

The Anxious Self

An Existential Reading of Jean Rhys's

Good Morning, Midnight

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Introduction

The sensation is instantly recognizable, regardless of where you are in your own life. That peculiar, dizzying feeling, we all experience at some point. Grasping to attain a revelation about ourselves and our existence, and finding whatever it is somewhere just out of reach. Always contingent on the self-relation of the individual, it is a distinctly human endeavor, trying to make sense of our lives: our past, present and future, who we are and might still become. The following master thesis attempts an existential reading of Jean Rhys's novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, while employing Søren Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety as a theoretical crux. Thus aligning an aesthetic work of art and a philosophical concept so that they intersect, allowing them both to enrich and clarify the other. By the privilege of being able to devote the better part of the thesis to one novel only, the approach enables a thorough textual analysis, granting the details and nuances of Rhys's beautiful words and complex narrative construction the attention it deserves. Following this introduction we will commence with a short survey of the concept of anxiety, before taking our cue from Kierkegaard's indirect communication. Adopting a strategy of indirectness for ourselves that allows the concept of anxiety to bookend the analysis of the novel, while otherwise remaining in the back of our minds. At first glance, it seems perhaps an ill-conceived alignment. Rhys and Kierkegaard, on either side of a century and even by most other counts far removed. One is an author who published most of her work during the 1930's, and expresses the inner world of a female protagonist through a fictional narrative. The other belongs to the first half of the 1800's and wrote extensively on various philosophical and religious topics. She wandered the cultural hubs of Paris and London in a time of great social and cultural upheaval. He, a Danish thinker living on the cusp of modern times, has been credited as the forefather of existentialism. Though there is no direct link to connect the two components of this thesis, there is between them a shared affinity for a common subject matter: the inner ruminations that the human psyche is given to engage in when faced with the futility, or alternately the possibility, of its own existence. Much like the concept of anxiety itself, the inspiration to juxtapose the two components of this thesis admittedly sprung out of nothingness at first. A predominantly intuitive notion that philosophy and literature treated and described a similar mode of existence, and that despite the immediate distance, allowing Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety and Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* to resonate with each other might prove to refine our understanding of them both.

What characterizes *Good Morning, Midnight* from the very first page, is the extent to which the narrative is shaped by the consciousness of its protagonist, Sasha, and the mood that permeates all of her thoughts and experiences. She appears consumed by a form of restless despair, an anguish that entails a continual examination of her own consciousness and identity. The narrative construction of the novel ensures that every impression is filtered through her consciousness, and despite her remarkable pain, Sasha displays commendable discipline as a narrator. Perhaps especially the novel's themes, metaphors and images appear to evoke a related preoccupation with the existential. Sasha is acutely aware of her physical appearance, how the state of her clothes changes how other people perceive her, and how the use of words and language can do the same. About her life, she says: "After all this, what happened? What happened was that, as soon as I had the slightest chance of a place to hide in, I crept into it and hid" (Rhys p. 120). Moving between present moment, interior monologue and past remembrance, the narrative gradually uncovers the events and insights that have come to shape Sasha's life. Many have to do with pretense and the inauthentic, hiding one's identity behind a mask, trying to escape the world by taking refuge in a hotel room or allowing insincere language to cloak the true meaning of a statement. From her outsider position, Sasha's lucid, uncompromising gaze presents a subversive point of view on the world. While navigating amongst both social injustices and sexual power politics Sasha shows no uncertain degree of courage by the clarity of her observations. Subtly undermining any respectable, solid assumptions through the use of irony, and with a keen eye for the paradoxical. Though the romantic attachment she craves is closely bound to money, security and power, we also realize the fledgling hope inherent in what can only be Sasha's very last chance at redemption and love. Throughout, Rhys's style remains formally controlled, making use of short staccato words and sentences, as well as insisting melodic repetitions that speak to Sasha's state of mind with a delicately poetic sensibility. The existential themes that are raised generally subsist on a deeper level of the narrative, and while Sasha describes her situation with words like misery and despair, the mention of anxiety in the novel remains within the boundaries of the word's traditional sense: for instance when Sasha speaks of her former husband Enno looking "thin and anxious" (Rhys p. 109). The concept of anxiety is thus not to be imagined as present in the novel in a literal sense. What we will explore is an existential nerve that is mostly to be found on the subliminal, non-verbal level of Sasha's mind: central metaphors that are utilized "to interpret experience and puncture and expose the amorality of power or the sterile arrogance of easy moral judgments" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 112).

Published in 1939, *Good Morning, Midnight* is the last and most well wrought of Rhys's four contemporary novels, which also include *Quartet*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. They were followed by *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, for which she remains most well known. The early approaches to her authorship considered Rhys's work as "thinly disguised autobiography" (Maurel p. 5). Reading her protagonists as one 'composite heroine', at different ages, as if all her writings were one long novel treating the same themes of "isolation and rejection, of cruelty and oppression" (Angier p. 404). Apart from these early attempts, academic criticism generally falls into three main trends. There is the post-colonial approach, which draws on Rhys's Dominican background belonging to a marginal group of white West Indians. Thus providing insightful analysis of some of her distinctive Caribbean images, and voicing the "'terrified consciousness' of the dispossessed colonizer", though failing to take into account those of her texts which do not refer to her home island (Maurel p. 5). When considering the entirety of Rhys's authorship, *Good Morning, Midnight* stands out as perhaps one of the least explicit texts concerning post-colonial issues, and the alienating experience of arriving in Europe from a far away and exotic place. As such it would seem to have less of a warrant to a post-colonial reading than several of her other novels. The publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the consequent rediscovery of Rhys's authorship in the 1960's coincided with the advent of women's studies. Thus a growing interest ensued in reading her novels as explorations of the "disempowerment of women at the hands of male oppressors" (Maurel p. 7). Drawing primarily on thematic content, feminist critics have analyzed Rhys's work in terms of sexual power politics and the discursive implications of the issue of femininity. Yet her protagonists have also been criticized as bad role models as a result of their debilitating passivity and collaborative attitude. Furthermore, by placing Rhys within this particular context critics often disregard that she by no means considered herself a feminist, and thereby run the risk of assigning her work a sort of "unconscious feminism". Though her novels rely on the female point of view, like *Good Morning, Midnight* where Sasha claims to shed tears for all the marginalized and defeated in the world, they do not seem strictly limited to that experience only (Rhys p. 25).

The third and final theoretical approach places Rhys's authorship in the context of literary modernism, and is the one that proves most relevant for this thesis. Though her writing does not by any means embody all of the relevant characteristics, and despite the fact that she outlived the movement by quite a few decades, Rhys's work does display several distinctly modernist features, "especially where the emphasis on subjectivity and the attention paid to form are concerned" (Maurel p. 6). In her own life, both historically and

geographically, Rhys was at the center of the literary world. Though she did not fraternize much with the famous group of modernist expatriates that lived in Paris at the same time that she did, remaining instead somewhat of an outsider, like her protagonists often are. As of late most critics have favored a theoretical context that blends all three approaches of gender, colonialism and modernism, allowing them to coalesce (Maurel p. 8). The same holds true for the theoretical approach of the literary analysis in this thesis as well, which presumes all three motifs not only to be present in Rhys's novels, but to a large extent also to be intertwined. Yet there is one additional reason why modernism proves to have even further relevance precisely when attempting to perform an existential reading of *Good Morning, Midnight*. One might argue that the potential of modernism was present in the development of literature before the advent of the movement itself, that it is "possible to discern its origins long before we see its function" (Bradbury p. 30). And Rhys is known to have drawn much of her influence from the nineteenth-century precursors of modernism, especially French writers such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Generally speaking, the modernist sensibility is often characterized by the following concerns, which all resonate fairly well with the novel:

[T]o objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind's inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalize the rational, to defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, to conventionalize the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of everyday life, to intellectualize the emotional, to secularize the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, mass as a form of energy, and uncertainty as the only certain thing. (Bradbury p. 48)

Taking into account that modernism tends to be defined in slightly different terms depending on whom you ask, the 1890's generation of literary critics, who were among those responsible for cementing an understanding of the modernist movement in the minds of the present time public: when asked to look for "specifically 'modern' qualities, to whom did *they* turn? To Strindberg and Nietzsche, Büchner and Kierkegaard, Bourget and Hamsun and Maeterlinck" (Bradbury p. 42-43). In other words, "the idea of the modern is bound up with consciousness of disorder, despair, and anarchy", and we are therefore able to trace a line of coinciding interest, however faint, from Kierkegaard, through the modern and modernism, to Rhys and *Good Morning, Midnight* (Bradbury p. 41).

When first discussing framework, surely there are those who would be inclined to object that there are other writers, closer to Rhys historically and in background, that may be better suited to the kind of collocation this thesis has set out to perform. In fact, anxiety as an

existential phenomenon has borne many different guises over the years, both in philosophy and in literature. What Kierkegaard described as dizziness or vertigo, became in Heidegger's conception a related sense of falling. Camus later described the absurdity of individual experience, and there is also Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, first published in French the year before *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sartre would, being a contemporary of Rhys's and tied to Paris like she was, appear to be the closest possible match, had it not been for the nihilistic insistence invested in the nausea that Antoine, the protagonist, is accosted by. The tacking on of days onto days, without rhyme or reason, in an "endless, monotonous addition" (Sartre p. 61). Bearing in mind that Kierkegaard was the first to elevate anxiety to the status of an independent philosophical problem, existentialism is largely regarded to have grown out of the foundation he provided. And regardless of the affinities we have just mentioned and will go on to explore in more detail shortly, there are certain merits inherent in opting to start at the beginning. Though all of the above belong within the same tradition, it would be an anachronism to speak of existentialism when discussing Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety. A differentiation is in order, and it therefore seems appropriate to specify that our analysis is an exploration of anxiety as an existential, though not existentialist, theme in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Placing the novel up against another work of fiction like *Nausea* would in addition result in the sacrifice of the aesthetic element of this thesis, which remains crucial. And although several of the writers mentioned produced parallel authorships within literature and philosophy, there are strong reasons to contest any objection against the inclusion of Kierkegaard's texts among the major writings of philosophy (Hannay p. 49). Critics mostly reference the aesthetic interest he demonstrates through his own playful use of form. Refusing to adhere to the strict formulations of a philosophical treatise, yet why should he, when the content of the text itself insist on the individual? In fact existential philosophy has always regarded literature as an outlet alongside that of the philosophical text. Even though the literary qualities of Kierkegaard's writings are such that they should not be overlooked, it is perhaps his roundabout way of constructing an argument, and related game of hide-and-seek behind a mottled gallery of pseudonyms, that have caused many in the past to write him off in terms of philosophical importance.

Which leads us to our final remark before embarking on the task at hand. What Kierkegaard himself termed a technique of "indirect communication" has puzzled his readers by its sophisticated irony, its parodic style and playing with conventions, and constant refusal to allow any closure in the matter of intended authorial meaning (Hannay p. 48-49). As a result, Kierkegaard's writings are highly complex and perhaps, one might say, dialogical, and

therefore more in the vein of the philosophical tradition of Plato (Hannay p. 61). Accordingly, Kierkegaard's indirect communication is not designed to affect his readers in an instructing manner. Instead, it is the very obliqueness of his writing that has the power to spark unforeseen directions of thought in those who enter his world. The same reasoning also applies to his concept of anxiety, and the almost modern tinge it carries. No doubt there is something in the way Kierkegaard formulates the concept that speaks to the beginnings of a notion of the self as an individual consciousness, which resonates immediately with the themes and narrative construction of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Kierkegaard's work also offers direct comment on certain movements and sensibilities that came into their own right most notably with the advent of modernism. His writings in general, and the concept of anxiety in specific, has had continued relevance precisely because of the way they have worked themselves into our culture, and have been internalized by others as inspiration for their own work. As a result, even if one might argue that his texts are of a literary nature, the evidence of Kierkegaard's philosophical importance is clear in the history of his reception, and the consequent thinkers and writers his influence has worked upon, however indirectly (Hannay p. 50-51). Through a juxtaposition of anxiety and Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* this thesis will attempt a related strategy of indirectness, by allowing the concept to bookend our literary analysis. We will begin by exploring the concept of anxiety as an existential phenomenon, before allowing it to linger in the back of our minds, providing only small insights and points of interest while we work our way through a series of different approaches to the novel. Moving from periphery to center, before finally coming full circle with an exploration of the resonance the concept of anxiety provides in relation to Sasha's paradoxical demise. In a sense attempting to anchor the complexity of the theoretical concept in the specificity that is Sasha's consciousness, while also utilizing anxiety to describe the non-verbal despair that characterizes her narrative.

1 The Concept of Anxiety

Søren Kierkegaard was, under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, the first to elevate angst, anxiety or dread, to the status of an independent philosophical problem. Since then the concept has worked itself into our culture to such an extent that we hardly question its presence. Anxiety has gained acceptance as a condition of the human psyche. It is perhaps foremost associated with a certain existential sensibility, described in literature and philosophy alike, and has of course also had a strong impact on the discipline of psychology (Grøn p. 14). This pervasiveness will allow us to explore Kierkegaard's conception of anxiety on the sole basis of his own writings, even though it constitutes a fairly isolated reading in terms of context. On that note, instead of viewing the juxtaposition of anxiety and *Good Morning, Midnight* as forcing Kierkegaard's concept to do something he would not himself have intended, our point of departure will be a passage from his principal work on the subject, *The Concept of Anxiety* from 1844. Speaking of poetry as a representation of the issues that concern our lives, Kierkegaard writes: "It is indeed certain that all poets describe love, but however pure and innocent, it is presented in such a way that anxiety is also posited with it. To pursue this further is a matter for an esthetician" (Kierkegaard p. 71).¹ The premise of this master thesis is perhaps best articulated precisely in this manner, utilizing a philosophical concept as a starting point and doing what a student of aesthetics can and must: attempt to apply it to a work of art. This first chapter will be dedicated to the concept of anxiety itself. To the constellation of traits and features Kierkegaard utilizes to delineate anxiety from related phenomena. The term itself is highly complex and we would be hard pressed to achieve anything resembling a definitive definition. Yet our brief survey of Kierkegaard's description of anxiety will at least allow us to suggest some of the most important characteristics of an experience of anxiety, which will then inform our subsequent analysis of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Incidentally, Kierkegaard is said not to have cared much for novels, he much preferred poetry. Yet although his thoughts will influence our literary analysis, it will not determine all, and despite his antipathy the thematic content of *Good Morning, Midnight* seems to make it ideally suited for the sort of collocation this thesis will attempt. Besides, there is much to be said about Rhys's poetic use of language.

¹ In order to preserve the narrative and argumentative cohesion of this thesis, all quotes from Kierkegaard's works will be rendered in an English translation.

It appears appropriate to first approach the concept of anxiety with the question of why Kierkegaard would place the term in such a privileged position among his writings. What is it anxiety can tell us about human existence, in short, what does Kierkegaard consider to be at stake when we experience anxiety in our lives? One clue can be found in the title of *The Concept of Anxiety*, which continues: *A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Kierkegaard's foundation is in religious thought, and so his natural point of departure concerns the question of hereditary sin, and consequently also the nature of freedom, for the two are closely intertwined. Kierkegaard writes: "The present work has set as its task the psychological treatment of the concept of "anxiety," but in such a way that it constantly keeps *in mente* [in mind] and before its eye the dogma of hereditary sin" (Kierkegaard p. 14). The first chapter of his book is thus devoted to an account of how hereditary sin first came into the world with Adam, and how it continues to influence every man and woman that follow in his line. It is a mismatched and peculiar construct, which combines a category of nature with one of ethics, and could therefore potentially result in a troublesome conclusion about human existence for Kierkegaard. One might easily interpret hereditary sin as an expression of fate, one that every individual is bound to, and in that moment watch any notion of freedom dissipate. But Kierkegaard is unwilling to accept hereditary sin in this guise, and instead performs a critique of the traditional ecclesiastical interpretations of the term (Grøn p. 16-18). Instead of supposing for every later individual that sin is already present in the world, thus allowing Adam to be placed "fantastically outside" the history of his own kin, Kierkegaard insists that sin comes into the world with every single individual, by way of a qualitative leap. And this leap is only possible through an experience of anxiety (Kierkegaard p. 25). In his initial discussion of hereditary sin, Kierkegaard is thus able to chain anxiety and freedom together. In order to describe anxiety, he must first go the way of hereditary sin. Yet even though it forms a foundation for the rest of his treatise, and remains present throughout, as soon as anxiety is established as a concept, hereditary sin recedes somewhat into the background. The occurrence of anxiety is, after all, "the pivot upon which everything turns" (Kierkegaard p. 43). Though Kierkegaard is regarded as a primarily religious thinker, the concept of anxiety itself is religious only in the sense that it offers the possibility of opening up a path towards a more authentic and some would say enlightened existence, both religious and otherwise. Yet despite what the extended title would suggest, the phenomenon does not seem so strictly limited to a religious worldview as one might initially imagine. Returning to the quote, we

come to understand that Kierkegaard uses the religious concept of hereditary sin as a springboard to explore his interest in the psychology and spirit of human beings.

