking after her mother who seemed to be wary and mistrustful of the world around her, as author Lillain Pizzichini recounts in her biography *The Blue Hour* that "Jean felt close to her mother when her mother was afraid. It was her link to her." (20.) Over her formative years, this idea of fear and pain would intersect with her conception of womanhood.

[1] In *I Used To Live Here Once* (2022), Miranda Seymour notes how the maid that raised her, a black creole nicknamed only known to Rhys as Meta, was forbidden to use whippings on the children; in turn the maid used to pick up Rhys and shake her violently as punishment. As seen in *Voyage in the Dark,* recurring disdain towards maternal figures is apparent.

The observations of the female intrapersonal relationships in Roseau became fodder for her early unpublished stories from her childhood, and they shine through in her novel, *Voyage in the Dark.* Critics usually note Rhys for her postcolonial-inspired novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* published in 1966.[2] While widely celebrated in feminist and postcolonial literary discourse, it is the lesser known book published in 1934 that gives an insight into the later formation of British modernist literature from a female perspective, echoing fellow writers of the time period like Virginia Woolf.[3] Although *Voyage in the Dark* seems to be scarcely discussed within the modernist literary discourse, Rhys's novelization of the transition from the Creole lifestyle to the culture of early 20th century London set the outline for intertwining the female cultural experience and fiction writing. Most prominently, *Voyage in the Dark* exemplifies the disastrous social systems that subject women to a life of probable misdirection or destruction based on the patriarchal social reality in the early-1900's; this thematic focus emphasizes that the tragic female narrative in modernist literature is a reflection of patriarchal sexual scripts that dictate women's self-identity, relationships to their bodies, and the inescapability of gender-based oppression. These characterizations continue into contemporary novels as representations of the same system which refuses to allow women sovereignty over their own body and self.

[2] There is an inherent irony of Rhys being characterized as one of Britain's great modernist writers when her most famous novel was published well after. As *Voyage in the Dark* was written and published well within what scholars consider modernist (1934), and set in the era's precipice, I have concluded that it is still appropriate to regard Rhys as a principal modernist writer.

[3] James Wood's investigation of Jean Rhys for *the New Yorker* in 2022 concludes that there is no evidence of Woolf reading Rhys's novels but could be seen as "literary allies" for their work in "constructing lives in the shadow of dark trauma." (Wood, 2022)

Relevance of Sexual Scripts and Heteronormativity

From vast sociological research over the course of many years, there is a standing argument that many facets of human behavior are bound by socialized factors, rather than purely biological ones. So, in the context of male-female relationships, or heterosexual relationships, there is a social rationality that occurs which prioritizes those attractions even if they're harmful to those involved. This has become known as heteronormativity. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, a basic definition of heteronormativity "is what makes heterosexuality seen as coherent, natural, and privileged."[4] With that mindset applied, the female protagonists in these novels feel the need to attain relationships with men, as there is already a comprehension that enduring a love affair is what one should suffer through as the achievement is not happiness. For women the achievement comes in the form of survival: financially, materially, and socially.

Further, it is my findings that the women in my modernist primary text and the contemporary comparator ones that the idealization of these heterosexual relationships arrives through a set of social ordinances which is set and controlled by patriarchy; ordinances which Simon and Gagnon coined as 'sexual scripting' in 1986. This theory argues that sexual attraction and desire present themselves in three stages. Firstly, there is the introduction of cultural scenarios, which display the instruction of collective meanings. To elaborate, from the radical feminist analysis we might acknowledge that when humans begin to be sexually active it is

[4] Note that the European Institute for Gender Equality additionally describes its definition as "[Heteronormativity] involves the assumption that everyone is 'naturally' heterosexual and that heterosexuality is an ideal, superior to homosexuality bisexuality." *Voyage in the Dark* does not explicitly address any type of queer attraction or desire. European Institute for Gender Equality. 2023. "Heteronormativity." European Institute for Gender Equality. July 3, 2023.

encouraged for men to have many different partners, while it is stigmatized for women to do the same. Once the cultural scenario has been introduced, the individual begins to develop their interpersonal script, which applies the specific cultural scenario they have encountered by a specific individual to the specific social context they find themselves in. Finally, the final phase forms as the intrapsychic script, which pertains to the management of these desires which are experienced by the individual. These scripts can be in a multitude of forms, as all are contingent on the specificities of the individual, setting, past experiences and more. But, in a heterosexual relationship, there will always be a common factor: the influence of patriarchy over the definition of gender will always favor the male influence, therefore negating the plethora of desires women may have had without misogynistic cultural scenarios, further wiping fundamental aspects of their social identities.

Modernist Versus Metamodernist Style

Addressing a genre is a complex task. From all the scholarship available, literary studies can only give an estimate on the years. Many accredited institutions have their own claims for when the genesis of modernist literature occurred versus the transition to the postmodern, but generally it is safe to characterize the modernist literary period from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. For all its complexities, metamodernism is a juxtaposition within itself, as it embraces all the beautiful and ugly aspects of the modern and postmodern and attempts to find meaning within it. Metamodernism in contemporary literature can be characterized as a thought experiment which aims to reveal, disguise, create, and destroy (among other things). In many metamodernist works, one may find stories which focus on the philosophical aspects of the human condition. For example, a work may come to nihilistic conclusion straight away - the key to the metamodern framework is breaking down that nihilism

and finding some form of beauty within it. If life has no meaning, perhaps there is something freeing about it. Maybe, just maybe, the ugliness of society which humanity has become so disillusioned by (which modernism aptly describes) is a paradox which reveals that in the margins of that disillusionment there is beauty within the pain and simplicity.

Metamodernism toys with the contrast of themes such as nihilism and beauty, authenticity and falseness, or awareness and delusion. All works by Rhys, Rooney, and McBride achieve this thematic contrast by utilizing a specific aesthetic which literary scholar Raoul Eshelman dubbed "performatism." Eshelman claims that performatism produces false realities in which a character feels they can produce a metaphysical outcome despite signs of mediated form and manipulation.[5] It is my findings that performatism serves as an essential literary aesthetic within *Voyage in the Dark, Conversations With Friends,* and *The Lesser Boheimians.* In applying this aesthetic to modernist and contemporary literature, social dynamics involving sexual scripts and heteronormativity there is a resulting pattern which results in contemporary female protagonists negating facets of their identity as means of romantic fulfillment and social survival.

