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Analysis of *Voyage in the Dark*

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The Objectification of Women

In the novel *Voyage in the Dark* by Jean Rhys, her main character Anna Morgan is forced to learn on her own the importance of women being recognized as individuals. A main theme in Rhys' novel is that women were viewed as objects in society. They were sexual entities that merely wore clothes and were alive for the sole benefit of pleasing men. On page 130 Anna used similes and irony to depict her own ideal of women personified as objects. She objectifies women throughout page 130 only to then question society, wondering if there is more to life than women living for men's benefit and having no personality of their own. This questioning highlights Anna's maturation through the novel. It leaves one hoping she will one day live for her own benefit and develop into something other than an objectified woman.

The theme of women as objects is extremely prominent in Jean Rhys' work *Voyage in the Dark*. Anna Morgan not only points out this theme but also buys into it herself. While she unconsciously slips into the world of prostitution, she realizes the objectification of women that takes place. She sometimes fights against it but appears helpless as she becomes an object as well. On page 130 Anna uses a simile when she describes a black velvet dress that could make a woman look "like a doll or a flower." Ironically the dress is found for sale "in a shop window." By saying a woman who bought this dress would look like something as lifeless as a doll and wilted as a flower shows her own objectification of women. She does not depict the woman as having a personality but describes the woman to look like an object. The irony of it being for sale symbolizes how Anna sells herself, as if she is nothing but an object merely used for being bought and owned by others. By coveting the dress she is wishing for that image

of herself, the image the dress would give her. She idealizes an image that is only found through the clothes one wears and not through her own unique character.

It is also ironic that the dress is poised inside a shop window while she looks at it. This description is ironic because she is picturing a woman in this dress, poised through an untouchable glass barrier. This represents the standard of a perfect, lifeless entity that women were depicted as. They weren't thought of as intelligent, witty, or individualistic. They were idealized as inanimate objects that were merely meant to be ogled at while they lived inhibited lives in their vogue wardrobes. Throughout the novel Anna appears to buy into this vision by selling her body and buying clothes to play the role men want her to play. She avoids discovering her own identity throughout the story and instead concentrates on a man and the clothes she wears, believing they will define her.

Anna reiterates the objectification of women on page 130 when she uses another simile saying "the clothes of most women who passed were like caricatures of clothes in the shop windows". She uses the clothes as the main entity of the women, stating that the clothes of the women passed and "were like caricatures". This statement objectifies the women as lifeless, giving their clothes personality and defining them. The women's movements were secondhand, less alive than the objects they were wearing.

Anna goes on to say that "when they stopped to look you saw their eyes were fixed on the future. 'If I could buy this then of course I'd be quite different.'" This statement reveals the women she sees as not only being personified as objects but thinking of themselves that way as well. They believe the life they lead depends on the clothes they wear. After this statement is when Anna begins to question the idea of women being coveted as objects and not recognized as individual people. This statement seems to be her epiphany. She realizes that the eyes of the women actually lead to a soul but their souls were being wasted on buying objects in order to define themselves. She mentions how the women are filled with all this hope for new clothes in order to have new excitements take place in their

lives. The fashion industry and society keep recycling this pointless hope for women and so she questions “what happens if you don’t hope anymore, if your back’s broken? What happens then?” This question demonstrates Anna’s maturation throughout the novel and the start of her realization that women are more than just lifeless, doll-like objects.

Anna Morgan buys into the objectification of women in *Voyage in the Dark*. She buys the fancy clothes and lives solely to please men. Because of her similes and irony on page 130 she questions the legitimacy of society, wondering what would happen to women if they didn’t live life as objects. Although Anna’s questioning is a mere stepping stone in believing in the uniqueness of women, her simple questioning leaves one hoping she truly matures and grows into her own woman at the end of Rhys’ novel.