1.1 Man as Synthesis

Kierkegaard's description is based on an underlying assumption that there is a potential for anxiety in everyone, but that it is a phenomenon that can only be experienced by human beings. Anxiety cannot be found in animals "because by nature the beast is not qualified as spirit", because unlike human beings, animals do not exist as a synthesis (Kierkegaard p. 42). Kierkegaard writes that any human being consists of two components in synthesis "the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third" (Kierkegaard p. 43). Thus building on the archaic notion that man consists of two fundamental 'factors', a human being is both body and mind, and could not exist without either one or the other. Through synthesis the two are united in a third, the spirit, the very aspect that separates a human being from the animal kingdom. They are separate, yet belong together, and as such a human being is, in and of itself, a relation of parts. Kierkegaard scholar Arne Grøn writes that: "The heterogeneous is held together by the individual relating to himself as soul and body, as temporal and eternal. In other words, the heterogeneous is held together in a self-relation. This is what Kierkegaard means by spirit being "the third factor"" (Grøn p. 11). While the body is temporal, the spirit is eternal, and Kierkegaard therefore institutes a second formulation on the synthesis, which together form the components of human existence. The synthesis thus becomes situated in time, and we remain "stretched out in the relation between the past and the future" (Grøn p. 12). Because we are a synthesis of these disparate elements, human beings suffer from a natural weakness that for Kierkegaard also becomes our most important charge. The body and mind, the temporal and eternal are joined together by spirit in the moment but the connection is vulnerable. Thus a human being is a "constituted being in that his coherence or identity with himself is fragile. Consequently, it becomes a task to "cohere" with oneself" (Grøn p. 10). The existential challenge we face in life is therefore not found in external achievements, or goals that we ourselves, or the society around us may determine. Our greatest challenge is to become one with ourselves. Anxiety is present in the spirit in order to awaken us to the fact that we are a relation within ourselves. Though even when we fail to cohere in this manner, the bond is not necessarily broken. Even though the spirit may not be apparent, it is still there, but in a dreaming state. The different factors of the synthesis belong together even in the misrelation,

which means that they can also continue to exist negatively (Grøn p. 10). Often resulting in an experience of the past becoming so heavy that it “closes in on itself”, or alternatively, in an experience where the possibilities we envision for our future become “light” and “fantastic” (Grøn p. 12). Anxiety is thus a double-edged sword, built upon a self-relation, an awareness of being an individual, and all the possibilities that this entails.

1.2 Fear and Dizziness

Kierkegaard also attempts to describe anxiety by delineating it from the related phenomenon of fear. When a person experiences fear it is almost always directed at something fairly specific. Be it spiders or enclosed spaces, fear is always linked to an object or situation. It is a kindred phenomenon to anxiety and for the most part, in our daily speech, it is difficult to separate one from the other. Yet as opposed to fear, anxiety is unrelated to the objects and external situations of this world. It causes in us a feeling Kierkegaard likens to that of a severe dizzy spell:

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. (Kierkegaard p. 61)

When we cast our gaze down into the darkness of an abyss, we experience a feeling of dizziness. This feeling does not arise from the abyss itself, but rather from within the one who stares down into it. Standing on the precipice, the gaping hole beneath appears about to devour you. It is as if the bottom of the drop suddenly rushes forward, even though you remain perfectly still. Yet your balance is thrown, and out of the dizziness that ensues springs a realization that you are staring into the nothingness within yourself. At that moment your confidential way of viewing the world is shown to be a construct. The world appears to end and take you with it, yet simultaneously you are separated from it and singled out as an individual (Grøn p. 6-7). Put in other words, we might say that fear is transitive: it “takes” an object. Anxiety on the other hand, is intransitive and reflexive. It transforms an unspecified fearfulness into anxiety of nothingness itself, and pulls the one who experiences it into a reflexive loop of self-relation. Fear is external, while anxiety rises from within. It is founded on the possibility of freedom rather than anything specific, and as such, anxiety constitutes the subject that it affects. The very indefiniteness of anxiety points back to the individual, because when everything else is uncertain, there question of how the individual will position

itself towards the uncertainty it experiences still remains. In this manner, anxiety constitutes the individual as separate from the rest of the world, and Kierkegaard has thus outlined a sense of alienation that resonates well with a modern and modernist sensibility, despite the fact that his words were written almost a full century ahead in time (Grøn p. 6-7).

We have already mentioned that the two versions of synthesis include a dimension that specifies human existence as an event in time, and when discussing anxiety more in detail we discover that it is also inscribed with a temporal aspect, in the sense that what we find ourselves being anxious about most often is not something in our present or past. On the contrary, anxiety concerns itself primarily with the unknown nature of our future. Thus it is once more given an indefinite quality, and yet one that is far more comprehensive than fear. It alludes to the fact that our lives are but an occurrence in time. It begins, and then at some later point it unceremoniously ends. And yet as long as we exist the future still holds promise. Regardless of what our lives may have held up until this point, and what it currently holds, the future is still open. It may yet be changed: it holds the possibility of something other than the present moment. Since Kierkegaard has argued successfully that we are not bound by fate to hereditary sin, to dance endlessly as the marionettes of a divine father, each and every human being is given a choice. Anxiety rises out of nothingness, it is both nowhere and everywhere at the same time. It has no object, yet it is by no means nothing. Anxiety may become so oppressing that it causes your breathing to constrict. Yet it also allows the individual to look within itself and realize the terrible and wonderful truth, that it is free to make a choice. In Kierkegaard's own words, anxiety is "altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" (Kierkegaard p. 42).

1.3 Learning to be Anxious

The notion of man as synthesis and the reflexive nature attributed to anxiety leave us in no doubt of the complexity of the phenomenon. Yet in learning to be anxious there are additional complications to consider. In anxiety we relate to our own situation, but the situation manifests itself as indeterminate. It demands that we make a choice, and therefore leaves us with a feeling of urgency. We are put before ourselves as a self who can relate to our situation in one way, or in another. Just like Adam and Eve did when choosing whether or not to eat the forbidden fruit. Thus a doubling occurs, for anxiety is already a relation. And we appear to see ourselves as someone who relates to themselves in anxiety. We must

consider the possibility of our future, but not just any possibility: “the possibility of the self relating to itself differently or to becoming someone else” (Grøn p. 16). Considering the dialectical determinations of anxiety, Kierkegaard states that it entails a “psychological ambiguity”, that anxiety is “*a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy*” (Kierkegaard p. 42). In relating to ourselves, Kierkegaard thus establishes an ambiguous possibility, “either to stand by ourselves (to embrace ourselves) or not to stand by ourselves (not wanting to be ourselves)” (Grøn p. 16). Through the notion that anxiety is both something we must attempt to free ourselves from, and the very thing that can set us free, we come to understand that it holds a simultaneous possibility for both freedom and unfreedom. Anxiety is thus seen to be fundamentally ambiguous and paradoxical.

Kierkegaard discusses the different ways of being unfree in anxiety more at length in *The Sickness unto Death* from 1849, where he positions the term despair as a representative for unfreedom, and the misrelation we mentioned briefly when introducing the concept of man as synthesis. Though Kierkegaard himself is not always consistent in the use of his own terminology, we will because of the limited scope of this thesis have to refrain from delineating the two, and instead consider despair as a variation on anxiety. Although the concepts are different, they do maintain a similar function in throwing the impermanence of our existence into relief. Kierkegaard goes on to specify that despair entails not being ourselves, and differentiates between three basic forms: “first, the despair that is ignorant of being despair; second, in despair not to will to be oneself; third, in despair to will to be oneself” (Grøn p. 90). He thus establishes several different ways in which it is possible to relate negatively to anxiety. Only anxiety itself is considered to be fruitful and thought to lead to a higher understanding of our own existence, while the remaining consist either in attempts to escape or ignore any such experience. We understand that anxiety may at the same time lead us to a greater understanding of our existence as human beings, but if handled incorrectly, anxiety may also bind us in a self-relation that leads nowhere.

What is worth noting in The Concept of Anxiety is that we reach an understanding of man as a self though anxiety in which we are placed outside of ourselves and where we can see ourselves as a stranger. As mentioned, the ambiguous meaning of anxiety was this: it gives us the possibility of discovering ourselves as selves, but of us becoming unfree in anxiety, which in such an anxiety means that we are not ourselves. (Grøn p. 87)

Our task is thus modified to entail cohering with ourselves by learning to relate to our anxiety in the right manner. Which constitute one of the most striking paradoxes concerning the

concept of anxiety: that one must learn to embrace it without losing oneself in it, in order to truly be free. It follows, that for Kierkegaard, the self is not a static essence. Through anxiety we are given the task of becoming ourselves, and this becoming is a process we must constantly engage in. Somewhat programmatically Kierkegaard states: “The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself” (Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death* p. 29). And becoming oneself, through anxiety, is the most exalted state a human being can achieve.

1.4 Freedom and Choice

We understand that for Kierkegaard it is a basic assumption that to be human is a complex existence. And we are not born human beings: it is something we must become, through the anxiety that rises out of our self-awareness. While original sin seems to represent a notion of fate that entraps and hinders, anxiety opens up for “the possibility of possibility”, and thus enables freedom from the determinism of original sin, freedom to make choices and through those choices strive to cohere with oneself (Kierkegaard p. 42).

Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness. (Kierkegaard p. 61)

Freedom is what the anxious self discovers, when first struck by the rush of dizziness. And thus anxiety comes to stand in opposition to fate. In anxiety we discover freedom: our own “freedom as a possibility” (Grøn p. 14). Neither original sin nor freedom can be inherited, and yet it was the fall that made freedom possible, by Adam and Eve’s choice of that which was forbidden. Our own experience of anxiety reminds us of that choice, and makes the possibility of our own freedom visible to us. Once again the choice emphasizes that anxiety is an ambiguous power, which can bind us and cause freedom to succumb, or alternately set us free. Though these short considerations can only begin to suggest the complexity of Kierkegaard’s concept, they have hopefully been able to convey some of the most important characteristics of anxiety as an existential phenomenon. Characteristics that will enable us to keep the concept of anxiety in the back of our minds while we transition to our analysis of *Good Morning, Midnight*, and a protagonist who appears to lead an existence entailing anything other than freedom.

2 Rooms, Streets and a Rootless Existence

Sasha Jansen has arrived in Paris, a single woman, her youth in decline. She has found a place to eat in at night, a place to have her drink after dinner. She has “arranged her little life”, and checked in at a hotel that is significantly located in what the French call an “impasse”: a narrow cobble-stoned street ending in a flight of steps (Rhys p. 9). From the very first page of Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*, we sense just how unlikely it is that her protagonist will go anywhere. Sasha is stuck in an emotional as well as a physical blind alley, with little chance of escape. She has just returned from London to the city she used to call home, sponsored by a friend claiming to hate seeing her so shabby and distraught. She is getting to look old, she realizes, and the unhappiness of her existence is starting to take its toll. A change of scenery and a new set of clothes constitute the prescribed solution, a new hairdo, and perhaps a new dress. Ten days on her own in Paris where her appearance must not be allowed to fall apart, even if her insides are crumbling. She assures herself: “This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much drinking, avoidance of certain cafés, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go off beautifully” (Rhys p. 14). Yet therein lies the problem. Because Paris is by no means neutral ground: instead every street is fraught with the possible threat of painful memories, or perhaps even worse, of happy ones.

The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance – no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no ‘Here this happened, here that happened’. Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if you can help it. (Rhys p. 14)

Sasha’s “programme” involves navigating the city streets in a very specific manner. Though her life may seem “simple and monotonous”, with hours on end, even days to fill with leisurely activities like shopping and going to the cinema, it is really “a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don’t, streets that are friendly, streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be” (Rhys p. 40). Sasha’s whole life, her past and her future seem laid out in these locales, which Rhys describes in evocative detail. And which represent some of her most eloquent and powerful writing, “perfect little poems about places” (Angier p. 386). Sasha displays an extreme sensitivity towards her surroundings, resulting in a sense of place that elicits symbolic depth, and an almost material anchoring of Sasha’s memory in the urban topography of Paris (Selboe p.

125). While her interior monologue skips freely between memory and present moment, her remembrances are often triggered by a specific place, making it seem as if the novel was built upon a skeleton of streets and rooms. And so despite the non-linear nature of the narrative, the events and episodes appear to take place within a grid of locations. The ones that recur most frequently are hotel rooms, but also restaurants, bars, and lavatories. In fact, of the novel's four parts, the majority either begins or ends with a consideration of the place Sasha is in. Making her hotel room a point of departure to which we repeatedly return.

Though Sasha appears fixed on adhering to the route she has laid out for herself, trying to avoid unruly recollections, the gramophone record in her head keeps spinning, illuminating the city along her path: "I can see myself coming out of the Métro station at the Rond-Point every morning at half-past eight, walking along the Avenue Marigny" (Rhys p. 15-16). And when a memory is first established, it often prompts a string of others, moving with the ebb and tide of Sasha's consciousness. Because places and interiors become so saturated with her emotions, memories and personality, they often seem to take on human characteristics for themselves, and Sasha tends to describe them in terms of being either friendly or hostile. Like the Morning and Midnight of the novel's title, the locations are divided into binary opposites, giving them an atmosphere of darkness or light, death or life, enemy or friend. Sasha has traveled to Paris in order to effect a transformation, working to become a more socially acceptable version of herself. The places she finds herself in appear closely linked to her objective: they mirror her as much as she mirrors them. If the room is light and airy it seems to open up all the possibilities in the world, most importantly the possibility of a different life. Yet when Sasha feels down and out, the houses appear menacing and cruel, to the point of the nightmarish:

Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters. If you have money and good friends, houses are just houses with steps and a front-door – friendly houses where the door opens and someone meets you, smiling. If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors, no lit windows, just frowning darkness. Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another. Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer. (Rhys p. 28)

Moving back and forth between these two extremes, Paris comes to inhabit such a crucial role in the narrative that it almost becomes an additional character. It is the city of lights, the city of love and romance, yet Sasha thinks to herself: "Paris is looking very nice tonight. ...

You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be!” (Rhys p. 15). As such the city also serves to juxtapose Sasha’s experiences and her expectations. She appears to cling to whatever hope is left in her heart, but moving through the city she is overtaken by memories again and again. Thus an ironic relationship is established, where dream is placed up against reality, and we are made aware of the fundamental discrepancy between the two. Even on the descriptive level, Rhys’s meticulous attention to the details of the environments Sasha traverses, both interior and exterior, allows her a similar play on opposites and contradictions.

Though the city is usually considered an anonymous space, Sasha’s narrative ensures that Paris appears almost as if constructed out of the material of her own memories. The continual resurfacing of her past thus “haunts and frustrates her yearning for a new self” (Muneuchi p. 132). So that her attempts to avoid unwanted reminiscences come to dominate her existence, and dictate her movements around the city. In the beginning for instance, she wanders the back streets. It is only later, when she is “lifted by a new hat and hairdo”, that she feels “confident enough to go to the famous Place de l’Odéon” (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 73). Yet it only takes one false step or moment of distraction before Sasha suddenly finds herself in the wrong place, before her feet have unwittingly taken her to a location that sparks her memory: “This damned room – it’s saturated with the past. ... It’s all the rooms I’ve ever slept in, all the streets I’ve ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms” (Rhys p. 91). While the city takes on the traits of Sasha’s psychological interior, it at the same time becomes claustrophobic and completely vast. It is almost as if the novel portrays two somewhat different cities simultaneously. One is a Paris of physical streets, landmarks and cafés. The other is an urban landscape constructed solely out of the fabric of memories, where scenes from a life play and replay themselves without end. If only Sasha could locate a nice hotel room, a light one, it seems as if all her future happiness depends upon it.

2.1 A Nice Room, a Beautiful Room

The room her friend has set her up with on the other hand seems to be everything Sasha wants to avoid. All musty carpets and dank interiors, Sasha imagines Sidonie “carefully looking round for an hotel just like this one. She imagines it’s my atmosphere. God, its an insult when you come to think about it! More dark rooms, more red curtains” (Rhys p. 12). Still, upon her arrival, the room itself greets Sasha like an old friend: ““Quite like old times,’

the room says. ‘Yes? No?’ There are two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a curtain. It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible” (Rhys p. 9). The descriptive details again appear striking by virtue of the accurate characterizations of an environment, sparing the reader no sight or odor for mere convenience. And we are instantly led to understand that this particular hotel belongs to a world of back alleyways and sad fates, of anonymous misery and money-troubles, far away from the brightly lit boulevards of the rich and fashionable. Thus hotel rooms also come to demonstrate an accurate ability to confirm the “social value” of its occupants (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 125). We initially get to know Sasha’s character and her story somewhat indirectly, and partly as a result of how she relates to her accommodations. In the narrative the hotel room is positioned to function as a “place to hide in”, a potential safe haven from whatever goes on in the outside world, and a “dry place”, where Sasha can escape the numerous metaphors concerning water and death by drowning (Rhys p. 10). Yet besides from providing shelter, a hotel room can also be a prison, further emphasizing the importance of obtaining, not just any room, but a room of the right variety:

‘A nice room?’ Of course, une belle chambre, the client wants. The patronne says she has a very beautiful room on the second floor, which will be vacant in about a month’s time. That’s the way it is, that’s the way it goes, that’s the way it went. ... A room. A nice room. A beautiful room. A beautiful room with bath. A very beautiful room with bath. [...] Swing high. ... Now, slowly, down. A beautiful room with bath. A room with bath. A nice room. A room. (Rhys p. 29)

Throughout the novel Sasha spends quite a lot of time and effort looking and longing for a room that meet these criteria, further enmeshing the literal space of the hotel room with her internal conflict. In the quoted passage, she mimics the jargon of hoteliers, and the excessive repetitions result in a kind of overstatement that carries an ironic tinge. Sasha thus exploits the expressive value of the phrases in order to “sum up her life and its ups and downs, also reflected in the almost visual, up-and-down structure of the paragraph”, which by reverting back to the original description succeeds in forming a perfect circle (Maurel p. 124).