Where the modernist genre employs breaks between traditional prose and themes, metamodernism aims to take those methods and mold them into something totally different than what traditional literature is accustomed to, but always with the respect of what is familiar. Recurring stylistic choices in the contemporary works as Eimear McBride offers no quotation marks long which demark dialogue and spaces in sentences, making the reader fill in the blanks for the character's internal monologue. Sally Rooney writes with unbreaking sentences which mimic emails, a reflection on how human communication evolves with love. These styles - simple-yet-complicated, easy on the eyes but difficult to comprehend - embody what

[5] Eshelman expands in-depth on his website, https://performatism.de/What-is-Performatism

metamodernism literature can be. With research into this genre still emerging, I argue scholarship should consider Rooney and McBride as pillars of the metamodernist movement. Their contribution to feminist literary fiction is poignant and displays where metamodernism and radical feminism intersect, an aspect which metamodernist scholars have not procured much research on.

In regard to modernism and the expansion of its structural and thematic ambiguity, Eimear McBride's novel *The Lesser Bohemians* blurs the narrative line between the reality of a scenario and the protagonist's internal monologue. The novel is set in 1990's London, with the primary point of view coming from an Irish 18-year-old theater student. In an all-too-familiar thematic form, our young protagonist, Eily, collides with an actor nearly twice her age and considers herself hopelessly in love with him. Quickly, the relationship turns unstable as her counterpart Stephen has years of trauma that begin to interfere with her life, as she has a boatload of childhood scars all on her own. On her grammatical style in particular, McBride claims that "I was interested to see how far it was possible to push word order and structure while still remaining comprehensible and – more importantly – engaging"[6] (McBride, 2014). McBride smartly creates a metamorphosis of the stream of consciousness style by treating her characters' narration as coherently disjointed, a juxtapositional style seldom seen within literature which emulates James Joyce's sporadic writing but influenced by the reflections of the modernist women writers, such as Rhys.

[6] McBride expands on more influences which construct her unique prose in a 2014 interview with The White Review https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-eimear-mcbride/#:~:text=Her%20writing%20combines%20the%20beautiful,but%20also%20in%20contemporary%20life.

McBride's novel stands out in relation to Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* for a multitude of reasons; most prominently, I believe that there is a standing argument that *The Lesser Bohemians* not only mirrors Rhys's threads of Anna Morgan and her confusion as postcolonial outsider in London, but gives an in depth display of the sexual scripts of a woman who is coerced into clinging to an older man for security and self-worth. This persists as Eily experiences an awareness of irony which oscillates between cynicism towards her lover, which McBride demonstrates with visceral sexual content. In this fashion McBride takes what Rhys laid nearly a century earlier and treads into the genre of metamodernism.

Alternatively, while Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* displays a unique structural style akin to *The Lesser Bohemians,* it is the thematic recurrences of frank and brutal reflections on the existence within a female body that echo the sentiments of Rhys's literature. Those reflections are seen through the eyes of Frances, the reclusive and observant college student living in Dublin. Rooney characterizes Frances as self-conscious and disillusioned with the world she finds herself in, which leads her to the arms of Nick, a married man. As the relationship runs its initial course, Frances becomes dependent on Nick for reassurance within herself, comfort, and monetary survival. During the process, she isolates herself from her passions and desires, adopting Nick's instead. She conflates the unhealthy dependency that the couple has to each other for reciprocal love, displaying systems of patriarchal sexual scripts. Sally Rooney takes a risky stab at describing the dissociative tendencies within social identity that women will conform themselves to in order to cling to any sense of power in an unbalanced relationship with a man. Therefore, it is the profound engagement with contemporary issues in which Rooney creates a feminist metamodernism genre of her own design.

Rooney credits the way that she developed her prose was simply through writing emails to people, which provides a simplistic and muted mood upon initial observation. Although she cites influences such as Ernest Hemmingway and mid-century American prose, she admits that the style's unique versatility evokes influences within the audience that she never considered at first. She told Michael Nolan for the Irish Times in 2017, "Sometimes I think that it's maybe reaching an audience that aren't necessarily familiar with the texts that influence the style. So sometimes I'm hearing back influences and I'm like, really? That person? But maybe in a way that's because it sits in an awkward position between being quite an accessible read, and also having a huge heritage of influence that's not necessarily so accessible." (2017). Rooney's observations on the power dynamics in love affairs have become profound since their publication, dominating the niche of feminist literary fiction in the mainstream book media. They reflect the various forms of how patriarchal sexual scripts influence the state of women's social sovereignty.

As women's literature continues to evolve with the expansion of sexual theory and study of patriarchy, it is paramount to acknowledge how modernist literature displayed analytical pillars of the genre's characteristics, both thematically and structurally. Jean Rhys wrote *Voyage in the Dark* as a fictionalization of her life, transforming her pain into liberation the only way she knew how, writing. The performatist literary aesthetic and the erotization of virginity not only demonstrates systems which thrive off of patriarchal oppression, but how little these systems have seemed to budge. These patterns are echoed in *Conversations With Friends* and *The Lesser Bohemians.* With the prevalence of women's contemporary fiction, scholarship can observe where literary ambiguity intersects with systems of gender.

Part I: Virginity, Weaponized Eroticism, and Trauma

All books in this thesis document a situational stereotype which presents itself as a pivotal experience to the cisgender woman experience: the initiation of sex.[7] In Voyage in the Dark, the reader comes to their own conclusion regarding Anna's first sexual experience with Walter by putting together context clues. Specifically, before a break between paragraphs in chapter 3 of Part I, Walter is talking to Anna about her virginity for which she feels intensely self-conscious. Walter is coercing compliance which Anna repeats an anaphora of, "'I must go, I must go.'" (Rhys, 37.) He initiates physical touch and Anna is panicked, internalizing feelings of distrust, fear, and repulsion. Jean Rhys's intentional focus on the individual communicates in very little words that sex is not what Anna wants out of Walter; she craves comfort, emotional love, and warmth which she seldom receives in London.

This scene is constructed with a vision Rhys did not have a name for at the time of its publication: its incorporation of heteronormativity and the application of sexual scripts. In regard to Anna Morgan, she is a young woman who is abruptly thrust into a position which lacks privilege in most capacities. She struggles for money as a chorus girl and bounces around different shabby boarding rooms in London; she supplements alcohol for her meals, and occasionally receives money from a stepmother she despises.