The hotel room remains a complex and interesting image, for several different reasons. In part because it represents a sphere where the public and the private become integrated, within one and the same structure. Where complete strangers go to sleep in rooms right next to each other, separated only by paper-thin walls. And where women are routinely exposed to the stares of the male guests staying in the same establishment: in Sasha’s instance represented by the haunting presence of a man she calls the commis. Though she

dreams that a nice hotel room can enable her transformation, the required privacy is jeopardized, making the location unfit for “fruitful self-discovery” (Muneuchi p. 129). So that while Rhys creates a protagonist who “believes in the romanticizing idea that the hotel provides privacy and thus a place to reconstruct her life, she also undermines the idea by making her hotel a place for the display of women as objects defined by the masculine gaze” (Muneuchi p. 130). A hotel room is also a home of a fundamentally impermanent nature. And from the snippets of her past that Sasha recounts, we surmise that she has spent much of her life staying in a string of shabby hotels, one after the other. Which instead of providing a satisfying temporary home are outfitted so as not to inspire a sense of belonging. The hotel room represents the fleeting nature of modern urban relationships, which are based around transience, anonymity and the impersonal. And which in turn facilitate a desolate and lonely experience of the modern city. Sasha’s internal monologue signals that hers has been a life spent in restless movement, largely unable to find a meaningful connection to her surroundings, and marred by the absence of a sense of belonging. Though we cannot blame her for lack of trying. Sasha says: “I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can’t escape from your fate? I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219” (Rhys p. 32). Though once again, she hopes to seek refuge in a yet another room for rent, not in a real home. The hotel room may initially promise her a chance to delineate a space of her own amidst the bustle of the city, but the promise is a construct. The hotel room is in its essence an anonymous space, which explains why most specimens look exactly the same. It can never constitute an authentic home, instead the false promise results in Sasha repeatedly being trapped in an equivalent anonymity. Where her misery is the same, and where any growth or change within her self is frustrated and impeded.

In fact, throughout the entirety of the novel there are no real homes. The only personal space we encounter is Serge’s artist’s studio, where Sasha goes off into a dream, imagining living around the corner “in a room as empty as this”, with nothing but a bed, a looking-glass and a stove to keep her warm (Rhys p. 83). The empty space and light walls stand in stark contrast to the musty hotels of Sasha’s description. Which despite all the variations, with or without bath and so on, seem to suggest that difference is an illusion, in reality only “sameness” masquerading as something it is not (Maurel p. 124). Thus the hotel jargon is shown to perform a concealment of sorts, which often hides the opposite of the expected. The lobby and reception desk look presentable enough, yet the hallway of every floor above is full of clutter (Rhys p. 13). There is a flowered carpet on the bathroom floor, which Sasha

watches the cockroaches crawl out from underneath, and then back again. Even in the establishments where you can have your meal brought up on the dinner-wagon, the waiter has a louse on his collar (Rhys p. 29). And while the clerk may insist on the positive qualities when presenting the beautiful room to a potential guest, appearance and reality have a way of rarely matching up in Rhys's universe.

[N]ever tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system. All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet. A room is the place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is. Why should I worry about changing my room? (Rhys p. 33)

Thus even her attempts to change her room turn out to be a dead end for Sasha, it cannot provide her with a safe place to hide, at least not for long. Through a lack of privacy, standardized impersonal décor and assumed impermanence the hotel room comes to symbolize the disconnectedness and insecurity that characterizes Sasha's existence. In the end, it can only disappoint her expectations and refuse to fulfill her dream (Muneuchi p. 134). Yet she must continue the routine of her "programme", and her movements through the city, even though her behavior increasingly resembles that of a sleepwalker: without personality, almost without self, trapped in a spiral of streets and rooms with no apparent escape in sight. Sasha tells herself: "Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room" (Rhys p. 120).

2.2 Paris Between the Wars

Rhys has drawn the outline of Paris city streets complete with sidewalk cafés for Sasha to frequent, bars to haunt, recognizable street names and neighborhoods, as well as landmarks to catch glimpse of in the foggy distance. Though the described topography of the city is often very detailed and specific, when time comes to populate these same streets with characters Rhys remains equivalently vague. Sasha is no exception: "Nationality – that's what has puzzled him. I ought to have put nationality by marriage", she says about filling in the hotel register (Rhys p. 13). We understand that she has lived for an extended period of time in Paris and in London, yet even though she speaks both languages she is ill at ease in either city. Though her hat shouts "Anglaise", we are made to see that she does not truly belong with the English, just as she is perceived to be foreign by the French (Rhys p. 14). In fact, Sasha

appears curiously rootless, and despite being a character who spends a fair amount of time reliving her past, she makes no mention of her childhood or adolescence. Whatever rising popularity Freud's theories of early development might have reached at the time, it is almost as if Sasha's distant past does not exist (Bradbury p. 27). We might interpret this absence as the "erasure" of an underlying colonial identity, yet we are by no means limited to that perspective (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 117). Because the same sense of rootlessness also constitutes a trait that has been closely associated with an entire generation of expatriates that inhabited the city roughly in the same years that Sasha would have been there. Hers is the Paris of the 1920's and 1930's, when it was the unquestionable center of literary and artistic activity. With the shared trauma of the First World War and other significant historic events affecting the collective consciousness, what Gertrude Stein coined the 'Lost Generation' of American writers flocked to the city, as did writers and young people from all over Europe: from England, Ireland, Scandinavia and Germany, but primarily from America (Selboe p. 146). We get a sense of the international atmosphere by the multiple languages that appear in the novel. Apart from English and French, even German is spoken, and Russian is referenced in passing several times. And several of the languages are rendered directly in the text, without concomitant translation, thus trusting the reader to either have a working knowledge of all three, or for the most part being able to analyze the meaning of the utterances from within the context of the narrative. All of which results in Sasha's environment appearing truly multi-lingual. Rapid social changes caused a mass of people to be drawn to Paris at the time, because it provided escape from a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement, to a feeling instead of living "creatively unfettered, at the cutting edge of art in the cultural center of the world" (Cowley p. xiii). Though the Lost Generation was by no means a homogenous group, largely consisting of American modernist writers, they were united by a deep-set sense of rootlessness. They were also known to hang around Montparnasse and Boulevard Saint-Germain, in fact frequenting several of the same establishments that Sasha visits during the novel. As it turns out, many of the traits associated with the Lost Generation supply relevant context for *Good Morning, Midnight*: Rhys was after all also a modernist, exile and expatriate, though of a different origin.

Historically the expatriates, American or otherwise, tended to follow the same route: moving from alienation to reintegration, from departure to return (Cowley p. 289). If we attempt to decode what little information we are granted about Sasha's past, and forget for the moment that she is a fictional character, we imagine that she must have followed the same general pattern of movement. Where she came from originally we do not know for certain,

but after moving restlessly about Europe for years, from Amsterdam and Brussels, to Paris and the south of France, she finally settles down in England. Making London the closest thing to a home she appears to have had. In the retrospective parts of the narrative, she and Enno are primarily penniless in Paris, but it does not seem to bother them as much as Sasha's financial troubles bother her at present: "No more war – never, never, never. Après la guerre, there'll be a good time everywhere" (Rhys p. 96). With the promise of peaceful times ahead they seem hopeful about the future, like F. Scott Fitzgerald is to have said at the time, "even when you were broke [...] you didn't worry about money because it was in such profusion around you" (Cowley p. 295). Thinking back to their time in Paris, Sasha wonders: "Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner, in the Rue Victor-Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? [...] Was it in 1926 or 1927?" (Rhys p. 11). Though the carefree atmosphere of the 1920's could not last forever. The crash of the New York stock exchange in 1929 heralded a significant change in atmosphere as the economic difficulties began to affect the European markets as well. Money became harder to come by, and a sense of uneasiness and desperation began to spread through the general public. A new mood became perceptible: "of doubt and even defeat. People began to wonder whether it wasn't possible that not only their ideas but their whole lives had been set in the wrong direction" (Cowley p. 306). The 1930's actually began with an additional explosion of American tourists traveling to Paris, a few of which make an appearance as minor characters in Sasha's narrative. Before finally, the tide turned, and thousands of people started to make their way back towards their place of origin, all over Europe and the United States.

Though Rhys's writing is generally considered apolitical, as is the modernist movement overall, and the Lost Generation writers too for that matter. There occurred for writers at the time an increasing emphasis on depicting social realities. All in all, the 1930's became a period of deep "reappraisal and social and intellectual change" (Bradbury p. 28). The Lost Generation credo entailed striving to "suggest the larger picture", without "making a pretentious effort to present the whole of it" (Cowley p. 298). Something along the same lines could be said of Rhys as well, for though she does not attempt to make social structures an outspoken theme in her novel, it would be a mistake to claim that she was ignorant of her surroundings. Rhys had a "wry sense of humour which she often turned on herself, but it was also often political, in the sense of being shrewdly aware of power and willing to engage with it" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 116). Even though *Good Morning, Midnight* contains just a few direct references to historical context, they are not completely absent, hidden instead in the

small details that make up the background of the novel. Sandwiched between two World Wars, and in the midst of an economic depression, it does not speak of politics precisely. Yet Rhys's indirect commentary on the serious moral and psychological crisis appear perhaps even more poignant as a result. As such, whatever social and political impact there is, remains buried deep within the text, allowing the novel to effect a "subtle and damning demonstration of the bankrupt spiritual context of a Europe flirting with the threat of totalitarianism" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 110). And by virtue of remaining in the background, Rhys's subtle way of treating these themes appears to make them less susceptible to a feeling of becoming dated. After all, every experience, every perception concerning power and social structures is rooted within Sasha's consciousness. Thus despite the limited scope, the novel provides an even greater sense of the effects of social and political changes on the individual. Through the perspective of Sasha's consciousness reacting to her surroundings, a grander image of the growing complexity and chaos of her time is effectively thrown into relief.

Good Morning, Midnight is the bleakest among Rhys's novels, published in the year the Second World War broke out. The preceding decade had turned modernism not only in the direction of impending international politics, but also towards darker subject matter in general, cultivating an aesthetic "which, in its embrace of fragmentation and alienation, identified the times" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 117). When Rhys is mentioned in this literary context, it is often alongside another female modernist writer, Djuna Barnes, whose novel *Nightwood* was published a few years earlier, in 1936. The two remain stylistically disparate, yet surprisingly coherent in the sense of gravity they both portray, which is typical of later modernism. Both novels are set largely in Paris, and appear interestingly preoccupied with affiliation. Character identities tend to remain somewhat oblique, both in the sense of geography, nationality, and race. And we sense that this peculiar combination of preoccupation and obliqueness is precisely what enables both writers to explore the fates of their characters as "cultural others", with an impressive level of psychological depth (Linett p. 27). In this manner the characters' estrangement from their own identities, and the individual misery of their wretched lives becomes carefully anchored in a larger context. For instance in the beginning of *Nightwood*, when Guido Volkbein hides his Jewish decent in order to lay claim to a Barony, producing "the most amazing and inaccurate proofs" in order to uphold his story (Barnes p. 3). In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the relevance of historic events, and changes in cultural currents, are alluded to by the one piece of information provided that serves to date the present time of the narrative: the World Exhibition held in Paris in 1937. Thus Rhys is able to contextualize the sufferings of her characters historically,

albeit with characteristic indirectness (Camarasana p. 51-52). Hitler's presence was indeed felt in Europe long before the outbreak of war. And the World Exhibition was marked by a competitive nationalism that in many ways foreshadowed the conflict that was to come, despite the Star of Peace that adorned the exhibition area. Almost every single one of the characters Sasha encounters is rootless and displaced. Which becomes even more significant when we emphasize the social and economic necessities that prompt such geographical movements. Through the location of the characters and their individual struggles Rhys is thus able to write a sort of "counternarrative to the triumphant and purportedly inclusive nationalism" that the World Exhibition displayed (Camarasana p. 58). It represented an ideology that was founded on authoritarianism and conformity, and which constitutes a polar opposite of what in *Good Morning, Midnight* is more a tendency towards "idiosyncratic anarchism" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 128). Thus, in the smallest of details we are able to find traces of a historical context, which becomes our aid in explaining the severity of the novel's mood, its elliptical and fatalistic logic, as well as adding greater depth to the recurring motif of rootless characters.

2.3 Restless, Rootless Souls

With this cultural and historical context in place, we are better equipped to interpret the many characters in *Good Morning, Midnight* whose "national identity is complicated by migration" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 117). We also realize that Sasha appears to attract individuals who share this same type of experience. In fact, the people who approach her during the present time of the novel: René, Serge, and the two Russians, are all poor, marginalized and in some kind of exile, as are most of the characters from Sasha's past. Yet, not only are they rootless and drifting in a foreign city, the majority also turns out to be something other than what they first appear. The novel is thus concerned not just with revealing the diversity of Paris in the 1930's, but with depicting characters who themselves are "preoccupied with identifying people they encounter", which paradoxically results in a series of misidentifications (Camarasana p. 60). Of the two Russians Sasha meets by coincidence in the street, at least one of them, Delmar, turns out to be from the Ukraine. Though he is communicative about every other aspect, he continually "slides away" from the subject of what life in his homeland was like (Rhys p. 54). And Enno's friend whom Sasha believes to be French is instead revealed to be a Turk (Rhys p. 104). While René's identity remains almost as big a mystery as Sasha's. Like her, he is of dubious origin, and first claims to be French-Canadian before

ultimately admitting to being from Morocco (Rhys p. 62). The same pattern of misidentifications and contradictions also applies to spoken languages. Reminiscing about her past, Sasha remembers that while being pregnant she used to make a little money on the side by giving English lessons to a Russian man who spoke the language just as well as she did (Rhys p. 110). There is also a brief appearance by a French singer who goes by the name of Dickson, for no other reason than because English singers were more popular at the time. And despite not being his first language, Enno himself sings in French, while Sasha sings in English (Rhys p. 97). Serge the painter speaks Russian to his friend, but is also described as having the “mocking look of a Jew, the look that can be so hateful, that can be so attractive, that can be so sad” (Rhys p. 76). And he readily admits that he made the West African masks on display in his studio himself, despite lauding them as being “straight from the Congo” (Rhys p. 76). The continual disjunction between the identities and languages initially assigned to each of these characters, and the homeland to which they later admit to belong: “simultaneously foregrounds the importance and destabilizes the notion of national origins” (Camarasana p. 61). Yet even among those who lead a comparably rootless existence there are obvious antipathies. For instance, despite being a foreigner himself, René speaks spitefully of the Russians in Paris: “Everybody knows what they are – Jews and poor whites. The most boring people in the world” (Rhys p. 136). Thus in effect demonstrating that though they may share a common experience, not all marginalized people stick together. Still there is a certain sense of community among these outsiders, the people without papers, without friends, connections and most of all without money. Those restless, rootless souls who seem to have no pasts, having cut the moorings to the place from which they came to instead try their luck in a foreign country and city.

2.4 The Constant Outsider

Sasha seems to have a continual awareness of the outsiders around her, “those who are different in their own sense of themselves”, or in the eyes of others (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 74). They represent the people she associates with, both in the present and the past of the narrative. Though most importantly, they also constitute the motley group of people with whom she identifies. And which stand opposed to the “extremely respectable”, the well placed and smugly secure citizens of polite society (Rhys p. 36). Sasha is in fact a skilled observer, who has a gift for pinpointing psychological archetypes (Maurel p. 109). Built primarily on a keen understanding of language, she has a special knack for zeroing in on

words used not really to express anything, but to cover something up. Though the outer circumstances of her life appear to have her trapped in an abject position, imprisoned by her hotel room, the streets of Paris, her financial situation, social status and lack of belonging, respectively: there is at the same time a peculiar strength to Sasha's character. The pressures and humiliations she faces during the narrative demonstrate that the power she wields does not fit any traditional conception. It is rather a form of resistance or resilience, which is culled from her awareness of power structures and springs out of her outsider position. In almost everything she does, Sasha remains on the outskirts, not just in terms of the nationality she reports to the reception desk. Though taking on the role of outsider does cause her a certain amount of discomfort, she still seeks the position out in almost every circumstance, rather than stay within the throng of people. Perhaps because the outsider status provides Sasha with a counterintuitive sense of belonging, since she is not definitively at home anywhere, the negation is at least something to which she can cling. When she first meets René they have a drink at the Closerie des Lilas, but instead of sitting inside where the lights are bright and there are lots of people, she significantly insists that they find a place to sit on the terrace: where it is "cold and dark and there is not another soul" (Rhys p. 61). Paris most certainly constituted a geographical "inside" in the 1930's, yet Sasha is socially on the "outside", marking a distinct doubleness that we will see repeated in several other aspects of her character. She does attempt to reach out to other people at times, primarily by chance encounters with other rootless outsiders and underdogs: people like herself. And even though they come to nothing, she keeps on having these encounters, repeatedly attempting to establish some sort of a meaningful and genuine connection to another person. Her interactions with René show the most promise, yet we are not really surprised when Sasha pushes him away. Throughout the novel, Sasha seems constantly to be located somewhere in the periphery. Yet being largely unconnected to the goings on of other people, she is able to see them with a kind of clarity that constitutes her greatest and most resilient strength: the power to decode the alternate discourses used by outsiders and insiders.

3 The Subversive Power of a Well Weighed Word

Sasha is an outsider and underdog, but she is also a skilled observer of words and discourses. And *Good Morning, Midnight* establishes close ties between her ability to understand and express herself through language, her outsider identity and feeling of self-worth. She is not a writer per se, as her only professional engagement of the sort was spent working as a ghostwriter for a ridiculous, and ridiculously wealthy old woman. But Sasha remains Rhys's most writerly protagonist by far: a wordsmith in many respects. She continually demonstrates a writer's awareness of words and language: its rhythms, cadences, alliterations, nuances and paradoxes. When someone talks to or about her, or speaks loudly in her presence, she often sets about picking the statement apart: word by word, revising as she goes, before putting it back together with a twist. Words appear to be one of the few things she is able to control in her life, and she treats them both with grave seriousness and a playful touch. A large portion of the narrative is spent making sense, or sometimes nonsense, out of language. And Sasha appears to be an especially keen observer of the inconsistencies and superficialities of words, which she pinpoints with a characteristically acerbic sense of humor and a tongue as sharp as a knife. Illustrating how some things are covered up with words, while other things are revealed. This occurs primarily through a parallel utilization of English and French, but as we saw in the previous chapter, even German and Russian is mentioned in passing. And because of the way in which the novel is structured, in many instances words and phrases contribute to motivate the narrative progression. As a result, words and language become a motif that is central both for our understanding of Sasha, the minor characters she encounters along the way, and the novel as a whole.