[7] I acknowledge in recent years, this term of virginity has been examined as a sexist and outdated concept, as there are varying standards to what 'virginity' is. In addition, Aja Renne Corliss's research notes that "According to previous studies and surveys, the definition of virginity loss can include: penile-vaginal intercourse, penile-anal intercourse, oral sex, presence of orgasm, genital contact, any sexual contact, or any degree of self-defined sexual intimacy." (5). For the purpose of congruence, I refer to these characters' first initiation of sex with a man as 'losing their virginity' as that is how they are describing it. However, this does not mean that it's the *only* definition for this idea. For more about the construct of virginity, see Corliss's research *I'd Rather Be a Slut: An Analysis of Stigmatized Virginity in Contemporary Culture* (2017).

Living penniless and experiencing degradation as an outsider from the West Indies, a sexual encounter (despite how nauseated it makes her feel) is idealized to Anna; in the opening chapter of the book she acknowledges how one of her chorus dressers crudely nicknames her, "the virgin…or sometimes the silly cow-" (Rhys 16). The text displays her incessant yearning to assimilate to a more precarious lifestyle because she has no mentorship in London other than the chorus girls who she lives with, who also fraternize with older men for their comfort and money. With no alternative guidance shaping her comprehension of how she is supposed to climb the social ladder for stability - a preemptive cultural scenario which encouraged her to cling to Walter. The clash between Anna's mood in the scenario versus her heteronormative final decision (or lack thereof) engages in sexual scripts.

After Anna reluctantly gets into bed with Walter, there is an abrupt shift in her internal thought. It's a moment which displays how viciously Anna views herself as worthless due to her conscious denial of her convictions; as such, while she comprehends that she has no desire to be with this man, she sees no other way to receive his affection. The prose changes to italics; it can be ambiguous to a first-time reader whether one is reliving a memory of Anna's or merely in her current state of mind, and Rhys does so purposefully as she writes, *"Of course you've always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly, except that you've always known it. Always - how long is always?"* (Rhys, 37.) This modernist technique of fragmentation serves an important purpose to Rhys's style. The interruption of the normal narrative structure communicates a shift in Anna's mood. Instead of the nervous mood which conveys her aversion to Walter's advances, the abrupt and seemingly unrelated line morphs into a mood of dysphoria. Additionally, it is important to note that in this fragment, the narrator's point of view changes from the first to the second person.

Rhys's intention is as such: when Anna is thinking to herself, Rhys uses normal dialogue quotation marks to indicate that the thought is occurring during the present scene. When italics are in use, they serve as Anna's attempt to intertwine her past memories with her current experience. The dysphoria appeals to pathos as Rhys creates a sympathy for Anna, as she goes to bed with Walter when she explicitly doesn't want to, reflecting: "I stopped. I wanted to say, 'No, I've changed my mind'" (Rhys 37). The rhetoric creates a real empathy which connects the reader to the character. Distress fills the reader, as the observer does not want Anna to consummate this imbalanced relationship; at the same time they understand it as an unnamed comprehension that this course of action was inevitable. This rationality is defined by a study for the Archives of Sexual Behavior, as the study explains "While we learn the general expectations from sexual cultural scripts depicted in media and popular discourse, we develop interpersonal scripts from our own experiences and use our intrapsychic scripts to rehearse interactions and determine our desires." (Harvey, et al., 2023.) Stemming from the influences of heteronormative culture, Anna is creating a sexual script based on the pressure to cling to a man who has age and wealth, as she intertwines certain sexual ideologies from modern London into her desires. As someone who grew up isolated from English life in the West Indies, Jean Rhys conveys that Anna is unfortunately at the will of whatever cultural scenario is thrust upon her whether she finds it enjoyable or not.

Anna's passivity to Walter's actions reveals how the sexual scripts she is constructing fall under phallocentric and patriarchal values, which restrict her own autonomy over her identity. For example, feminist writer Karen Atherton relates Anna Morgan's social reality to Helene Cixous's perspectives on the male gaze and how complying to its demands constructs the woman's lack of self-worth. Atherton utilizes Cixous's ideas regarding how under a society

dominated under rules determined by the male, women's opinions and identities are forced to remain trapped inside themselves thereby perpetuating the passive role.[8] The only way that the patriarchy allows them to safely communicate with men is through the exploitation of their bodies rather than expressive methods.

With that in mind, Atherton explains why Anna's decisions are clouded in judgement and further lead her in a downward spiral, claiming "In [*Voyage in the Dark*], the tension between what is imposed upon women and what they instinctively desire leaves women confused and disorientated, on a journey that does not lead to any sense of clarity or empowerment, as it is implied by the title." (151). Anna, hoping to cling to Walter for security, cannot comprehend any other way to rely on his affection than to comply with his sexual advances. Instead of finding the sense of contentment with the advance in their relationship, Anna is left despondent and reposed. Her body language is closed off as she repeats incessantly that she wants to leave. Walter even acknowledges this misery, telling her "'You mustn't be sad, you mustn't worry. My darling mustn't be sad.'" (Rhys 37). Walter's opinions demonstrate the Cixousan ideology that women seldom have the right means to express themselves in a phallocentric society, therefore when he imposes his convictions on Anna in one of her most vulnerable moments, she is left with the cultural scenario which enforces the idea of female passivity in virginity loss.

Soon enough, Anna Morgan transcends the cultural scenarios she absorbs into the interpersonal. Specifically, after the break in writing Anna is laying in the bed contemplating what just occurred. There is no description of the intercourse itself, only Anna's stream of consciousness which communicates what should come next.[9] When the prose picks up again

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[8] Vanderbilt University's research page on Helene Cixous's famous piece, *The Laugh of Medusa,* (1975). https://www.vanderbilt.edu/AnS/english/English295/albright/main1.htm

[9] In Western media you might hear this trope labeled as 'fade to black.'

Anna is dressing herself, and she thinks, “I thought it had been just like the girls said, except I didn’t think it would hurt so much.” (Rhys, 38.) She cross references the talk she hears among other chorus girls about their sexual encounters compared to the one that she just had and adjusts them to her new comprehension. As Anna is heterosexual, it is now cemented that sex will most always be at the will of the man and involve pain. These conceptions are now intertwined with how she identifies herself, as Anna’s loneliness persists so much that she accepts this structure of power. The pain and lack of power is now the confirmation of Anna’s sense of self, and it critically alters how her actions are shaped for the rest of the book.