What Rhys often does is let Sasha adopt and internalize phrases and statements from conversations she is either engaged in, or has just overheard. For instance when she takes refuge in a restaurant, an old haunt from happier days, and a girl speaks to the manager, obviously about her: "Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?" (Rhys p. 43). The question is innocent enough, perhaps, but it sets Sasha off on a long consideration of what the young woman could have meant speaking of her in that manner, singling her out for the judgmental stares of all the other guests in the locale. "And what is she doing here now?" moves from innocence to insult and back again. Sasha continues to replay these snippets of words and sentences in her mind while plying them with all her skill: "But what language! Considering the general get-up what you should have said was: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fiche ici?' Considering

the general get-up, surely that's what you should have said" (Rhys p. 44). Over the next few pages the words morph and are spliced with another snippet, a passerby in the street calling her old. "Last night and today – it makes a pretty good sentence. ... Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille? What the devil (translating it politely) is she doing here, that old woman? What is she doing here, the stranger, the alien, the old one?" (Rhys p. 46). Sasha thus takes control over the insults, making them worse but making them her own. Commandeering the language and demonstrating her skillfulness with words, she becomes powerful rather than just being a victim of the snide remarks from strangers that keep coming her way.

3.1 At Other Times I Just Speak It

Another episode, concerning Sasha's experience working as a 'vendeuse', is perhaps one of the most explicit instances in the novel where words and language play a crucial part in illustrating the characters present. While it functions as a driving force in the situation, the multi-lingual environment of the metropolis also forms a natural backdrop for the events that take place. The establishment where Sasha works, a chic clothing boutique that includes branches both in London and Paris, is managed by the "real English type" Mr. Blank. When he arrives she describes him as "le businessman": "Bowler-hat, majestic trousers, oh-my-God expression, ha-ha eyes" (Rhys p. 17). Sasha needs only collect this rapid first impression to pinpoint his type exactly. He is a Mr. "fill in the blank", a stand-in for almost any sort of authority figure. He belongs unquestionably to the world of the respectable. And unlike Sasha, who is continually fighting a losing battle against her face and body to make their appearance acceptable, Mr. Blank seems very much in command of his physical expressions and how he comes across. The fact that he holds a position of power also grants him the right to put Sasha to the test whenever he might wish to do so: "'She speaks French,' Salvatini says. 'Assez bien, assez bien.' Mr. Blank looks at me with lifted eyebrows. 'Sometimes,' I say idiotically" (Rhys p. 18). While Mr. Blank responds by delivering a measured stare, Sasha blurts out an answer that is paradoxical on the surface but underneath adheres closely to the separate sense of logic by which she lives. To herself, Sasha has no trouble admitting that when she is perhaps a little bit drunk and "talking to somebody I like and know, I speak French very fluently indeed. At other times I just speak it" (Rhys p. 18). Though somewhat counterintuitive, Sasha's logic hints at a demarcation between true mastery of the French language, and the mere implementation of phrases and words. It also says something about the undertones of language, and the difference a friendly atmosphere can make. Taking this

into account Sasha's statement makes infinitely more sense. Still it proposes a delicate sensitivity to language, of which her employer appears completely oblivious.

Mr. Blank proceeds to ask Sasha to run an errand for him, and deliver an envelope to a Mr. Grousset in another department of the store, explaining: "Will you please take this to the kise?" (Rhys p. 22). He remains the definitive authority in the situation, yet his mispronunciation of the French word 'la caisse', for cashier, still throws Sasha to such an extent that she ultimately loses her job. She runs blindly into a lavatory before even finding the way out of his office, and then continues to stumble frantically about the old house in search of whatever it is she's supposed to find. Every hallway leads, in equal parts comedy and absurdity, either to yet another lavatory, or a locked door (Angier p. 378). In this particular context, Sasha's superior understanding of the French language actually turns out to be a disadvantage. The scene is built around an inversion of power structures that is somewhat typical for Rhys. What should have proved a strength for Sasha, and has done so in the past, is flipped on its head and instead only serves to magnify whatever flaws she may have in the eyes of Mr. Blank. Rather than competing on the same plane, their relationship of power and powerlessness is cemented to such a degree that she can only make a fool of herself. In the end she is left with nothing else to do than concede, and return unsuccessfully to the office of her employer, ready to "blush at a look, cry at a word" (Rhys p. 26).

3.2 Challenging Social Structures

Back in his office once more, Mr. Blank confronts Sasha with her failure: "Just a hopeless, helpless little fool, aren't you?" he says. Jovial? Bantering? On the surface, yes. Underneath? No, I don't think so" (Rhys p. 24). Sasha responds by demonstrating her skillfulness with language yet again, by decoding the subtext of the statement, uncovering the contempt that simmers beneath the joke. She is fully aware of the situation, even of the fact that all the evidence seems to support his objections against her. Yet despite her knowledge and clear-sighted view of the way Mr. Blank relishes his power over her, she is still unable to stand her ground. Instead of raising herself up, her sensitivity to the implied message of his statement only allows her to fall even further. Had she been the fool Mr. Blanks takes her for, she would most likely not have understood the full implication of his words, and would have been able to move on. Instead she becomes even more aware, analyzing every word and facial expression it in its most minute details, only to feel deeply hurt and unable to let the damage go. The episode initially comes across as comical, but only so much so that Rhys is

able to instill one of the more tragic elements of Sasha's personality. That for all her talent as a wordsmith, all her adept observational skills, talking back to a figure of authority is still quite a different matter. The hostility of the situation results in her quietly excusing herself to go home, and it is only in retrospect that she is able to begin composing in her mind a protest speech on behalf of "all the fools and all the defeated", all the underdogs and outsiders she feels akin to (Rhys p. 25).

Well, let's argue this out Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings. (Rhys p. 25 - 26)

Sasha's imagined speech outlines the woe and lack of freedom inherent in an existence like her own, and proves a powerful indictment of society with a capital "S", which profits from systematically denying the humanity of others (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 69). Though it is never delivered, Sasha vindicates herself to some degree by taking on a temporary role as a sort of champion of the underdogs, making use of the subversive power of irony to challenge established authority. Her tirade mimics the authoritative speech of Mr. Blank, while at the same time stealing the arguments out from under him and all his like. Almost as a piece of consumer goods, a slave or cog in a large machinery, Sasha is classed and labeled according to form: "inefficient", "slow in the uptake", "slightly damaged in the fray". As readers we are left to wonder how one can pass such judgment on another human being, let alone how Sasha can say such things about herself. And she does go a great deal further than Mr. Blank appears to do, even her own worst critic. Yet Sasha's harsh evaluation of herself is also what enables her outsider position, which we in Chapter 2 suggested is what enables her powerfully subversive point of view. Which says something about who Sasha is, her sense of reality and code of ethic. We also saw that it influences where she places herself, geographically as well as socially. And it is precisely from an outsider position that Sasha is able to deliver her indictment of the ills that society, so smugly secure, imposes on an existence like her own.

Sasha's outsider position is defined in relation to several different social markers: a triumvirate of power, sex and race. The previous episode suggests both that these factors influence social standing, and that our society is actually to some degree structured around the differences they create. After all, Sasha says, again speaking to Mr. Blank: "We can't all

be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky – and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't it so Mr. Blank? There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours” (Rhys p. 26). Out of relative comparison, difference is born. The brightness of the colors would never have been able to shine, had it not been for the dark background that surrounds them. The rich would not be rich if not for the poor: both as a result of the exploitation of the lower classes by those who are economically self-sufficient and secure in their respectability, and by the simple virtue of contrast. Rhys again draws on the central dichotomy of darkness and light, the Morning and Midnight that serve both as title and structural device for the novel, and which we will explore in more detail in relation to our discussion of intertext in Chapter 4. What Rhys suggests throughout, is that one would not be able to exist without the other. Light and darkness, the powerful and the powerless, the rich and poor, male and female are all bound together in mutual dependency. The novel presents an endlessly recurring pattern of pairs through layers of social strata and positions, and partly as a result of this the social structures that Sasha describes and criticizes become more than simple caricatures in black and white. They are colorful, dynamic, and appear to imply that social status depends largely on situation. So much so that René at one point accuses Sasha of being a bourgeoisie (Rhys p. 133). Thus an underdog may prove to have the upper hand in a different setting, though the powerful often remain so regardless. It all depends on how you are perceived, and so it is constantly shifting, maintained and shaped by every action we perform, which results in a very dynamic conception of social status and mobility. And just as the privileged define their lives in opposition to those who are not so lucky, the underdogs and outsiders that Sasha associates and identifies with also define their lives in opposition to those who look down at them. From within the confines of a seemingly abject position, Sasha is thus able to wield a certain subversive power by virtue of her outsider status.

Sasha's acquaintance, Delmar the melancholy Russian, voices an interesting theory of his own about the haves and the have-not's: “When you aren't rich or strong or powerful, you are not a guilty one”, he says (Rhys p. 55). Thus suggesting that those who have lost the power and ability to define their own lives, those who have had it taken from them by force or circumstance, cannot be blamed for the degradation they experience as a result. He seems to claim that whatever humiliating situations they find themselves in, and morally dubious actions they perform in an attempt to break free are ultimately not their own responsibility, but that of the establishment and respectable society. Though his existential ponderings have interesting reaches that resonate thematically in the novel, most especially in relation to the ending, Delmar's theory remains a sort of philosophical escape hatch in terms of assuming

responsibility for one's own life. Our discussion in the first chapter of this thesis revealed that Kierkegaard establishes a strong link between anxiety and freedom, but that freedom is meaningless without a concomitant sense of moral responsibility to other beings. If our actions were without consequence our incentive to behave in this way or another would disappear. And freedom would become an empty shell, devoid of meaning and importance. It might be tempting to try to apply these diverging trains of thought to Sasha's existence to see which rings more true, yet we are actually left completely in the dark as to how she regards her friend's theory. At least for the moment, Rhys grants us no knowledge of whether Sasha considers it a viable survival strategy, which in itself brings us to a related point of interest.

3.3 Silence Speaks Volumes

While considering the novel as a whole we come to realize that such points of view as the one just discussed are consequently voiced by one of the minor characters, never by Sasha herself. In fact she rarely states her opinions in this manner at all. Of course she certainly observes, analyzes and mulls things over in her mind, but apart from internal rants and never-delivered speeches, such as her appeal to Mr. Blank, Sasha doesn't seem to say very much at all. Delmar, Serge and René however, all relate their worldview through speech, and much of their arguments, insights and beliefs are rendered as direct dialogue. The only reason we as readers know Sasha's point of view is the insight Rhys has allowed us through the narrative technique she employs. And though we get to follow the current of her thoughts and the internal dialogue she maintains with herself, outwardly Sasha must appear to be largely silent. Of course, calling the rendered dialogue 'direct' is from the outset somewhat misleading, as Sasha remains the filter of consciousness through which every impression is conveyed. Sometimes the opinions of the minor characters are left to stand for Sasha's own, at other times more of a distance is implied. Either way, and as an added consequence of this structural element, we have no way of determining whether Sasha's voice is absent because she doesn't open her mouth at all, or because she censors herself in retrospect by excluding her own utterances from the narrative as a record of her mind. Most likely it is a combination of the two, both involving a movement that is somewhat repressive. Should we turn our gaze outward, we are also left to wonder whether the statements of the minor characters that are rendered as dialogue have been allowed to appear as they were spoken, or if they might not have been subjected to the invisible touch of Sasha's skill as a wordsmith too. A word

replaced here, a sentence shortened there: a language like her own, which is constantly revised and improved upon, while the story is told.

Retaining this outward view for a little while, we could perhaps also attempt to read Sasha's silence into a somewhat wider context, by taking the expectations her contemporaries would have made upon her into consideration. In the 1930's women were supposed to maintain their respectability through even the toughest of times, and preferably gain social standing through marriage to a man of means (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 68). Sasha's situation is therefore one of significant exposure: she is unprotected by a man yet economically dependent, attempting to age gracefully without really succeeding, which cannot fail to dictate much of her behavior. We can always trust Sasha to call the shots like she sees them, to describe herself with the most painful clarity and brutal honesty. As a narrator she hides nothing, no matter how humiliating, for the sake of her own comfort. Still Elaine Savory argues that she might constitute an unreliable narrator of sorts, primarily in reference to Sasha's abusive consumption of alcohol (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 70). The same point could probably be made about her excessive editing of her own utterances, as both speak to the pressure of social expectations. Yet self-medication by alcohol aside, labeling Sasha as an unreliable narrator does not appear to benefit our analysis of her character by much. Though she doesn't hide anything, the fact that she in her internal monologue, sometimes aided by drink and sometimes not, should skip over certain painful memories, and struggle to remember other things accurately is more of a psychologically realistic trait than anything else. Otherwise we would all have to be considered unreliable narrators of our own lives, for memory is a fickle organ. And what Rhys demonstrates through Sasha, more than anything else, are the inner workings of the mind. Where our past experiences, present tense, and hopes for the future are melded into a narrative we tell ourselves as well as anyone who cares to listen. Some experiences stick, and grow to define part of our existence while they are mulled over repetitively. Others we choose not to linger on, trying instead to just get on with our lives. The inside of Sasha's head does not reveal the calm and complacent feminine consciousness society would have expected of her. Though if she is silent, much of that silence should be interpreted as painful traces of her past. Through the disjointedness between what is thought and what is said, or in many instances not said at all, we realize that this is perhaps just one way in which the language of the less fortunate is shackled by convention and expectations of respectability. How it is stunted, crippled, and then forced into silence. Sasha may not say much, yet her silence speaks volumes of the misery and injustice she's had to endure.

3.4 Two Discourses

Returning once more to where we began this chapter, in order to meet the gaze of Mr. Blank's "ha-ha" eyes, we realize that they have taken on an even more menacing look. From the position of power he so enjoys, he is not only able to order lesser beings around at will, but even to laugh at them from a safe distance while watching them struggle and fail. And this is precisely where Sasha's protest speech culminates, with a challenge of his right to ridicule the already down-and-out:

Sacrifices are necessary. ... Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple – no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. (Rhys p. 26)

Mr. Blank may, as a representative of respectable society, be able to cut her pride down ruthlessly. He may force her to work under conditions she cannot bear. Turn her life into monotonous drudgery, an existence where no joy or feeling of accomplishment can survive. But even though Sasha recognizes her misery as having been sacrificed on the altar of the well to do, she is adamant in denying Mr. Blank the pleasure of ridiculing his victims after metaphorically cutting their legs off. Even though the threat is purely symbolic, the result would be no less painful and humiliating. Sasha's concern is with retaining the very last shred of her honor. And she is willing to lash out heroically to protect it, for herself and perhaps also for others like her. While the respectable lot struggles to maintain the status quo, their highest virtue is keeping up appearances, excluding the underserving and denying them any influence or power they should hope to attain. It is a sort of quiet consensus not to cause a stir, built on the inexpressive, politely meaningless behavior that adheres strictly to tradition, upholding expectations with no questions asked, above all no scenes and no surprises. While sitting in a café at the very beginning of the novel, Sasha overhears what is perhaps the quintessential example of such a conversation: "'Life is difficult,' the Arab says. 'Yes, life isn't easy,' the girl says. Long pause. 'One needs a lot of courage, to live,' the Arab says. 'Ah, I believe you,' the girl says, shaking her head and clicking her tongue'" (Rhys p. 14). Despite seemingly engaged in a deep existential discussion, the conversation offers nothing in the way of sincerity or passion. Though it concerns a question close to the core of the lives we lead, it is as if nothing is at stake. Perhaps we could even call it a non-conversation. Though the Arab is not the most obvious proponent of the respectable lot, when he states that "life is difficult" one almost wants to interrupt him out of disbelief. Sasha on

the other hand, only reveals her misery in parts and very slowly, yet we have no trouble believing that she has been through difficult times, in fact Rhys sees to it that we sense it almost instantly. Later, while remembering the time when a solicitor asked her why she didn't just end her suffering by throwing herself in the river, Sasha articulates what is almost a diagnosis of the well to do:

Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' These phrases run trippingly off the tongues of the extremely respectable. They think in terms of a sentimental ballad. And that's what terrifies you about them. It isn't their cruelty, it isn't even their shrewdness – it's their extraordinary naiveté. Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliché. Everything is born out of a cliché, rests on a cliché, survives by a cliché. And they believe in clichés – there's no hope. (Rhys p. 36)

Sasha thus suggests that all would be lost in the moment when language ceases to have meaning. When the clichés and empty phrases of the respectable are all that remain, it will be impossible to say anything that is true, sincere or heartfelt. We understand that a facade of inexpressive mumbling, where neither meaning nor the beauty of words matter much, is what defines the language of the respectable people. And Sasha is acutely aware that the “social machine is kept in place by a use of language which ignores nuance, complexity, deviation, ambivalence, a language which reiterates the fetishistic phrases which preserve the status quo” (Carr p. 109). When faced with a cliché, nonsense becomes preferable, perhaps even repressive silence. Yet, neither of these options represents the chosen strategy of communication for the outsiders and underdogs.