In correspondence is the rationale of sex as transactional, a heteronormative cultural script which impacts Anna which commodifies her body. Before Anna leaves Walter’s room, he puts money in her purse which makes her feel uncomfortable:

> He came into the room again and I watched him in the glass. My handbag was on the table. He took it up and put some money into it. Before he did it he looked towards me but he thought I couldn’t see him. I got up. I meant 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, 38.)

The amplification of the word “anything” used by Rhys at the end of the passage actively displays how Anna audibly repeats something in order for her to persuade herself of a conviction that she does not adhere to. She explicitly wants to reject the money Walter gives her because that cements that their time together is merely a transaction. Against her better judgement she accepts, as the scenario is communicating that in order to keep the relationship that offers her security, the money is what she should accept going forward. Actively, the cultural scenario

which she is observing is morphing into her interpersonal sexual script, formulating the social rules that guides her through how she is supposed to apply sexual situations.

Now that she has put the cultural scenario she heard about into practice, it can be regarded as an interpersonal script. The consummation which was performed under coercive and heteronormative circumstances foreshadows a course of demise for Anna. Her interpersonal sexual script is now rationalized by the power imbalance held by Walter. Now, sexual activity includes pain, manipulation, and the idea of her body being a transaction - which she conflates with love. Since this transaction is how Anna loses her virginity, it is an unfortunate nail in the coffin which enforces how she will shape her identity regarding how she loves, which sacrifices fundamental wants and desires that she might have had without the influence of the patriarchal social structure. In a system which is unfamiliar and foreign to her, if she is to sustain love and security, she must abide by the scripts that patriarchal rule has set before her; furthermore, coercion, transaction and pain starts to shape Anna Morgan - and it is what she starts to construct herself as, negating the sense of self she might have had if these systems of power had not existed.

As discussed, this part of the novel is a paramount experience that critically alters her perception of herself. The pathos applied to Anna in this scenario serves a dual purpose: First of all, her intense despair after spending the night with Walter creates sympathy within the audience, with "I felt miserable suddenly and utterly lost. 'Why did I do that?' I thought." (Rhys 39). The reader understands her regret and basks in that hopelessness. Secondly, it serves as the beginning of Anna's downward spiral, as her own self-awareness surrounding the dependency to Walter appears; after visiting him again, Anna thinks "'My God, this is a funny way to live. My God, how did this happen?'" (Rhys 40).With this appeal to the reader's sympathy and Anna's

awareness, Jean Rhys creates a tonal shift identifying a transition from girlhood to note-quite womanhood, but something akin to it.

The same tonal shift occurs in *The Lesser Bohemians,* only amplified by Eimar McBride's stylistic and thematic decisions. Whereas the passage above has key differences from Rhys's - mainly in the expansion of sensual imagery - the thematic rhetoric mirrors *Voyage in the Dark* when it comes to the perspectives of young heterosexual women and their introduction to sexual intercourse. Before they even start, Stephen embraces the idea that is taking charge here and setting the pace of the experience for Eily, communicating his own cultural scenario to and transferring it to her. Eily accepts this scenario because she has no other conception of an alternative. McBride writes Stephen as excited at the fact that Eily is a virgin. When she reveals this fact to Stephen, she tells him that she wants to leave his apartment in embarrassment. Instead, Stephen begs her to stay, insisting "Don't say that, I'm actually having a weirdly good time," (McBride 31). The epistemic response to Eily's initial rejection implies that Stephen finds virginity erotic. It is a juxtaposition within itself as logical thinking demands chasteness and eroticism on opposite sides of the spectrum.

Historically in Western European culture sex traditionally represents deviance, and virginity represents holiness. However, it is that cultural juxtaposition of erotic virginity that creates the scripts that Eily and Stephen fall into. Historian Hanne Blank characterizes virginity and the erotic as one which was conceived under the pretenses of economic patriarchal rule.[10]

[10] Regarding how the concept of virginity in the Western world intersects with economic value, Blank expands that "The eroticization of virginity is tied to the rise of capitalism and the growth of cities. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the rise of capitalist economies and the eventual prominence of an industrial, rather than an agricultural, economy transformed both geography and culture." (Blank, 196.) In England, traditional Christian values in villages and small towns encouraged their women to remain chaste (or face eternal damnation). But when many fled to cities such as London in search of jobs, fallout and poverty would leave them no choice but to commercialize their bodies for lonely men. Over time, this culture began to solicit an excitement for proclaimed virgins in brothels and prostitution rings. See *Virgin: The Untouched History* (2007) by Hanne Blank for more on how eroticism has historically intersected with virginity.

Considering historical influences of religion, taboo, illness, and legality over bodily autonomy, Blank argues that "The erotics of virginity are the priorities of patriarchal sexuality writ large. In eroticizing virginity, youth, physical nubility, ignorance, inexperience, fragility and vulnerability are objectified from the perspective of someone who, by definition, is none of these things." (195). When contextualizing this perspective in aspects of social identity, for a short moment Eily, much like Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* and Frances in *Conversations With Friends*, believes that their virginity is something of value to them. Then suddenly, when it is 'gone' after sexual intercourse, what are they left with? A feeling that their stakes as valuable beings in society has significantly decreased. A fundamental piece of social ownership over their bodies, instantaneously gone.

While Jean Rhys is considered one of the first writers to unabashedly convey the woman's yearning for sexual love, the act is never written about in detail.[11] Rhys leaves it up to the reader's deductive reasoning to surmise what has occurred, implying the passage of time. The break in writing proves effective in emphasizing Anna's peril. However, because of the break there is no description of what she feels at the moment the trauma to her body occurs. Detailed writing of sexual love was not unheard of in 1934, but it certainly was not common.[12] Alternatively in today's contemporary novels, sexual scenes are common and allow the audience a window into characters' most intimate moments. Importantly, this type of writing could be

[11]Karen Atherton's research into *Voyage in the Dark* and Jean Rhys, "Rhys was among the first women writers to express a direct acceptance of women's desire for sexual love, but in this are also, the same reticence and anxieties surface as with language." Atherton, Karen. "Staging the Self: Gender, Difference, and Performance in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark.*" *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2003, pp. 147–60. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41274218.

[12] One of the many reasons behind this stems from the Victorian age. Queen Victoria wanted the royal family to provide an example of purity, chasteness, and traditionalism. Her vision for England was to lead by example with her husband and nine children in tow. Her diaries later reveal she did not apply these standards to herself, her husband, and her children behind closed doors. For expansion, see https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/london-stories/marriage-queen-victoria-prince-albert/

considered an aspect of the metamodernist technique, as it involves the expansion of critique and commentary in contemporary life. In *The Lesser Bohemians,* Eimear McBride poignantly includes detailed sex, highlighting the realistic aspects which conjure discourse for how heterosexual intercourse is expected to be for women and its inherent issues. See the breakdown of Eily losing her virginity:

> And he is all against me. And he is inside. Attempting to kiss through a pain running wild from his body far into mine. I bite my own lip and stare above. Ceiling swirls there. Cracks. Worlds beyond the pain not improving. Now. Or now. Or yet. I wish I hadn't. I wish I'd never done this. I wish he didn't know. Oh God. Hey, look at me, he says. I don't. I'm being as gentle as I can, do you want me to stop? No. He tries to kiss again but I won't. Come on, don't make it like I'm here on my own. Humiliation immaculata though sprouts its own tongue. (McBride 32).

In this passage, McBride takes liberties in sentence structure by molding blunt clauses and phrases to mimic the hyper-realistic process that Eily is going through. For example, observe the two opening sentences: While the clause "And he is all against me," can be considered a functional sentence as it involves the subject, 'he', and the object, 'me', all tied together with a verb and preposition, 'is' and 'against.' However, the sentence remains boring, colorless, without any elaboration. The following sentence echoes this dullness, omitting the subject. The parallel structure of the two sentences serves to amplify the terse mood occurring in the scenario. That terseness serves as a paradox within itself. Looking through the lens that Stephen has constructed, this experience for Eily should elicit eroticism and excitement, so the fact that this pain and distress occurs causes conflict in how she is expected to internalize sexual scenarios.

One of McBride's strongest choices applying rhetorical devices in the passage is the use of anaphora throughout. Applied with the syntax, both of the first sentences begin with 'and.' Eily's physical senses are experiencing a feeling unknown to her until now. Therefore the stark repetition of a word which serves to add rhythm to Eily's thoughts as she processes it all. Because 'and' is a conjunction rather than a word one would traditionally start a sentence with, it provides a panicked rhythm to the prose. The rhythm and anaphora combine to emphasize a pathos appeal to empathize with Eily's current condition. This type of McBride's rhetoric is repeated a few sentences later, with another anaphora, "Or now. Or yet." (McBride, 32.) These sentences are short, choppy in nature. It is through the frigidity of the prose which serves to actualize the peril Eily is experiencing.

Comparing where the traditional structure of sentences and metamodernism intersect, the sentences that start with 'or' are not proper clauses. Yet, the form that follows McBride throughout her novels is not meant to be proper, which harnesses that core trait of modernist novels of inexactness within traditional prose. She claims that in order for her novels to be understood, the reader must shift the viewpoint from what they originally used to. In an interview with the White Review regarding her style, McBride notes that "I wanted the simplicity of the vocabulary to allow the more complex construction to slip in under the radar so that the decoding would take place within the readers themselves, almost as though they were experiencing the story from the inside out rather than the outside in." (McBride, 2014). In a sense, the intentionality of ambiguity and simplicity that McBride employs mimics how one internalizes a traumatic scenario firsthand. Thoughts are fleeting and incoherent, and as the mind tries to catch up with the body, the mind tries to protect itself by focusing elsewhere in an act of disassociation.

Further, the incoherent nature that McBride creates in this instance culminates in Eily thinking to herself how shameful she feels in this moment, and phrases to herself "humiliation immaculata." In Latin, *immaculata* can mean many different things - but it correlates with *immaculatus,* which has a translation to 'unstained' or 'without blemish' in the English language. In Christianity, the Virgin Mary's story begins with 'the immaculate conception', as the biblical story states that Mary became pregnant via the holy spirit, not a man. So, in phrasing together "humiliation immaculata," as a juxtaposition regarding purity and shame, it confirms that Eily feels that after this cultural scenario she feels that her body is now blemished or stained, ruined by this experience. An experience which is riddled with humiliation goes on to manifest as her interpersonal scripts.

Afterwards, Eily reflects on what has just happened to her body, reflecting sentiments similar to Anna Morgan's, thinking "I lie in the pain. Climb his cities of books. Hand between my legs. The wet, true, blood. So that's done and something wrecked, what should I do next?" (McBride 32). There is a bitterness which is exemplified when she refers to the books. Eily's senses are reacclimating to her body and she is in a lot of pain. In an effort to disassociate she 'climbs' Stephen's books, meaning she focuses her attention on the visual to compartmentalize what comes next. What brings her back to her reality is when she sees the blood. McBride's imagery is important, as the blood is being described as "true." The text exemplifies that Eily is connecting herself to her body as she comprehends the blood is a result of what has just occurred. It is a dysphoric moment as this introduction to exploring sexuality is now physically and metaphorically stained with blood. An intimate moment which is romanticized to be pleasurable is now intertwined with trauma and destruction throughout the rest of the novel, which presents itself in patterns of recurrence in later passages.

After considering how the initiative cultural scenarios are applied in *Voyage in the Dark* and *The Lesser Bohemians*, the connections made between how women in literature understand what is expected of them sexually in order to maintain their relationships reveal some troubling tendencies. This troubling nature is more poignant when considering the novels were published 83 years apart, and an even longer gap in the setting as Rhys's novel is set in the years right before the outbreak of World War I.[13] It is safe to conclude that regarding structure and style, contemporary women's novels have been allowed to expand in their ambiguity. However, women in novels still manage their desires based upon the patriarchal sexual scripts that their male partners instill on them for the first time, most often in a traumatic nature. This further diminishes attractions, desires, and wants which contribute to one's identity.