Perhaps we might instead imagine two discourses, in the shape of masks, side by side much like at the theater. Yet instead of one being happy and the other sad, the first representing comedy and the other tragedy, the masks that Rhys carefully contours are different. One is perfect in its features of eerie expressionlessness, while the other is grotesque, eyes bulging and tongue sticking out in a jeering grin. Comedy and tragedy have become all befuddled. What separates the two now is an impulse to conceal on one side, and an impulse to shock on the other, because when ordinary words are gradually losing their power the foul and grotesque, dirty anecdotes and swearwords will still be able to provoke a genuine reaction, if nothing else then one of disgust. The severed legs of Sasha's speech are the first in a string of imagery related to the circus or freak show, emblematic as perhaps the ultimate outsider. She imagines being crippled and then ridiculed by Mr. Blank, and later, when thinking about her time in London, remembers standing in the crowded street outside a

store window offering up all kinds of artificial limbs (Rhys p. 11). Even the paintings Serge shows her in his studio repeat the same type of image: “misshapen dwarfs juggle with huge coloured ballons, the four-breasted woman is exhibited, the old prostitute waits hopelessly outside the urinoir” (Rhys p. 84). Sasha herself keeps disappearing into the lavatory, and even the film she goes to see one evening tells the story of a man who sells toilet articles, ending with the line: “Alors, bien, je te laisse à tes suppositoires” (Rhys p. 90). Leaving her and the rest of the audience to their suppositories, or other unmentionables. And someone or other is constantly telling a dirty joke or anecdote, the most memorable of which concerns Sasha dropping her underwear in the street, before walking on unperturbed (Rhys p. 114). What unifies all of these tiny episodes and images is the shock effect they attempt to elicit, by embracing the rude, the unseemly, the grotesque and excessive. And what else is there to do than attempt to shock, when one has been marginalized, silenced, and language itself is drowning in clichés and platitudes? Yet words still have an inherent power, if you know how to use them, and Sasha certainly does. A well-weighed word can accomplish wonders, and an ironic line can turn established power structures upside down, or at least undermine them from within. Sasha is first and foremost an underdog and outsider yet through the changing social constellations she navigates we at times see her emulate the insiders as well. Which leads us to the most interesting consequence of viewing the two discourses as a set of masks, a metaphor we will explore in full at a later point. Masks can reveal and conceal in equal measure, depending on how you use them, but at the end of the day they are just a façade. We might grow accustomed to hiding behind them, and learn how to wear them for the desired effect. Yet underneath we are mostly the same: the mask signals identity but is ultimately a construct. And the right words have the power to unmask almost anyone.

4 A Mosaic of Intertexts

In the previous chapter we explored the significance and power attributed to words, while moving mostly on the surface of the text. We examined the combination of rendered dialogue and interior monologues that constitute a few pivotal episodes in the novel, and gained a greater sense of Sasha as a character whose force is culled from her proficiency with words. This chapter will continue to focus on the use of words and language yet attempts to burrow a little deeper, through the many layers of which *Good Morning, Midnight* consists, and with a special emphasis on the implementation and additional interpretive potential of intertexts. What the reader, at first glance, would expect to be one cohesive narrative emanating from the central consciousness of Sasha, proves on closer inspection to be a mosaic consisting of a myriad tiny, textual fragments. Drawing primarily on Sylvie Maurel's insightful analysis of this particular feature of the novel, we will after a brief initial discussion of the overarching aspects of the novel's intertextuality, concentrate our further analysis on three specific examples from the text: Emily Dickinson's poem which provide the novel with its title, a popular jazz tune called "Gloomy Sunday" that obtains a recurring function, and Molly Bloom's final monologue from James Joyce's *Ulysses* which proves important for our reading of the novel's conclusion. Though there are many other intertextual references that might have been highlighted in equal measure, these particular examples were chosen because they in addition to illustrating Sasha's experience also have a structural importance, in a sense framing the novel around her.

4.1 A Separate Language

Though Sasha borrows from a wealth of different sources, we can from the outset divide the material into two different sub-groups. The poem and song lyrics are easily recognizable as explicit intertextual references. In addition to performing a quotation, they also provide reference as to the origin of the material. While the poem remains the most direct form as it is rendered on the page, the song is one more step removed. It is mentioned by title, yet the content of the lyrics is left for the reader to infer. Other quotations are not so easily recognizable: they are buried deeper in the text and may only provide clues about their own status as a quotation and the context in which they originally belonged (Maurel p. 103). Should one possess the requisite knowledge to discover and place these implicit intertextual references they will unlock an additional interpretive dimension, an associative cadence,

which might otherwise have been overlooked. The allusion to *Ulysses* is such that if one were to miss it, the ending would still appear complete by its own right. Yet the superimposition of several texts on top of each other adds greatly to the complexity of the novel.

In some instances quotation marks are utilized to signal that the material in question is borrowed from another source, at other times any such gesture to the reader is omitted, and the quote remains inconspicuously hidden. It is codified, so to speak, into the general narrative, on a deeper layer of meaning than the story itself. Thus imbuing certain words and phrases with a significance that would not be apparent to the uninitiated. As such, it is almost as if Rhys constructs a separate language for *Good Morning, Midnight*, made up of borrowings from literary and non-literary sources alike, from within the fictional world of her novel and without. It is a language that contains a discriminating faculty, to include and exclude based on a set of criteria of its own. Criteria that Sasha for once remain somewhat in control of, and that stand in opposition to the ones employed in the discourse of the extremely respectable, which we in the previous chapter observed to have the intended effect of keeping Sasha out of good company, pushing her even further towards the social margins. We also established that through Sasha's skill as a wordsmith, her command of social and linguistic codes, she is largely able to deflect and subvert the force that was intended to pressure her into suffocating conformity. Sasha remains an outsider, but her position is no longer an abject one. Maurel describes the most central feature of Sasha's actions and utterances as turning language itself into "an object of inquiry", thus shifting both the center of the reader's attention and the power balance between characters (Maurel p. 109). The sophisticated tools Sasha employs to elicit these shifts are primarily exaggeration, irony and parody. And what denotes all three of these strategies is that they relate in some manner to an original text or utterance. They all expect the reader, by different degrees and characteristics, to read two or more texts as one: superimposing them on top of each other to create a textual synthesis. Thus showcasing disparities, they are a form of repetition, but repetition with a difference. And as such, Sasha's use of all three becomes a natural extension of the novel's emphasis on intertext (Maurel p. 114-115). The resulting narrative is riddled with quotations, everything from previous extra-diegetic conversations, to a wide range of non-literary texts such as love letters, advice columns from women's magazines, popular songs and an operetta. There are also quotations in the shape of clichés, exposing speech and written language as a constricted and exhausted form, often transforming the utterances into metalanguage (Maurel p. 103). On several levels actually, Sasha's narrative keeps pointing back to language as a form of expression, even displaying itself as a text.

This textual self-consciousness that characterizes much of *Good Morning, Midnight*, can in light of the modernist tradition be understood as a kind of “narrative introversion” (Bradbury p. 395). Where a preoccupation with form prompts the novel to make visible the means by which the narration itself is achieved, in a distinctly self-conscious manner. Thus form no longer simply represents a way to enable the content: instead “language ceases to be what we see through, and becomes what we see” (Bradbury p. 401). Which in fact allows the novel to take on certain symbolic characteristics that are usually reserved for poetry. Within the narrative itself, Rhys is also careful to place the novel in a literary landscape, through the large number of intertextual quotations that reference canonical authors. Apart from the already mentioned monologue by Joyce, the novel also utilizes material borrowed from Rimbaud, Keats, Racine, Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, to mention just a few (Maurel p. 103). Viewed as one, these sources bear witness to Rhys’s literary proclivities, as well as suggesting the outline of a contemporary culture, and the currents that influenced readers and writers of her day. Together they form a backdrop, thus allowing the narrative to demonstrate yet another way in which Sasha’s words have “chains round its ankles”, while the implication in this instance remains self-consciously intertextual (Rhys p. 88).

The use of intertextual references to elevate parts of the narrative to the function of a metalanguage suggests more than just confidentiality with the quoted materials. Sasha’s tendency, in Maurel’s words, to quote rather than speak can be understood as symptomatic of a sense of being alienated both from language, and from the society it is constructed to service. As mentioned at the very close of the last chapter, Sasha’s position as an outsider also dictates that the words she speaks do not really belong to her. In fact, viewed from the outside, a language can indeed be a “strange and coercive system” (Maurel p. 103). What metalanguage does is at the same time put language on display as well as creating a distance between the general discourse and the meta-level. The two layers coexist, while within the gap, irony and parody are delegated to a space they truly thrive in. The different intertextual elements that are brought together to form the narrative may be incorporated almost completely, or adversely, appear like pieces in a mosaic, where every grout and splice remains apparent to the reader throughout. In *Good Morning, Midnight* we find examples of both degrees, and everything in between. Interestingly though, the majority of the quotations are to be found in the retrospective sections of the narrative. That the intertexts are mostly embedded within flashbacks cause the fragments to be “doubly distanced, through Sasha’s critical stance and through time” (Maurel p. 118). Thus the general sense of alienation is perpetuated by the quotations’ position in the narrative, where they are subjected to a form of

detachment from Sasha's present time consciousness either by filtration through memory or through direct commentary by her critical, revisionary voice.

The interplay of these different intertextual elements result in the reader being placed in a similar position to the one Sasha inhabits. We are left on the outside of a language controlled by someone else, struggling to make sense, coaxing a myriad tiny elements into revealing a larger image. It is a layering that makes the reader akin to Sasha in some respects, and offers a sense of community with a character that we might otherwise have been prone to judge as unduly dominated by unsympathetic personality traits. On this deeper level, Sasha carries out a similar operation to the extremely respectable, by codifying her narrative through the extensive use of intertextual quotations. Though we sense that her intent, and Rhys's in the background, is not malicious. It is rather set up to reward the effort of her readers with deeper understanding, and a more colorful image, for every textual fragment we discover and place. But now, let us move on to the first of the specific examples, the one we initially encounter when opening the novel, which offers the very first suggestion of the novel's status as a self-conscious intertext.

4.2 Different as Night and Day

Good Morning, Midnight obtains its title and one of its most central structural devices from the opening line of the untitled poem number 425 by Emily Dickinson, the first half of which also appears as the novel's epigraph. Playfully constructed around the inversion of day and night, the poem comes across as a parable of the unhappy fate of a "little Girl". Even though it contains elements of tragic drama, a classic tale of love lost, the words Dickinson uses remain simple, childlike, short and succinct. And they are almost exclusively monosyllabic, creating a chilling singsong effect that blends well with Rhys's own mode of expression. The poem is stripped of any tendency towards pomposity, void of grand gestures, and thus delineated from the conventional majority of texts we associate with portrayals of heartbreak: "Good Morning – Midnight – / I'm coming Home – / Day – got tired of Me – / How could I – of Him? / Sunshine was a sweet place – / I liked to stay – / But Morn – didn't want me – now – / So – Goodnight – Day!" (Dickinson p. 203).

More specifically, the poem functions by playing out the tension created by the central dichotomy of light and darkness. Pairing together the binary opposites of our everyday idiomatic use of the words, and turning our expectations upside down by its oxymoron "Good Morning, Midnight" and "Goodnight, Day". The little girl who serves as

the poem's protagonist, claims to have fallen for Day only to have him grow tired of her. She, on the other hand, still favors him over Midnight, but realizes the futility of her continued preference. The last half of the poem is not included in the epigraph, but we might assume that Rhys would have expected her readers to know it beforehand or perhaps to seek it out by themselves. Though not strictly necessary for our understanding of the poem, and by extension the novel, the latter half reinforces what the first only suggests: "I can look – can't I – / When the East is Red? / The Hills – have a way – then – / That puts the Heart – abroad – / You – are not so fair – Midnight – / I chose – Day – / But – please take a little Girl – / He turned away!" (Dickinson p. 203). In the face of rejection, the protagonist's choice will have to be the second best, so even though Midnight does not boast the same charms, she appeals to be taken in by him. It is an act of settling for something less than ideal, perhaps even settling for something less than love, and signals that all hope has gone to pieces. We understand that Rhys's protagonist is to be read alongside this "pitiful choice" that Dickinson's persona is faced with, and we are thus warned from the outset that the novel is "likely to have a bleak emotional landscape" (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 67).

Consequently, Sasha spends the bulk of *Good Morning, Midnight* struggling to maintain her hope of a last chance at love. When she finally resolves to open up to René, a tragic twist of fate as heart wrenching as it seems unavoidable, sends her instead into the arms of the resident ghost. Still it is a fate to which she resigns herself, in some respects, as part of the very complex and conflicted emotional development of the final scene of the novel. Returning to the poem, we sense a certain nuancing of any straightforward understanding of light and dark as simply synonymous with good and bad, life and death, as it describes Midnight also in terms of "coming home", of somewhere to return, thus suggesting a sense of belonging we usually attribute to love. Alluding to the fact that Day and Midnight, though initially positioned as clear opposites, may be more similar than at first glance: mutually bound by their relationship of negation. The ultimate consequence of this relativity is a simultaneous calling into question of our traditional notions of a fated true love. Though Day and Night are arguably not the same, the only apparent cost of choosing one over the other seems cosmetic, in that Day is stated to be the fairer of the two. If they are not exactly interchangeable, we might at least understand them as somewhat equal. Still it is a pitiful choice to be forced to let go of the one you had your heart set on.

From its important placement at the outset of the novel, and consequent reappearances every once in a while, the poem establishes a mood that lingers until the end of the narrative. The images we infer onto the novel through its intertextual relationship thus form an

additional layer of interpretive potential, while also foreshadowing the essence of the chain of events that follow: an attempt at love that never comes to fruition, where the hearts attraction is substituted for something more lowly. The poem establishes the dynamic duality of light and darkness, which is repeated in so many different variations that it becomes a sort of organizing principle or structural device for the novel as a whole (Angier p. 389). Again and again we see the image of two opposites positioned across from each other, from the pig and the lily, to the eccentric old woman and her nervously controlling daughter, the crazed traveling salesman and the softhearted gigolo. In many instances we also observe a further complicating of the duos first established, like the one seen in the poem. The constellation of characters Rhys has populated the novel with includes no obvious candidate for the part of Sasha's romantic interest. Though she finally sets her hopes on René, he is by no means a white knight. Considering his professional livelihood as a gigolo actually makes him the male equivalent of a woman of the night. And the character wearing symbolic white is none other than the commis, constantly roaming the halls in his dressing robe. Dualities of this kind keep reappearing, but in both Dickinson and Rhys's conception, they are never straightforward. They keep shifting, continually evading our expectations, making a display out of something that was hidden or obscuring itself behind a mask, a dynamic we will get back to in Chapter 6. What the images from the poem suggest when applied to the novel as a whole and Sasha in particular is more than anything else, a certain romantic nerve. Though they illustrate an almost pragmatic relativity when it comes to romance, we sense that a core of ideals still remains. Instilled deeply within Sasha, these ideals seem to make her ill fitted to cope with a search for love amongst the men she meets. She might pretend otherwise by making herself appear cold and unassailable, but underneath the surface she so carefully curates, is the heart and tender hopes of a romantic.

4.3 With Shadows I Spend it All

To encounter the next of our chosen examples we have only to turn the leaf, to the first page of the novel proper. Apart from the opening account she makes of her shabby hotel, this is our first introduction to Sasha. It takes place in a café where she is drinking, by herself, according to "programme". While thus situated the dark, thin woman at the table next to hers strikes up a conversation. Unlike Sasha, the woman is respectable beyond any doubt, about forty, but very well made up: "She had the score of a song with her and she had been humming it under her breath, tapping the accompaniment with her fingers. 'I like that song.'

‘Ah, yes, but it’s a sad song. *Gloomy Sunday*.’ She giggled. ‘A little sad.’” (Rhys p. 9). This initial episode provides yet another powerful illustration of Sasha’s character, built on the intertextual reference to the jazz number “Gloomy Sunday”, which Rhys’s contemporaries would most likely also have known as the “Hungarian suicide song”. The melody was written by Rezső Seress, to which English lyrics were then later added. It was first recorded in 1936, but most famously performed by Billie Holiday a couple of years after the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight*. And it constitutes the first of several detailed references to popular culture in the novel, including both films and music. The original version of “Gloomy Sunday” was surrounded by a certain mystery, actually becoming somewhat of an urban legend, because several suicides were said to have occurred with it playing in the background (Selboe p. 227). What is certain is that the lyrics make fairly explicit reference to taking one’s own life, and as such prove interesting for our analysis of the novel even though the song is mentioned only by title within the text.

*Sunday is gloomy / My hours are slumberless / Dearest the shadows / I live with are
numberless / Little white flowers / Will never awaken you / Not where the black coach of
/ Sorrow has taken you / Angels have no thought / Of ever returning you / Would they be
angry / If I thought of joining you? / Gloomy Sunday // Gloomy is Sunday / With shadows I
spend it all / My heart and I / Have decided to end it all / Soon there'll be candles / And
prayers that are sad I know / Let them not weep / Let them know that I'm glad to go [...]
(AZLyrics)*

The woman at the next table giggles and calls the song “a little sad”. However, it does comprise the first mention of the motif of love lost, where death is seen as a release. It is a motif we will see resonate deeply within Sasha, and that will reappear and be developed further towards the end of the novel. The English version of the lyrics end with a realization that it was all a dream, yet *Good Morning, Midnight* pursues a thoroughly nightmarish feeling that lies closer to what the original song evoked, as opposed to accepting the easier resolution. Still, the most obvious reference to suicide in the English lyrics: “My heart and I have decided to end it all”, is echoed at several instances in the novel. Notably by Sasha’s admitted attempts to drink herself to death, and the remark made by the solicitor on why she did not just drown herself in the Seine. “Gloomy Sunday” or “Sombre dimanche” gains a haunting presence, as it begins repeating at irregular intervals almost like a chorus. Other short phrases play similar roles, punctuating the narrative every now and then, emphasizing the importance placed by Rhys on repetition, all the while maintaining her “exact, evocative, incantatory prose” (Angier p. 385).

Yet another image conjured by the lyrics that resonate well with the Sasha we gradually get to know, arises from the description of spending one's days in the sole company of "shadows" of memories. Not reminiscences, but shadows of things past: more fleeting, see-through and insubstantial than memories even. Still sitting at the café table, Sasha bursts into tears seemingly unprovoked, to the apparent perturbation of her companion:

I started to cry. I said: 'It was something I remembered.' The dark woman sat up very straight and threw her chest out. 'I understand,' she said, 'I understand. All the same. ... Sometimes I'm just as unhappy as you are. But that's not to say that I let everybody see it.' (Rhys p. 9-10)

While on the surface she appears volatile and emotionally unstable, the exchange illustrates the extent of Sasha's sensitivity, while the intertextual layer adds greatly to our superficial first impression. We might argue that what Sasha exhibits more than anything else is a deep connection to the contents of the lyrics. Given what we have already established as her way with words, we realize that her proficiency does not stop with skill and understanding. She is also more attuned to the word's emotional resonance, which in turn cause the lyrics to trigger painful memories of her own. Thus, Rhys makes sure that Sasha is instantly thrown into relief as a character who feels things deeply, an impression the rest of the narrative confirms in time. And conversely, that she is not very good at pretending: smoothing over her emotions for appearances sake, leaving her face blank and expressionless, calling the song a little sad and leaving it at that. Once again we see repeated the pattern of the extremely respectable and the constant outsider, of covering up and letting show. Using words to contain the behavior of others or drawing attention to the texts that inform our lives.