[13] Penguin Random House's back cover description of *Voyage in the Dark* gives a premise of "the demi-monde of 1914 London," however in no place does the novel explicitly say what year Anna Morgan is living in. https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/57152/voyage-in-the-dark-by-rhys-jean/9780141183954

Part II: Performatism and the Intrapsychic

Performatism In Love

By her novel *Voyage and the Dark,* Jean Rhys had perfected her archetypes for her female heroines, which paralleled many of the more trying times in her life each with their own imaginative exploration. In an analysis of Rhys, scholar Elign W. Mellown describes the blueprint for a Rhysian woman as "a happy childhood in a tropical state of nature, growth into adolescence without the presence of a father, a complete submission to physical love, the inevitable loss of that love, and the consequent misery."[14] (472). Contemporary authors Sally Rooney and Eimear McBride deviate at different aspects of this characterization; for example, both their female heroines have no background in tropical countries. However, the characters Frances and Eily both hold aspects in their identity which mirror Mellown's conclusion. Frances's father is a depressed recluse, and she has no relationship with him beyond cleaning his house when she visits. Eily's father died of cancer when she was very young and grapples with the pain of never fully knowing him. The both of them have grisly experiences having sex with a man for the first time, and the submission to physical love proves a traumatic one. Most prominently, the calamitous result of the love that they had immersed themselves in leaves them emotionally reposed. In the end the love they have given and received has been twisted, their social identities morph to one which is constructed of pain and objectivity, sealing themselves as victims, negating all other forms of need and centralizing the man.

[14] Note that this article was published in the University of Wisconsin Press's *Contemporary Literature* in 1972, so some of Mellown's analysis on modern characterizations of women can be considered outdated as they come from what was a contemporary perspective. However, Mellown provides a remarkable examination of the basic thematic narratives that Rhys uses in her novel.

A poignant example of this pattern is in *The Lesser Bohemians* after what is arguably the emotional peak of the novel. Over the course of a long night, Stephen has explain to Eily the entire course of his childhood and young adulthood - which is riddled with sexual abuse, drug abuse, suicidal ideation, and isolation. For Eily, it is the emotional catharsis she has been waiting for. Yet, what is more reflective of the stakes of this novel, and what further displays metamodernist traits and the pitfalls of sexual scripts based on patriarchal needs, is what occurs the night after when Stephen allows a flirtation at a bar.

> Does he think I don't notice his ambiguity about what we are? Not holding my hand now. Not calling me love. Am I the unwanted hanger-on? Maybe. I know if I can smell the want off her he can smell it too. I still hurt from this morning, how he was. Has he already forgotten? But I'd let him do anything now, if only he'd send her away. So I look at him with all my love. (McBride 236)

Before this scene, Eily feels an unprecedented level of peace within her relationship. She feels that finally, there is no more contempt between the two, no more secrets that Stephen uses to hijack his teenage girlfriend's desires.[15] Upon the bar scene, Eily's mood dramatically shifts. McBride optimizes this feeling by using many rhetorical questions in Eily's inner monologue in order to obtain an emotional effect rather than an answer. In between those rhetorical questions, the sentences are paired back, using the word "not" as repetition in order to connote the negative tonal shift. Additionally, McBride utilizes an olfactory metaphor, using the verb "smell" as not something the human nose can detect, but as palpable desire. Especially as Eily becomes aware that she might be a "hanger-on", defined as "a person who tries to be friendly and spend time

[15] Before this passage, Eily reflects "But cramped as we are, with my stuff everywhere, it's a wonderful life." (McBride, 233)

with rich and important people, especially to get an advantage," by the Cambridge Dictionary, she displays a vital characteristic which occurs more and more in texts which can be associated with metamodernism: Performatism. In an article for the Journal of Aesthetics and Culture, performatism in literature is described "as the willful self-deceit to believe in - or identify with, or solve - something in spite of itself." (van den Akker, et al., 2010). In other words, McBride portrays Eily forcing a belief that this is normal into reality even though there's an underlying acceptance to the reader that expresses that it very much is *not* normal.

Performatism in *Conversations with Friends* appears as Sally Rooney creates her narrator as too self-aware for her own good. She grapples with being intensely conscious of her flaws and selfishness, and further understands when she is hoping to gain back a sense of confidence when it comes to her affair with Nick. After an awkward moment in public where Nick misses one of her successful slam- poetry performances, Frances revels in people praising her in front of him, and scolds herself for it:

> Maybe having him witness how much others approved of me, without taking any of the risks necessary to Nick's personal approval, made me feel capable of speaking to him again, as if I also was an important person with lots of admirers like he was, as if there was nothing inferior about me. But the acclaim also felt like that part of the performance itself, the best part, and the most pure expression of what I was trying to do, which was to make myself into this kind person: someone worthy of praise, worthy of love. (Rooney, 39-40.)

In this passage, readers have a distinct window into Frances's internal conscience as it becomes engulfed in acquiring Nick's admiration of her, despite his little inclination to give that to her. Rooney intentionally has Frances talk in a self-reflective voice, which displays the ability

to know when she is putting on a performative identity, despite her awareness that she is sacrificing her quality of performance art all for Nick's benefit. For example, the last clause of the passage includes an anaphora which starts with the word 'worthy.' Rooney aims to hammer in Frances's insecurities. She does not particularly care if her performance (the thing she is most passionate about) is applaudable for her own intellectual growth. Instead, she wants her art to be praised so that this man she has attached herself to will find it agreeable and therefore that admiration will transfer to her as an individual - even if it means a portion of the individual is based entirely on the man's judgment of her.

This heightened awareness of identity negation ties into Rooney's advanced writing style of leading the novel's form based on its narrators, rather than plot. Instead of reading a story which is driven by a sequence of events, Rooney novels are best read if one is hoping to observe a condition of being, as if you have a perfect window of one's life through their eyes. This can be jarring if one is diving into a novel like *Conversations with Friends* with the hope for a riveting love story, and instead finds what Rooney admits are pared-back sentences, controlled dialogue, and a lack of anything lyrical. This literary form of writing emphasizes a focus on how a character shapes a novel, instead of the events occurring around them, which therein portrays an in-depth social reality of the conditions that one lives with in constructing their social identity.