4.4 Waiting for Love's Return

The last of the intertextual examples is also the most subtle, as we move from the very beginning of the novel to the very end. It concerns the last lines of *Good Morning, Midnight*, which have been likened to the closing monologue of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in itself a reworking of *The Odyssey*. This particular implicit reference thus results in no less than three intertextual layers, all of whom implicate a separate set of connotations and imagery. We will attempt to outline some of the most crucial textual interconnections here, leaving all other aspects of the ending to a more thorough analysis in Chapters 7 and 8. While the reference to Molly Bloom's final monologue is in itself only an allusion, the consequent link to Homer's *Odyssey* remains unassuming in its importance. What does resonate somewhat with Sasha's

journey in the novel is a sense of biding the time, waiting for love to return to one's life. The departure point for Joyce's reworking of Penelope into the character of Molly Bloom is also a form of repetition with a difference, in that she remains not nearly as faithful as her forerunner was (Maurel p. 125). Up until the last pages of *Good Morning, Midnight* there seems to be a small glimmer of hope for Sasha: that she may yet break out of the destructive spiral and be released from going through the motions by a genuine connection with René. Romantic love is positioned as a prospective silver lining, and its redeeming qualities promise the possibility of a different life. That this likely constitutes the last chance at love Sasha will ever have, is something Rhys leaves us in no doubt of. But in the end the effort is a failure, and what fragile hope existed in Sasha is instead exposed to a devastating reversal.

When considering the phrases and images that correspond between the two different endings, one belonging to Joyce and the other to Rhys, we immediately gain a sense not only of the ones that overlap completely, but also of the ones that are significantly alternate:

how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (Joyce p. 933)

There is a similar importance placed on eyes and eye contact in both texts, yet while Molly Bloom actively uses hers to elicit a proposal, Sasha at first remains the passive receiver of a malignant stare, delivered by someone who appears at once to be almost part machine, part mythical creature: "He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering" (Rhys p. 159). It is Molly Bloom who utters the phrase "as well him as another", yet it is Sasha's fate that tragically hinges on her leaving the door ajar for the wrong man. But then again, thinking back to Dickinson's poem, perhaps she could have opened up her heart for almost any man, not just René. Still, where there in Joyce's text remains a strong union of thought and action, a true stream of consciousness anchored within Molly's placid mind. There is in Sasha's rambling thoughts a fundamental split between the words she says out loud, to drive René away, and the ones she whispers to him in her mind, imploring him to stay. Both texts constitute the climax of a novel, yet in Rhys's narrative there is a sense of crisis that is markedly different than the mood of the other. They both conclude with a downward motion towards their protagonists, which from Sasha's point of view results in the

following last lines: “Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: ‘Yes – yes – yes. ...’” (Rhys p. 159).

And finally there is the triple repetition of the word “yes”, which is present in both texts. Joyce ends his narrative with an affirmation, signaled by the capital letter of the last repetition. While in Rhys’s conception it is the other way around. Three identical repetitions begin predictably with a capital letter, before petering out into nothingness and the triple period we have seen her make use of so many times before. Rhys’s style remains distinctive precisely by her affinity for short sentences ending in these contemplative dots, while Joyce’s passage stands out by the complete absence of grammatical markers. All in all, the presence of Joyce’s ending obscured underneath Rhys’s own, with no other clues to their correlation than a few corresponding words, ensures that the intertextual relation does not detract from the endings completeness on its own. Yet it also adds an associative cadence, though only for those readers who are familiar enough with Joyce’s text to recognize it even though it is seamlessly codified into the narrative, completely without reference. The synthetic coexistence of the two layers enables Rhys to communicate to the reader on a meta-level, an act of inclusion for those who have proven themselves worthy. Still, what this final intertextual communiqué ultimately tells us about Sasha’s fate is a question that may encourage several possible interpretations.

Maurel argues that the ending comes across as if constructed to rule out the possibility of deviating from repetitive patterns when René leaves and Sasha falls into the arms of the commis, a “paper man” that reappears multiple times over the course of the novel (Rhys p. 31). That this last twist in the plot is built on an intertextual reference she reads as an “ultimate acknowledgement of the tyranny of repetition” (Maurel p. 125). The commis thus comes to symbolize the force that coerces Sasha into voicing a language that is not her own, one of many “pre-existing texts which compel the subject’s utterances” (Maurel p. 125). However, in following Maurel’s otherwise convincing argument, we are left with limited interpretive options for the ending itself, other than in a sense witnessing Rhys undo with the last lines of the novel what she has spent the preceding pages to establish and probe. In which case Sasha’s commandeering of an alienating language through the use of exaggeration, irony and parody would, even though it granted her a small sense of power along the way, ultimately be for nothing. It is also an ironic reversal that the character that in the end becomes Sasha’s demise is not really one we would expect to be in a position to control language, and thus her. The commis has been a menacing figure from the start, a largely mute nightmare of her waking hours, yet has never before in the narrative been associated with the

extremely respectable or powerful. Rather, he has been a paper man in more than one sense, flimsy and insubstantial, one that Sasha has been able to sideline with a single shove. “It’s quite easy”, she says: “Like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn’t exist” (Rhys p. 31). Moreover, he is actually a lot like her, an outsider and oddity. So that even though Maurel presents a valid point about the weight that all of the different intertexts in the narrative exert on Sasha, her argumentation does not seem to represent the full picture. We sense that there is more to be found within the complexities of Rhys’s own words and the ones she borrows.

Perhaps the key lies in the minute changes that Sasha exerts on the previously existing texts before incorporating them into her own narrative, and the different degrees in which this takes place. What our close reading of the three examples has shown is that the fragments retain most of their existing implications, yet their position in a new narrative has a way of highlighting correspondences, sometimes bringing out slightly different aspects than what appeared most central in the original. If we conclude that what power Sasha has as a wordsmith stems from her ability to both edit and compile textual fragments from a wealth of different sources, then perhaps it wouldn’t be too far-fetched to regard her preoccupation with intertexts more as interaction than tyranny. In which case the ending and its intertextual relation to Joyce would constitute a prime example, not necessarily of Sasha being swallowed whole by words belonging to someone else: trapped in her own narrative technique. But of the ways in which discreet editing can allow her to graft material from previous texts into her own narrative, showcasing both their power and her own by sometimes laying the fault-lines bare, other times reworking them beyond recognition. Any argument suggesting that phrases or quotes may have worked their way into the narrative without Sasha noticing seems to go against the grain of her character, as she treats the various textual elements with an awareness bordering on the obsessive. Thus any intertextual reference cannot fail to involve an interaction that moves in both directions: the process in itself will always result in our understanding of both texts becoming something slightly different than it was before. In this manner Sasha is granted the ability to construct a mosaic of intertexts that is also a language of her own, despite the fact that the pieces originally belonged to someone else. And the intertextual nature of the novel results in the borrowed texts becoming “less referential than self-referential”, causing the reader to question the narrative standpoint and technique that enables such widespread incorporation of intertextual material (Maurel p. 117). Which is exactly what the following chapter sets out to explore.

5 Narrative Dissonance and the Fragmented Self

The previous chapter culminated with the realization that *Good Morning, Midnight's* preoccupation with intertext is closely interconnected to the novel's formal strategy. By creating a mosaic of intertextual references that Sasha utilizes as a language of her own, the narrative attains a deeply self-referential aspect. Repeatedly drawing attention to itself as a textual construct, and foregrounding the central narrative standpoint. Yet even by virtue of its containment within the consciousness of a single first person narrator, the novel demands that we consider the formal aspects and narrative technique that among other things facilitate the widespread incorporation of intertextual material. Because the act of describing is “necessarily performed by a beholding ‘I’/eye”, any consideration of narrative technique must also be a consideration of Sasha as a character (Maurel p. 112). Yet, these two aspects often seem to function in spite of each other, resulting in several paradoxical elements and a form of resistance within the novel itself. The narrative is tethered to Sasha's consciousness to such a degree that identity and conceptions of the self, which we have already seen function as a theme on the story-level to some extent, also becomes a fulcrum around which several of the formal aspects of the novel revolve. This chapter will attempt to collect and contextualize the most significant of these aspects, including a consideration of the use of pseudonyms and the importance of names, delineating stream of consciousness from interior monologue and placing the novel within an extended context of modernism, as well as looking closely at the function and effects of the different forms of narrative dissonance.

With the exception of the first chapter, we have spent the remainder of this thesis working our way into the fabric of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Getting a feel for the central themes the novel establishes, its storyline, construction, and perhaps especially the narrational standpoint and character traits of Sasha. We have approached the text from several different thematic vantage points, with the existential as our perspective, while otherwise allowing the concept of anxiety to linger in the back of our minds. Perhaps nudging our analysis in the direction of the metaphysical, informing the way we interpret our perceptions without ever straying far from the textual material that constitutes the foundation of our inquiry. Never allowing the theoretical framework to alter the essentials of the text, instead opening up our interpretive options, and training our eyes on those aspects of the novel that seem to make even more sense within this chosen context. Lest we not forget that the purpose of this thesis lies precisely in an intersection of a literary work and philosophical

concept it is perhaps fitting, as we essentially take a step back to consider the formal precepts of the novel, to also make note of an interesting concurrence between the authorships of Rhys and Kierkegaard, once again moving from the outside inward.

5.1 Pseudonymity and the Importance of a Name

Though Rhys and Kierkegaard hail from different worlds and different times they share a small biographical commonality concerning the use of pseudonyms, which may seem superfluous to mention, yet still enables a deeper look at their respective conceptions of identity and the self. Rhys was christened Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams, and took the pen name of Jean Rhys, ostensibly in order to avoid certain unwanted connotations prompted by the one she was given at birth. Perhaps especially the Welsh name Gwendoline, meaning white, which she perceived to be a liability in light of her Dominican background (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 1). During her years working as a Gaiety Girl in London, Rhys also went through a series of different stage names, among them Ella Gray (Pizzichini p. 81). Kierkegaard on the other hand, published both under his own name and a variety of pseudonyms, where each persona was created to cover a different theme, or philosophical platform. The pseudonyms that concern this thesis are Vigilius Haufniensis, and also Anti-Climacus, who are both “depth-psychologically oriented” (Hannay p. 12). Operating with an extensive system of pseudonymous identities, Kierkegaard went so far as to equip most of his avatars with separate biographies, as well as making a point of differentiating the style in which “they” wrote. Most likely, his present time readers in Copenhagen would have no trouble at all ascertaining who was behind the publication, regardless of which name Kierkegaard had printed on the title page. The tactic was thus not so much concerned with fooling his readers, as it was with instituting a performative conception of identity to take part in his technique of indirect communication. The relevant point of interest to be found in these seemingly inconspicuous tidbits of information concern the fact that Kierkegaard and Rhys both, by their respective uses of pseudonymity as a narrational device, in slightly different ways assume a comparable self-conscious position. A perspective which implicitly questions the role of the individual who originates the text on the authorial level, and introduces a distancing effect that enables both writers to maintain a position as ironic observers, situated largely on the outskirts of society. Utilizing one such strategy thus allows Kierkegaard to voice his philosophical concerns via a gallery of pseudonyms, while Rhys

embraces a similar dynamic not only as an author, but even more importantly, within the narrative of her novel.

Because biography aside, the concept of donning a different name than the one you were given also surfaces within the fictional universe of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha herself has gone through a change of name, and expresses the sentiment in the following manner: “It was then that I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder – calling myself Sasha?” (Rhys p. 11). The given name she has discarded, Sophia, appears well suited for a “pretty, amenable character”, something Sasha, clad in her gifted Cossack cap definitively is not (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 67). The hard sounds of her new name instead evoke the image of someone tough and slightly strange, a more foreign creature than she might have been at first. Which again leads us to question what a name says about a person, about their identity and who they are. Can a change of name have an almost magic power to alter these things, Rhys asks through Sasha, and answers her own question with both a yes and an eventual no. Though this instance is by far the only time the significance of names will be made into a theme in Rhys’s writing. A later scene from her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* proves interesting by the connection it creates between the power of a name and the magic practice of ‘obeah’. Derived from West African religions during the time of slavery, obeah was considered dark and harmful by the Caribbean colonials, but historically “signified a metaphysical means to address injustice” for the marginalized population on the islands (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 110). In the novel, Antoinette accuses her husband of casting a spell on her, a form of spirit theft, when he addresses her by the name of Bertha rather than her own: “You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeah too” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* p. 94). As mentioned before, compared to her other novels there are relatively few aspects of *Good Morning, Midnight* that explicitly reference Rhys’s Caribbean background, and thus warrant interpreting the novel within the framework of the post-colonial tradition. The importance Sasha places on her name is one such example, though for the sake of our analysis we discover the most crucial implication not in the insight that geographical belonging may account for important aspects of a person’s sense of identity. As seen in Chapter 2 both Sasha and many of the other characters she encounters are defined by the rootless nature of their existence. If we instead view Sasha’s change of name as a sort of incantation, evoked in the hopes of changing her life, who she is and how others see her, then we must also ask whether or not identity is an essence or a process, something we ourselves can shape. In some respects her two names foreshadow the tragic division that Sasha

experiences in the final scene of the novel, as well as tying into the symbolic of masks that we will explore further in the next chapter. Yet more than anything else, it also says something about what constitutes a fragmentation of Sasha's narrational 'I', through several different types of dissonance. Let us therefore move on to consider the technical aspects of the novel's narrative form.

5.2 Modernist Strategies of Representation

Within the existing secondary literature on Rhys's authorship there are quite a few which reference the narrative technique utilized in *Good Morning, Midnight* as some form of modified stream of consciousness. Yet the use of this definition on Rhys's style of writing may profit from a more thorough questioning. In the process we will glean towards Virginia Woolf in a brief attempt to establish what stream of consciousness is, and through contrasting the two works explore the most important reasons why trying to fit Rhys's novel into this category remains somewhat problematic. Though at first glance the facts appear promising, as Sasha is indeed a first person narrator whose intimate thoughts the reader becomes privy to through her extensive use of interior monologue, a term frequently used in association with descriptions of the stream of consciousness technique. Yet although the narrative may look similar to a stream of consciousness, it is marked by a series of differences and paradoxes that are significant, not only for our interpretation of the story itself and Sasha as a character, but because they also demonstrate certain affinities between *Good Morning, Midnight* and the concept of anxiety.

The first and most obvious of these paradoxes pertains to the combination of the extensive intertextuality we spent the previous chapter exploring, and a narrative strategy, which at least in principle, should make for an "idiosyncratic expression of the self" (Maurel p. 104). The reason being that interior monologue, or auto-diegetic narratives as they are also called, necessarily revolve around a central consciousness and therefore foreground the subject: "whose voice, vision and psychology originate the text" (Maurel p. 104). The fact that Sasha alternates between outward silence, internal revision and incorporating quoted texts by different degrees into her own narrative greatly contributes to the novel's complexity. And by virtue of their relative visibility, the textual fragments sometimes act as a sort of dissonance, disturbing the cohesion we would otherwise expect from a narrative of this kind. It is as if the voices of the other texts speak through Sasha, and she through them, which in turn results in a narrative that is oftentimes staccato, while at its most extreme

almost cacophonous. Since the act of quoting itself tends to function as a sort of exhibition, the textual fault-lines that are sometimes laid bare serve to make the display of language “even more conspicuous” (Maurel p. 117). It is somewhat ironic, that in the instances where Sasha as a character feels most present she is often speaking to herself or in the process of revising words and phrases of her own or someone else’s. At other times the dissonance caused by the incorporated texts almost threaten to obscure her, perhaps by virtue of their power as preexisting texts, yet perhaps also by her own wish and design. In any case, the fragmented form of the narrative demands much of the attentive reader. And as we shall see, the same trait also has serious implications when we attempt to determine the novel’s contested status as a stream of consciousness narrative.

Within the modernist canon James Joyce and Virginia Woolf remain the two authors most often cited when seeking to exemplify the formal traits of the stream of consciousness technique. Even within the space of the short quote included in the previous chapter we were able to observe some of the subtle differences between the style of Rhys and that of Joyce. Most importantly the way in which the latter flows, jumping by flight of fancy from one point to another yet largely uninterrupted, even in terms of punctuation. With the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, and the general social and political upheaval that followed in the wake of the industrial revolution, literature had reached a crisis sometime around the turn of the century, in which “myth, structure and organization” in the traditional sense collapsed (Bradbury p. 26-27). Many writers felt this represented an historic opportunity for change, for a literature that made “dense the feel of life, and the conditions of uncertainty and complexity under which it is lived” (Bradbury p. 400). At the same time more intuitive and poetic, dehumanized and technical, self-questioning and lucid, alienated and chaotic, as well as symbolist in its general preoccupation and fascinated by consciousness and psychology: modernism embodied all of these sometimes contradictory qualities, and more. And its implications went far beyond that of a problem of representation, to become “a profound cultural and aesthetic crux” (Bradbury p. 29). As a prime example of the formal strategies of modernism, the purport of stream of consciousness is often described as an attempt to create a new literary technique that adhered more closely to the actual workings of the human mind, based on a fundamental belief in “perception as plural, life as multiple, reality as insubstantial” (Bradbury p. 50). Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in 1925, at the very height of modernism, thus more than ten years separate it from the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Most scholars hold that modernism as a literary

movement came to an end somewhere in the meantime, yet the artistic impetus of Woolf and Rhys are without a doubt closely related (Bradbury p. 51-52).