Once Frances begins to get a sense of what Nick's sexual scripts are by experiencing his cultural scenarios, she attempts to apply those scripts to herself and others by transforming them into her own interpersonal sexual scripts. Nick's own cultural scenarios in regards to Frances are imbalanced due to his social standing as a successful actor, When she spends an impulsive night with a random man as an effort to feel a sense of control, she tries to make herself identity with a sexual script she cannot grasp, exemplifying the attempted application of the intrapsychic, as she

tries to convince herself of a desire that does not feel correct. Rooney portrays this attempt through the repetition of identical phrases, writing, “Afterward he invited me back to his apartment and I let him unbutton my blouse. I thought: this is normal. This is a normal thing to do.” (201) The conclusion ends with her feeling even more distraught with herself, which leaves her in a dysphoric state of being, as if she is unknown to herself. This occurrence goes to show how when sexual scripts are dictated under oppressive male favor and privilege, women will take on victimized social identities over ones that could have been fulfilling. All of those managed desires due to sexual scripts and the constant awareness that the woman negates their own sense of self that precisely displays the performative in the literary context.

While not as unabashedly striking in *Conversations With Friends* or *The Lesser Bohemians,* the seeds of performatism are in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* at the end of Part II, when Anna’s relationship with Walter starts to unravel for good. After Anna receives a letter more or less severing their love affair, she arranges a meeting together. Her awareness of what is going to happen echoes in her internal monologue:

> I imagined myself saying, very calming, ‘The thing is that you don’t understand. You think I want more than I do. I only want you sometimes, but if I never see you again I’ll die. I’m dying now really, and I’m too young to die. (Rhys 97)

Here, Anna is trying to take control of her situation in whatever capacity she can. Her sexual scripts have culminated into the interpersonal at this point, adapting her actions based on what she believes Walter will find interesting and arousing. In an effort to mend their offenses, despite the signs that there is only one outcome to this meeting, Anna walks herself through what she might say to Walter so he will not leave her. She conceptualizes that her tone will be calm, a purposefully ironic adjective, as Anna’s feelings towards gaining back a sense of security is the

antithesis of calm. The word "calmly" has a true meaning of chaotic, frantic, or unstructured. This paradox is then supported by Anna's juxtaposition thinking; ideally, she would tell Walter that she is not utterly obsessed with him, hyper-aware that the reason he wants to leave her is because she has fallen too deeply in love. But truthfully she feels total despair if she were to be cut off from him fully - simply put, she would rather not admit it.

This type of rationalization that Anna subjects herself to lays the groundwork for performatism, which Sally Rooney and Eimear McBride execute from the author's perspective. German theorist Raoul Eshelman is considered a pioneer in the practices of the postmodern into the metamodern and conceptualizes a key part of performatism as "The author, in other words, imposes a certain solution on us using dogmatic, ritual, or some other coercive means." (Eshelman 3). In this thinking, Anna's solution is a confrontation where she would ideally want to curb her love, desire, and attractions based on the new cultural scenario Walter is displaying for her: in love affairs, she will be the one that people tire over and discard. The beginning performatism occurs in her ritual thinking of possible solutions to her love crisis even though there are no means for resolve in her societal position.

Performatism in Restarting and Ending

Notably, all three novels share conclusions which create endings which don't feel rewarding or happy, but at the same time complete in its deference or resolution between a conflict in character. In all of these narratives, it is the conscious deference of their desires for themselves in spite of what they know to be right. All protagonists, who have suffered amongst the sexual scripts which patriarchy has dealt them, don't leave the imbalanced relationships they know are harming them. They don't gain an opportunity to lead a different life. All indicators, despite desires which they may be denying, construct intrapsychic scripts which lead them to

starting a cycle of emotional turmoil all over again. All authors frame the reading experience in such a way that the ending invokes frustration as readers watch our female protagonists apply their intrapsychic scripts centralized around the misogyny around them. But, at the same time, rhetoric leads there to be no other option for these women. The society that they are subject to doesn't allow them to create other options, as Eshelman describes, "On the one hand, you're practically forced to identify with something implausible or unbelievable within the frame – to believe in spite of yourself – but on the other, you still feel the coercive force causing this identification to take place, and intellectually you remain aware of the particularity of the argument at hand." (2). The open endings all exemplify how the cycle of womanhood seems unrelenting, and at times there never seems to be a solution to women's liberation in love - which is itself the solution that McBride, Rooney, and Rhys are trying to communicate.

For example, Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* sets up this continuation in Part IV of the novel. The section is only five pages long and serves to narrate the protagonist, Anna, through her illegal abortion after Walter, her lover, tires of her physically, materially, and emotionally. The father of her pregnancy is unknown to Anna and audience, and amidst the procedure the narration switches between Anna's memories of the West Indies, versus the doctors in London. Already, this obstruction of linear storytelling creates a chaotic tone as Rhys mimics the fear and delusion of the illegal operation because Anna is only 18 and understands very little of what is occurring. When Anna fully begins to emerge back into consciousness the doctor is laughing at her; this prompts the final passage of the novel in which she comes to terms with how this is how her life will stay:

> When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought

> about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again… (Rhys, 188)

Here, Rhys enables performatism through Anna by regulating what "starting all over again" will mean for her, without directly acknowledging that she knows that her vision for herself is unrealistic in the world she has found herself in. The descriptive pastoral imagery of idealized mornings and freshness creates irony as that is precisely what Anna yearned for upon her initial arrival in London, something that would mimic how she felt when in the West Indies. Truthfully, Anna knows that starting over doesn't mean creating a better life for herself. This is evident as the simile which opens the passage, comparing the sliver of sun from the door as the last thing before imminent darkness. The simile aims to mimic the last thoughts of consciousness before one falls asleep or dies, or in Anna's case perhaps the last moments she remembers before drugs or alcohol overtake her mind.

With all that in mind, the dogmatic framing which constructs essential parts of literary performatism occurs as Rhys already has condemned Anna's life to be abundant with difficulties - a projection of her own loneliness. There's an inherent irony in this metaphor of "starting all over again," because Anna is aware of the outcome. Readers only have to refer to the opening line of the novel, which goes "It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known." (Rhys 1). In this way, Rhys artfully sets up for Anna's entire arc to repeat itself. As the fantasies of newness are juxtaposed against the dark reality, the novel communicates through its own performatism that in patriarchal Western societies the ideology of rebirth or starting new is irrelevant; the system of gender (seen through the construction of her sexual scripts) in Anna's life are constantly shaping her existence to be one of suffering and endurance.

In a similar fashion, Rooney also takes advantage of performatism and creates Frances's dogmatic framing to lead her back to Nick, the person who has complicated her life and altered how she establishes her sexuality. Towards the end of the novel, Frances has severed her relationship with Nick after a confronting email from his wife, Melissa, telling her that Nick will never get divorced, nor can he and Frances be together. In the fallout, Frances starts to rekindle her friendships and start over. She begins to take care of her health amidst an endometriosis diagnosis, something that she neglected during her affair with Nick. But, out of nowhere, he calls her again, asking to see her again. Frances considers, and her inner monologue goes as such:

> I closed my eyes. Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know about and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you can understand them. You can't always take the analytical position.
>
> Come and get me, I said. (Rooney 307)

This passage highlights how Frances is using her observant nature to convince herself of the only conceivable result of the phone call. Her language stacks ideas which connote the observant, logical, and reasonable; words such as "complex", "network", "analytical" all amplify the logos she is building for herself, all to justify re-kindling a harmful relationship. She confirms her own dogmatic framing which beckons her to detach herself from her own objectivity by absorbing what her new intrapsychic scripts based off Nick mean to her. His cultural scenarios and her own interpersonal scripts have culminated in a genesis of new desires which tell her that her social world, despite her best hopes, will always be overshadowed by the desires of patriarchy. Nick can pull her along whenever he pleases and she will answer, as this is the only way she can love him. Thus, the cycle starts again, much like in *Voyage in the Dark.*

As far as the metamodernism genre goes and Rooney's place within it, Eshelman gives an explanation on how performatism severs the objective lens for a character's solution to create something in spite of itself, writing "As a reaction to the plight of the postmodern subject, who is constantly being pulled apart and misled by signs in the surrounding context, the performatist subject is constructed in such a way that it is dense or opaque relative to its milieu." (Eshelman, 8). It is in this very same fashion that Frances makes her decision to open herself back up to Nick. Her milieu, or social environment, concerning Nick has been quite harmful to her. This leads to Frances's social reality (constructed by no small means due to her sexual scripts) which displays that in order to sustain any scrap of reciprocal love from Nick, she has to manage her intrapsychic scripts to his desires, what *he* wants.

The social patterns in which female characters apply performatism in these novels reveal the gendered systems of power they have no choice but to navigate, and the lengths they must go to survive it. In *Conversation with Friends*, Frances reconciles with Nick to achieve the affection she craves, despite knowing that she fashions faulty desires to get attention; deep down she knows he treats her wrongly. Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* yearns to sever herself from her reality to construct a milieu which spites the current scenario; in turn she constructs an ironic ending for herself which transcends the separation of her body and self. Both examples do not exist without the influence of sexual scripts and the intrapsychic methods in which woman are compelled to manage how they operate under physical and emotional misogyny.

Conclusion

I often wonder what Jean Rhys would have thought of an entire thesis dedicated to her influence. Mostly, because her literary executor Francis Wyndham received instructions in Rhys's will that she did not wish to have a biography written about her. Wyndham notes in the introduction of *The Letters of Jean Rhys,* the reason "was not so much a desire for secrecy as a dread of inaccuracy." (9). While I believe my analysis to be as accurate and honest to Jean Rhys's life based upon her literature, I feel it is prudent to acknowledge that she expressed her distaste in scholars analyzing her personal life and its intersection with her literature. I imagine if she read this study of herself, she would respond with a sharp-tongued review with little improvements I could have made. Yet, a small part of me thinks she would be flattered at a literary admirer; Francis Wyndham, a close friend in her small circle, notes that she answered every fan letter she possibly could while she lived her later years in a small Devon village. Perhaps she would appreciate the effort put into appreciating her art.

Regardless, the influence that she continues through contemporary literature reveals itself through identifying misogynistic systems of gender. Women, to survive the pain which accompany womanhood, negate fundamental desires and needs which result in identity confusion for the female literary character, contemporary and modernist alike. The aspects negated come in various forms; the severance of their romantic desires as a conscious understanding that in structures which are dictated by patriarchy, they must barter and trade their emotions to have a fragment of power. Wydnham writes that no one experienced this more than Rhys herself, as she was known to perform "the complex emotional amputation which Jean performed on herself to prevent any recurrence of the grief and hurt which had overwhelmed her then." (11). The emotional amputation which Wyndham reminisces on makes itself known in

Voyage in the Dark, as Anna Morgan's emotional journey through womanhood mirrors Rhys's own. The systems in place did not seem to alter, so Rhys and Anna both altered themselves, like the many women before them.

These sociological systems were known to Rhys, she was just unable to give them a title: sexual scripts under patriarchal society. Like nearly all aspects of human behavior, sexuality evolves through socialization. When that socialization is conducted through means which prioritizes men over women in all aspects, women have little freedom in how they manage their true desires, attractions, wants or needs. Instead, all facets of sexual scripts must be dictated through the male perspective, which historically is constructed through sexual aggression and manipulative tactics. As evident through these novels starting with Jean Rhys, sexual and social liberation for women in the physical and metaphysical sense is an issue which persists. As writing is one of the most intimate and reflective means of liberation, learning through patterns of literature is one of the most valuable assets to creating a better society; through metaphor, ambiguity, and fictionalized anecdotes display oppression which might not have been noted otherwise. Being aware about these systems of power our everyday social environment carves out an opportunity for women to cancel out the negation of identity.

As to metamodernism, it is my conclusion that women's literature progressing in a manner which reveals the most honest, deceitful, painful, and pleasurable parts of womanhood as the genre navigates that grey area between all of it. Eimear McBride and Sally Rooney have achieved that by crafting unique proses and character studies which amplify the strife that the conditions of womanhood stipulate. Although both authors have not explicitly correlated their literary inspiration to Jean Rhys, the modernist influence from *Voyage in the Dark* specifically

makes itself known in the contemporary women's novel through its similarity thematic and stylistic structures.

For one of the more brilliant writers of her time, Jean Rhys often frowned upon herself. According to her, *Voyage in the Dark* was never quite 'right', per say, as during the publication process, she claimed that "I don't know what I feel about the blessed thing. I had the horrors about it and about everything for a bit. I mean the complete futility. Nightmarish." (Letter from Rhys, to Evelyn Scott, 1934.) More frustration arose when her editor forced her to change the ending, as Rhys's original plan was to make Anna die in her botched abortion – instead she had no choice but to leave it ambiguous; another severance of emotion which Rhys endured with ample frustration. Yet, *Voyage in the Dark* is a book which persists in being a paramount example in how scholarship can study modernist women's literature and its intersection with the dismantling of patriarchal control over women's bodies and identities in romantic relationships.

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