Though it has been questioned whether the entirety of *Mrs. Dalloway* can be said to represent a true stream of consciousness, making it indeed more likely that no more than small sections of the novel fit the mold. Let us for the sake of the comparison it enables assume that at least parts of the narrative adheres to the technique of stream of consciousness, in its depiction of the subjective experiences of the major and minor characters during a single day in their lives. *Mrs. Dalloway* chronicles the multiple characters' interior thoughts with little pause or explanation, so that they spin out like spider webs, showcasing the finely interwoven texture of present moment and past remembrance, interior thought and attempts at communication. In particular, we are granted access to the consciousness of the narrative's main protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway. The novel goes on to treat some of the same themes that are raised in *Good Morning, Midnight*, for instance, both narratives describe a culture of coercion, where the unlucky few that do not fit in with the establishment are simply relegated to the margins. Still the context is markedly different than the one Rhys describes, as Clarissa at all times stays safely within the boundaries of polite bourgeois society, a world that Sasha defines herself in opposition to. And in many ways, the futile quest for a nice hotel room that Sasha engages in may be seen as an ironic puncturing of Woolf's insistence on the importance of a room of one's own. *Mrs. Dalloway* also appears especially aligned towards exploring whether or not it is possible to touch the lives of other people: to communicate in the true sense of the word, rather than just speaking past each other. The characters move through space, reacting to their surroundings and each other, still most of the them can't seem to, in the words of Clarissa herself, shake that nagging feeling of being "far out to sea and alone" (Woolf p. 7). The narrative flits between the consciousnesses of several characters, sometimes within the space of a single paragraph, using free indirect discourse and the third-person singular pronouns of 'he' and 'she'. While it is sometimes disjointed and prone to interrupt itself with sudden trains of thought, memories especially, the narrative appears significantly more stable than the one we encounter in *Good Morning, Midnight*. So that despite its multitude of characters, *Mrs. Dalloway* comes across as more unified.

Yet given the thematic and stylistic similarities, why does Woolf's novel warrant the use of the term stream of consciousness, while Rhys's novel does not? Contrasting 'stream of consciousness' and 'interior monologue' leads us to an initial explanation. Oftentimes the two concepts are mentioned in the same breath, appending the second to the first as if they treated the same literary phenomenon. There are however, significant differences:

Though interior monologue and stream of consciousness have often been considered interchangeable, they have also frequently been contrasted: the former would present a character's thoughts rather than impressions or perceptions, while the latter would present both impressions and thoughts; or else, the former would respect morphology and syntax, whereas the latter would not [...] and would thus capture thought in its nascent stage, prior to any logical connection. (Prince p. 92)

Stream of consciousness then, is to be understood as largely defined by the unchecked flow of impressions and perceptions that is filtered through the mind of the character: immediate, unmonitored, unconscious almost, and certainly without commentary or later revision. Nor is this stream obliged to adhere to conventions of grammar and punctuation, allowing long sentences to run on almost indefinitely instead. The definition of stream of consciousness thus appears fairly specific, albeit intuitive. Whereas interior monologue embraces a larger array of literary phenomenon, including more fully formed thoughts and lines of argumentation, so long as they take place within the mind of a character. When we apply this more nuanced definition to the two novels, it becomes immediately apparent that by virtue of her almost obsessive editing, the incorporation of intertextual fragments and consequent narrative dissonance, as well as sections that can only be described as conversations with herself: Sasha's narrative is not a stream of consciousness at all. It is too stylistically staccato, too constantly self-conscious. Having thus defined, and established the ground rules of the narrative technique employed in *Good Morning, Midnight*, we will continue our analysis by pinpointing some of the other, equally important examples of narrative dissonance. Having already explored the form and function of intertextuality at some length, our point of departure arrives in the shape of another commonality between *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Mrs. Dalloway*: the function of time, and how the past seems always to linger just underneath the present moment in the consciousness of both protagonists.

5.3 Interrupted Monologue

During long sections of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's narrating of her own life is simultaneous, occurring in the present tense. Thus the moment of the story and the moment of the narrating primarily coincide, in the same manner that the narrational voice and the narrated "I" initially does. Both features encourage the reader to expect the speaking subject to produce a highly integrated text, one that smoothly intermingles narrative and interior monologue. Yet this expected unity is repeatedly thwarted, also in terms of the different time-planes that operate within the novel. The inclusion of long embedded memories and

remembrances, disrupt “the postulated unity of the narrative on the one hand and of the narrating instance on the other” (Maurel p. 104-105). As a matter of fact the past seems to creep into the present time flow of Sasha’s consciousness increasingly throughout, until Part Three of the novel consists of nothing but memories (Angier p. 386). Because only the frame story adheres to linear chronology, while the remembered episodes are to be understood as prompted arbitrarily by the train of Sasha’s thoughts, the reminiscences come to function as a dissonance, comparable to the one we outlined in our analysis of intertextuality. And which again result in a form of narrative introversion. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, it constitutes an interesting feature of the narrative that the intertextual elements are largely concentrated precisely within these retrospective sections of Sasha’s story. It causes a layering of both intertexts and time-planes that results in a very concentrated form of dissonance. A double distancing, that separates Sasha’s present time consciousness both from the external incorporated texts, and from her past self. In fact, some of the previous events that resurface and are replayed in Sasha’s mind expand into such extended sequences of retrospective narrating that they not only undermine the expected sense of immediacy, but also reintroduce a certain distance between the narrating and the narrated ‘I’. Thus Sasha’s story, despite its reliance on interior monologue, takes on some of the same qualities that any other story told in retrospect by a first person narrator would have (Maurel p. 105). And not only does Sasha remember moments from her past, she also appears to relive them whenever they are brought to the front of her consciousness.

It thus becomes the task of the reader to piece together a fragmentary grasp, not only of Sasha’s consciousness and personality, but also of the defining events that lay in her past. These features of the narrative strategy emphasize the complex nature of our experiences and perceptions, a complementary vision to the modernist credo we described as making “dense the feel of life” (Bradbury p. 400). And because the numerous time-shifts are induced by Sasha’s consciousness, and the sequence of events remain jumbled, this strategy also serves to perpetuate the general sense of alienation. By allowing the present time narrative to be increasingly interrupted by memory, Rhys is able to gradually divulge significant pieces of information so that the reader is ultimately made aware of the tragedies that have shaped Sasha’s life: both her broken marriage with Enno, and the child that died in infancy. Even when the narrative is kept strictly simultaneous, the past seems ever-present underneath the now: all it takes is the tiny spark of a familiar street or situation to set Sasha off on an extensive reverie, to start the “cheap gramophone records” playing in her head (Rhys p. 14). Her act of returning to Paris is in itself a repetition, and as we saw in Chapter 2, the same

applies to her movement through streets she used to know, and the seemingly never-ending carousel of restaurants, lavatories and hotel rooms. As such, the narrative is truly “saturated with the past”, even to the point of affecting Sasha’s interior monologue on the sentence-level (Rhys p. 91). Her narrative is full of “clipped lines, sentences of single staccato words, sentences without a verb” (Angier p. 386). And oftentimes, Sasha’s introduction to a particular reminiscence is marked by nothing more than a few quick words, as if reminding herself of how it was: “...*The room at the Steens*” (Rhys p. 95), “...*The room in the hotel in Amsterdam that night*” (Rhys p. 98), “What happened then? ... Well, what happens?” (Rhys p. 99). Sasha is speaking to her private mind and therefore has no need for explanations. Descriptions are delivered at a single glance and the reader is left to clamor for whatever sense of consistency and unity Rhys is willing to permit, creating an intriguing sense of distance without ever leaving the confines of Sasha’s head.

A similar and related form of distancing occurs at the level of the narrated present. A pair of strangers, who later turn out to be the two Russians, walk up to Sasha in the street and ask: “Pourquoi êtes-vous si triste?” (Rhys p. 39). Coming from someone she does not know, it constitutes an odd question. And the simple directness of “why are you so sad?” does indeed send Sasha’s mind into an instant ramble. Intuitively we understand that the average person would have to deliberate telling the truth in the same manner that the question was asked, or attempt to evade directness altogether, seeking refuge in polite commonplaces. For Sasha this proves a complicated task. She first procrastinates, and then considers several possible answers, ranging from the metaphorical to the brutally honest: “sad as a violin with only one string, and that one broken, sad as a woman who is growing old” (Rhys p. 39). She then wonders which answer would prove the most adequate, regardless of telling the truth. And when she finally does speak, it is to voice none of the alternatives she has just considered, opting instead to deny being sad in the first place. We have established that interior monologue as a narrative form leads the reader to expect a certain unity and simultaneousness within the speaking subject, despite implementing fewer formal demands than stream of consciousness. Yet Sasha’s narrative often appears more like an internal dialogue. Most of the time her mind is occupied in “carefully planning out whatever she is about to say or undertake, arguing it out with herself, thus undermining the effect of spontaneity” (Maurel p. 105). The act of speaking to herself results in a fragmentation of Sasha’s narrational voice into what can be defined as two conflicting vocal frequencies, further counteracting our expectations and creating yet another form of dissonance (Caples p. 9). It seems improbable that the use of interior monologue could possibly produce an

alienating and distancing effect on the speaking subject, yet that is precisely what Rhys achieves. Oftentimes Sasha's interior monologue "forks into two voices, one censoring the other", while the extensive use of the second-person pronoun signposts the instability and division within (Maurel p. 106).

Even in the instances where longer sections of dialogue are rendered directly on the page, we sense the same form of detachment. Sasha often paraphrases the situations and conversations she experiences, making use of several different techniques ranging from summary to indirect speech. Yet even though we know she must have been present for the incident to be featured in her narrative, she sometimes seems more like an eyewitness than a participant. And not only does she disengage herself from dialogues where she remains largely silent, but more surprisingly, in her continued conversation with the two Russians for example, she also distances herself from words that are her own: "Now, for goodness' sake, listen to this conversation, which, after the second drink seems to be about gods and goddesses. 'Madame Vénus se fâchera,' the short one is saying, wagging his finger at me. 'Oh, her!' I say. 'I don't like her any more'" (Rhys p. 41). While the exchange may look fairly straightforward, there are several formal sleights of hand at work. The paradoxical addition of the reporting clause is immediately "at odds with both the use of the present tense and Sasha's actual participation in the conversation" (Maurel p. 112). In the first part of the quote, Sasha also references the entire situation as if viewing it from the outside and speaking to herself, despite being present in the moment. This distancing effect is repeatedly utilized in the narrative, and is also paramount for the incorporation of Sasha's irony, self-deprecating or otherwise. Yet even though Sasha's internal monologue is sometimes marked by distance, she is never missing altogether. Like Maurel remarks, the speaking subject is "always present in the ironic code", even though the signs of that presence may be few or none at all (Maurel p. 123). And while we may think that distance would function as negative space in the narrative, it is instead imbued with meaning, often one of subversion, building precisely on the irony and parody that characterizes Sasha's use of words in general. She finally sums up the conversation she is having as a conventional scene, reducing it to no more than bullet points: "Now we have discussed love, we have discussed cruelty, and they sheer off politics" (Rhys p. 41). As if self-consciously dramatizing the performing of conversational rituals, Sasha chooses instead to linger on the insignificant details of their greeting and goodbyes (Maurel p. 113). Suggesting a related logic to the one we have attested to her outsider status, as well as echoing the modernist emphasis on form over content. During the chapter on intertextuality we noted that Sasha sometimes omits quotation marks, blending a piece of text

seamlessly into her own narrative, or otherwise making the origin of an utterance unclear. Through her revision of dialogues we are sometimes made to wonder whether or not a statement should be attested to another character, or if it indeed belongs to Sasha's interior monologue. The divided nature of both her character and narrational voice, which we have just explored, complicates this dynamic even further.

5.4 Borrowed Voices and Textual Ghosts

To whom does this voice and utterance belong, we have to ask ourselves repeatedly. The question brings us back to the vicinity of where we started this chapter, a sort of pseudonymity within the narrative itself. Our initial example in this context hails from the first part of the novel, just a few pages into the text. Sasha, who is still in the process of settling in to her hotel room, comes to think of her friend Sidonie's favorite saying: "one mustn't put everything on the same plane. That's her great phrase. And one mustn't put everyone on the same plane, either. Of course not. [...] 'Il ne faut pas mettre tout sur le même plan'" (Rhys p. 12). The phrase becomes important by virtue of the critical reading that Sasha subjects it to, "a sort of textual analysis of Sidonie's utterance, translating it, assessing its semantic implications, and so on" (Maurel p. 117). Sasha does what we have seen her do before when demonstrating her skill with words, yet what characterizes this instance perhaps even more than many of the others is that our attention is directed towards the discursive mode. At first Sasha seems to feel trapped by the utterance like she feels trapped by her hotel room: "Quatrième à gauche, and mind you don't trip over the hole in the carpet. That's me" (Rhys p. 12). Which suggests that the phrase, like other preexisting texts holds a certain power to create determinations that she must then comply with. Yet Sasha's transformation of the utterance, through analysis and translation, appears to divest it of much of its trace of origin and original meaning. It becomes a catchphrase, more of a gesture than it is concerned with the content it initially evoked. So that Sasha, who has so very few words of her own, in effect annexes someone else's, and allows them to speak for her.

The same applies to the later quotation from *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Oscar Wilde: the "horrible laughter of the world" that stands in for many of Sasha's existential fears (Rhys p. 115). Though primarily informed by an explicit intertextual reference, the quotation also draws on Sasha's remembered vision of sinking into the depths of the river, to "the accompaniment of loud laughter" (Rhys p. 10). In this particular instance the quotation marks function as "mere screens affording false distance", so that despite the textual fragments

placement and punctuation, it appears to speak directly to Sasha's feelings (Maurel p. 116). As does the included quote from *The Autobiography of a Mare*: "At first I was afraid they would let gates bang on my hindquarters, and I used to be nervous of unknown people and places" (Rhys p. 37). Once again, the quote appears to voice opinions and emotions that Sasha is either unwilling or unable to relate herself. In Chapter 2 we saw a similar transference at work, where Rhys imbued the streets and rooms that Sasha moved through with emotions, allowing the environments to take on certain characteristics of her psychological interior. That Sasha borrows the voice of a horse actually constitutes only one example in a string of recurring images, in *Good Morning, Midnight* and elsewhere in Rhys's work, where animals are animated, granted human emotions and even thoughts. The same takes place in an anecdote concerning the fate of a troubled cat that in many respects personifies the worst of Sasha's worries: "The kitten which had 'persecution mania', who was attacked by male cats and finally run over by a car and killed, represents the kind of outlaw female Sasha is: her eyes, she sees, are just like the kitten's eyes" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 125). The story of the kitten has the basic components of a fable, neatly summing up Sasha's story in the space of a few sentences, while also foreshadowing the end she is moving towards and repeating the image of death as a mercy (Rhys p. 47). What all three of these sequences have in common is that they have the paradoxical effect of creating both distance and closeness at the same time. Speech and writing is laid bare as repetition, before taking on a meta-function and allowing Sasha the peculiar effect of speaking through a proxy inside her own narrative or interior monologue.

Even though Sasha's actions and utterances, or the lack thereof, must be said to demonstrate a certain avoidance of self-exposure, the novel also demonstrates that the dynamic is sometimes reversed. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, Sasha is at one point employed as a ghostwriter, an element of the plot that affords Rhys the occasion to rework the theme of narrational distance in yet another manner. Thus all of a sudden it is Sasha's words that are attributed to the name of another subject or speaker. In this instance a woman of extreme wealth living in Antibes with her husband. She has hired Sasha to write fairy tales, in itself one of the most strictly prescribed literary genres. In addition, the woman also dictates the thematic content of the story, if not providing Sasha with the opening line she is to use. Thus faced with the dilemma of satisfying her employer in order to avoid losing her livelihood, while simultaneously staying true to her own language and therefore herself, it only takes a few tries before Sasha is "kindly requested to alter her style, the ultimate stronghold of the subject" (Maurel p. 126). Not sharing her taste for the monotony of

monosyllables, her employer makes an appeal for longer words, ostensibly because she wishes to get her money's worth: "Long words. Chiaroscuro? Translucent? ... I bet he'd like cataclysmal action and centrifugal flux, but the point is how can I get them into a Persian garden? ... Well, I might. Stranger things have happened" (Rhys p. 140).

Within these strict rules Sasha sets about writing stories, even though the creative contribution she is at liberty to make is seriously encumbered. How is she to reconcile the preexisting constraints that shape a text, while still being able to create something that represents her identity? The tension between silence and assimilation on the one hand and an authentic expression of the self on the other thus repeats itself both on the story-level of *Good Morning, Midnight* and on the formal level. The several different types of dissonance we have outlined in this chapter therefore appear interconnected, contributing in part to the novel's greatest narrational paradox: that the extensive use of interior monologue does not institute Sasha as a stable psychological self, whose singularity it then becomes the purpose of the narrative to explore. That despite the implementation of what is by definition an egocentric form: the novel repeatedly subverts the "conventional emphasis on the private consciousness of individual selves" (Maurel p. 106). Rather than being grounded in Sasha's sense of self, and from that basis drawing on her memories, impressions, feelings and beliefs to supply the contents of the narrative, *Good Morning, Midnight* centers around a protagonist who appears in constant disarray: on a narrative level characterized by dissonance, resistance and fragmentation. It is as if the form and content of the novel convene, and the question at the core of the maelstrom concerns the stability of Sasha's self.

Through contrasting *Good Morning, Midnight* with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, we arrived at certain insights about the two novel's different formal strategies, and saw the narrational dissonance and paradoxes that characterizes the former at work. While the use of free indirect discourse affords Woolf the subtle and smooth transitions between multiple perspectives that make her style distinctive, Rhys's narrative appears all the more claustrophobic for being limited to Sasha's consciousness at all times. Yet although Woolf's narrational voice is multifaceted, it offers a sense of unity within each of her characters that Rhys appears unwilling to grant her single focalizer, Sasha. While Clarissa goes about her business, we perceive her as an established presence and personality. She thus appears grounded by a relatively steadfast sense of self, even while torrents of impressions and impulses, thoughts and memories pass through her mind. Sasha, on the other hand, displays no single quality more pronounced than her fundamental insecurity. Despite being the eldest heroine of Rhys's contemporary novels, she is a character who comes across as constantly

questioning the solidity of every aspect of her own existence, down to the very foundations of her personality and selfhood. And Rhys employs a narrative technique that comes to almost physically represent this crisis within the speaking subject, by allowing dissonance to seep into the narrative on several different levels (Maurel p. 126). The fact that Sasha struggles with her sense of self is suggested by multiple aspects of the narrative: her change of name, implementation of intertexts, conflation of past and present, borrowing of other people's voices, animation of animals, her work as a ghostwriter, as well as the attention she pays to her physical appearance as if it were all a mask. These varied examples convey the constant tension that exists within Sasha. The enormous effort spent maintaining a surface, and the very real danger of disintegrating underneath that façade. It is as if the modernist crisis that "destroyed the tidy categories of thought, that toppled linguistic systems, that disrupted formal grammar and the traditional links between words and words, words and things" has moved even further (Bradbury p. 48). As if it has continued into the subject itself, to sever the bond we have taken for granted between consciousness and identity: from concerning itself primarily with the representation of reality and possibility of communication, to also question the very stability of the self as a category. Not in the post-modern sense of the subject disappearing altogether, but effecting a severe instability within Sasha nonetheless. Demonstrating that the underlying difference we have observed between *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Mrs. Dalloway* stems at least in part from a fundamentally alternate conception of the self. In the latter, the crisis seems to exist between individuals, while for Sasha it affects the very stability of her self, suggesting a slight shift in interest between high modernism and later works in the same tradition.

Thinking back to our initial survey of the concept of anxiety we are reminded of Kierkegaard's insistence that identity is never a given, once established and then set in stone. Rather, that the self is in a constant and gradual "process of becoming", by the small increments of both internal and external influence (Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* p. 30). With Kierkegaard's constellation of concepts in the back of our mind, we are able to interpret Sasha's fundamental insecurity, and the ways it manifests itself throughout the narrative, as more than just an issue of dashed hopes and low self-esteem. As readers we become better equipped to comprehend her distress at full impact, understanding its existential implications and just how much is at stake. While the analytical tools of literature carry us far in our interpretation of the novel, it is almost as if there are some areas that are just out of reach. That the profundity of the novel in a sense demands different and larger concepts that only existential philosophy can provide. Resisting the temptation to pigeonhole Sasha as

depressed, traumatized, or mentally ill, we are instead able to view her constant questioning of herself and her existence as a existential mindset, a form of problematizing of the individual as an entity. Delineating her character as a self in a constant state of becoming. The preoccupation with consciousness and identity constitutes a modernist trait for sure, yet also one that has tendrils reaching further back in history, to Kierkegaard, among others. It appears that even more so than Woolf and Joyce, Rhys makes the instability of the speaking subject into a theme of her novel, shaping the formal aspects of Sasha's narrative around this fulcrum as well. The fundamental insecurity and resulting dissonance thus becomes more than an interference to be tolerated, interpreted and ultimately worked around. The fact that the novel's formal strategy and its most important images convene within Sasha's consciousness leads us to believe that the dissonance is indeed paradoxical, yet also a pivotal function of her fragmented sense of self.

6 Masks, Metaphors and Mirror Images

Considering *Good Morning, Midnight's* formal and narrational strategies brought us to the realization that even when different forms of dissonance become a dominant feature of the narrative it is as a function of Sasha's consciousness. More than anything else this dissonance foregrounds the speaking subject and Sasha's fragmented self, allowing the formal aspects of the novel to convene with some of its most striking and powerful images and metaphors. To arrive at this insight we made a slight detour to place the novel in a modernist context, which also proves relevant here. Bradbury and McFarlane have observed that modernist works tend to be structured, not by "the sequence of historical time or the evolving sequence of character, from history to story, as in realism and naturalism; they tend to work spatially or through layers of consciousness, working towards a logic of metaphor or form" (Bradbury p. 50). Though the scholars reference modernist literature in general terms their statement resonate extraordinarily well with several of the distinctive features of *Good Morning, Midnight*, providing an advantageous point of departure for our further analysis.

We have already touched upon the relative unimportance of plot for the development of the narrative, because Sasha's mind and interior monologue functions as the driving force, and the chain of events appears governed largely by chance encounters. The narrative strategy also ensures that sequential time is disrupted as it flits back and forth between present time interior monologue, and Sasha's recollection of the past. Any traditional conception of character development is thus largely circumvented. Instead, Sasha's consciousness gradually reveals her past to the reader, allowing layer after layer to be stripped away. What emerge during the course of the narrative are certain images and metaphors that seem to structure the novel in a way that plot and character development cannot. In accordance with the dynamic duality first established by Emily Dickinson's poem there are several sets of images: day and night, external and internal, outsider and insider, present and past, looking and being looked at, surface and depth, dream and reality. It appears that: "*Everything is double*, to mirror Sasha's doubleness" within (Angier p. 389). Yet out of this multitude a cluster of images seems to crystalize and assume an even more ubiquitous position in the narrative than the rest. This central image and metaphor concerns the practice of masking. Drawing on examples from throughout the novel, this chapter will explore the ways in which Sasha utilizes masking alternately as an escape, as social armor, and a disguise. What has been the case for all of our different approaches up until this point holds

true for these central metaphors as well: the novel appears to emphasize the importance of the individual self, because masking also naturally concerns identity. At every turn, Sasha's outward appearance of clothes, hair and makeup are positioned as intricately linked to her sense of who she is. Some of her actions affect a similar outcome, primarily when it concerns the consumption of alcohol in public, looking and being looked at, as well the possibility of making a scene or exhibition of oneself in these same spaces. If we understand Sasha's masking essentially as a covering up, it is requisite that we also inquire what she is trying to obscure, how, and to what effect. Thus we also note a certain performativity or posturing in the practice of masking, which begs the question of whether or not something differentiates the outward display and playing of a role, from what we must presume exists beneath the surface. Is it all just play-acting, or is there a more or less authentic identity, a true self to be found underneath, if only one is able to discard the mask and put pretense aside.

Sasha maintains an ambiguous relationship to masking, as she seems to do with most everything. She expresses skepticism and distrust at what we have described as the extremely respectable people's practice of masking language in insincerity and cliché. At the same time she engages in several different forms of masking herself, and throughout the narrative masks become a recurring image, both in the literal sense, and the metaphorical. They are often shown to "provide a refuge", at least temporarily, from the uncertainty that is her life (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 121). And regardless of what form Sasha's own masking practices take, the act itself is designed to disguise her inner distress, fragmentation and panic, and project instead an outward façade of acceptable respectability and belonging. Sasha says:

Faites comme les autres – that's been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you. And a lot he cares – I could have spared myself the trouble. But this is my attitude to life. Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. (Rhys p. 88)

Sasha is indeed trying, with all her wit and resolve, to do and be like everyone else. And while the outer circumstances of her return to Paris are motivated by the effort to keep up appearances, most of the activities and errands she sets out to accomplish during the present time of the narrative also tends to this same purpose. Though at night she lies awake in her hotel bed contemplating the way in which the trip came about, how her friend Sidonie looked at her: "Half-shutting her eyes and smiling the smile which means: 'She's getting to look old. She drinks.' [...] 'I think you need a change. Why don't you go back to Paris for a bit? ...

You could get yourself some new clothes – you certainly need them” (Rhys p. 11). What matters now is that money has conveniently arrived from somewhere, to allow Sasha to repair the “evidence of time passing” (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 121). Despite the fact that it must have become an uphill battle of late, now that whatever youth and promise she laid claim to in the past has dissipated, while she remains ever dependent on the patronage of others.

6.1 The Social Armor of a Good Fur Coat

Upon her arrival in Paris, as we have touched upon briefly in another context already, Sasha is wearing a hat that shouts “Anglaise”, a dress that in her own words “extinguishes” her, and a “damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else – the last idiocy, the last incongruity” (Rhys p. 14). Put together this assortment of items suggests an outward image of Sasha: her background, status and current position. And it is precisely by virtue of their function as social markers that her different pieces of clothing gain their significance. When we decode the evidence of her appearance, our first impression of Sasha is thus one of a woman who has been down on her luck for quite some time. Who wears her threadbare garments because they are all that is available to her, with an old fur coat bearing witness of happier, more affluent days that are now long gone. In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* another one of Rhys’s protagonists speaks to the same point, insisting that people think twice before being rude to anyone wearing a good fur coat, that it is an item that automatically functions as “protective colouring, as it were” (Rhys, *After Leaving* p. 57). Such is the incongruity of Sasha’s old fur coat, a status symbol on top of an otherwise careworn exterior. Which instead of providing her with the social armor she needs, becomes an attempted façade that insufficiently masks her current social status, and the downward turn her life has taken. At present they are fundamentally mismatched, Sasha and her fur coat, and she knows this better than anyone.

Similarly, after the failure of her non-confrontation with Mr. Blank, which we explored at some length in Chapter 3, Sasha holds that her humiliation might have been avoided altogether had she only been wearing the right dress. And she is very specific about its merits, having picked it out already: “wide sleeves embroidered in vivid colours – red, green, blue, purple. It is my dress. If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid” (Rhys p. 25). The dress is almost an embodiment of the dark background required for the colors to shine, Sasha’s bleak vision of society and suffering. Had she only been wearing it the entire confrontation might have been different, and perhaps even more importantly, she might not have been the same. Thus not only can clothing provide social

armor, Sasha even implies that it can affect a metamorphosis of sorts. That the stature of the dress may shape the wearer into someone who doesn't shrink back from a challenge: someone who is vivid, severe and innately powerful, like the garment itself. The sentiment resembles Sasha's motivation for changing her name, and prompts a series of actions and gestures that appear naturally related in the sense that Sasha carries them out seeking to alter how others perceive her. In fact, as soon as she has a little money in her pocket, she immediately sets about changing her appearance in an attempt to reinstate the outward signs of her respectability, in effect hoisting herself up onto the next and more secure rung of the social ladder. A visit to the hairdressers is requisite, though the decision of which color to choose, whether she would prefer herself as a blonde, brunette or redhead sets Sasha off on a fervent internal monologue borrowing from the lingo of the professional beautician.

I try to decide what color I shall have my hair dyed, and hang on to that thought as you hang on to something when you are drowning. Shall I have it red? Shall I have it black? Now, black – that would be startling. Shall I have it blond cendré? But blond cendré, madame, is the most difficult of colours. It is very, very rarely, madame, that hair can be successfully dyed blond cendré. It's even harder on the hair than dyeing it platinum blonde. First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it – and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another colour must be imposed on it. (Educated hair. ... And then, what?) (Rhys p. 44)

This internal deliberation is significant for several reasons. First and foremost because Sasha appears intent on effecting a change that is more than cosmetic through her choice of hair color. When she then quips that the entire process will result in “educated hair”, we are led one step further towards understanding her actions in terms of masking, as the “removal of original identity to make way for what is approved by the system” (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 72). This is how Sasha proposes to mold herself, to become more acceptable to society and fulfill her motto of being like everyone else. Thus she is essentially trying to disguise the very character traits we have come to regard as most central to her personality: her outsider status, lucid observations of others and subversive way of thinking. Yet Sasha states that the prospect of transformation is something she hangs on to as if someone drowning, suggesting that in order to survive she doesn't believe herself to have much choice. So she keeps herself busy, going over the list of all the things she needs to buy: stockings, gloves, lipstick and a new scent (Rhys p. 121). Everything could be different, she insists, if only she had that dress, or the right hat. Both she and the reader knows that this

affirmation is essentially an illusion, yet it is one she must keep on engaging, because to do anything else would be tantamount to surrender.

Sasha also makes use of alcohol in a related form of masking, part armor and part disguise. Initially she states that: “it’s when I am quite sane like this, when I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane, that I realize how lucky I am” (Rhys p. 10). The quote ironically suggests that Sasha drinks to attain a sense of normalcy in her existence, that without alcohol even her sanity would be in question. Thus it represents a numbing sort of self-medication, predicated from the very beginning by the necessity of locating “a place to have my drink in after dinner” (Rhys p. 9). And by the way she relates this necessity, we immediately suspect that one drink won’t quite be enough to escape the demons she is running from. We understand that Sasha drinks to forget who she is. To forget the past that led up to this point in her life, and whatever future is still within her reach. With alcohol as her weapon of choice she is constantly striving for that illusive state of mind, after just enough drinks, when she no longer knows “whether it’s yesterday, today or tomorrow” (Rhys p. 121). When the organization of time, and the interference of both her memories and fears for the future seem to have passed out of existence, leaving only now: the present moment. What awaits her there remains unresolved for the time being. Perhaps it is only resignation and indifference, or perhaps there still exists a small glimmer of hope for a more unconstrained version of Sasha’s self, freed of the damage, dissonance and despair that make her life insufferable at the moment. In the narrative, alcohol is positioned as a means for Rhys to explore the violation of “normative codes of expectation for women”, as well as “a way to express the repressed inner core of her characters’ emotional lives, liberated if distorted by the drug” (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 70). Through her behavior Sasha breaks no less than two social conventions: “that women should not drink strong drinks (she likes Pernod), and that they shouldn’t drink alone”, both of which she appears to have been doing for quite a while already (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 70).

Now the feeling of the room is different. They all know what I am. I’m a woman come in here to get drunk. That happens sometimes. They have a drink, these women, and then they have another and then they start crying silently. And then they go into the lavabo and then they come out – powdered, but with hollow eyes – and, head down, slink into the street. ‘Poor woman, she has tears in her eyes.’ ‘What do you expect? Elle a bu.’ (Rhys p. 89)

What are we to expect from Sasha, when she has indeed been drinking, and spends large portions of the novel either planning a visit to a bar, or nursing a glass of some sort of liquor.

At first alcohol doesn't seem to affect her much, but then it makes her look terrible: "face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller" (Rhys p. 37). About to break into tears, as she is wont to do at some point during the evening, thus completing the circle of Sasha's self-destructive pattern of behavior. The striking image of a woman's immaculately powdered face, with deep, dark hollows under the eyes, is one that repeats at several points in the narrative. Even on its own it is a ghoulish mask, and one that only partially conceals the distraught features of the woman underneath. Seriously undermining the façade that she has spent so much time and effort constructing, by selecting the right hair color, applying makeup, carefully choosing a dress and a hat and finally buoying herself up with a drink after dinner.

When Sasha is in this state she appears to revert even more often to remembrances and retrospective episodes so that alcohol also comes to function as a sort of narrative device. Furthermore, under the influence she becomes increasingly "unreasonable, self-pitying, aggressive and yet peculiarly aware of how she looks and acts" (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 70). Rhys thus achieves a convincing portrayal of the effects that alcohol exerts on her protagonist's consciousness, as she also does in several of her other novels, primarily *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Yet none of the other novels are quite as tragically explicit about the existential aspect of the self-destructive dynamic that Sasha engages in. Because at the same time, drinking represents a much-needed respite that is necessary for keeping the mask in place, as well as perpetuating her social decline. It both shields Sasha from the hostile looks of others, and makes her all the more conscious of their stares, almost to the point of paranoia. As when she sits down in a restaurant and instantly feels the eyes of every other person in the room "fixed" on her (Rhys p. 43). Whether her sensation of being an object of scrutiny in this particular situation is imagined or not, it says something about the paramount importance placed within the narrative on the act of looking and being looked at. While Sasha's actions, and the alterations she makes to her appearance are shown to grant her momentary escape, to serve as a disguise or social armor, they are at the same time contingent on her acute awareness of how other people see her. Because putting up a front would be close to meaningless if no one else were looking. Thus Sasha's preoccupation with the ways in which her appearance, clothing and the drink in her hand influence how other people perceive her, also carries a tinge of performativity. And as soon as the mask slips ever so slightly, she is instantly exposed. Let us therefore attempt to follow some of the stares that Sasha feels herself the target of, and allow them to grant us further insight into the dynamic of masking.

6.2 Judgmental Mirror Images

Take, for instance, the scene in the hotel room where Sasha looks outside her window, and directly opposite sees a young girl putting on makeup. The street outside is so narrow that the two women are almost face-to-face. Across the way, the girl becomes aware of Sasha's glance: "She averts her eyes, her expression hardens. I realize that if I watch her making-up she will retaliate by staring at me when I do the same. I half-shut my window and move away from it" (Rhys p. 30). In addition to this early example, *Good Morning, Midnight* is flush with imagery of "exposing oneself to hostile, contemptuous eyes" (Angier p. 379). Looks and stares are everywhere, and can constitute so many different things, a provocation perhaps, or an invasion of privacy, but first and foremost a look is important because it contains an implicit judgment. And as Sasha retreats back into her room out of fear of being watched, she thus attests to the pressure to conform exercised by the watchful eyes of others.

"Well, well," the mirror in the lavatory of Deux Magots says to Sasha at a later point in the novel: "last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren't you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one – lightly, like an echo – when it looks into me again?" (Rhys p. 142). All lavatories do this, the mirror continues, throwing the image of her somewhat happier, less distraught past self directly in Sasha's face. Giving her, and us, a visual representation of the displacement within, by a mirroring of images. Both of these episodes make use of a strategy that is repeated quite often, installing mirroring not only as a prevalent image alongside and related to that of masking, but also denoting the majority of relationships that exists between characters. In both respects, the narrative often positions two opposites across from each other, once again in the vein of Dickinson's poem. Sasha introduces us to the other mannequins for instance, of which one is English and the other French. The first "belle comme une fleur de verre" while the other is "[b]elle comme une fleur de terre" (Rhys p. 21). There is the young and sad Lise who is contrasted by the tough and self-sufficient Paulette. The optimistic Russian and the one who is more like Sasha, who "has his feelings and sticks to them" (Rhys p. 40). There is the nice boss and the ignoble Mr. Blank, the old whore and the young one, as well as the Pig and the Lily of Pecanelli's restaurant (Rhys p. 34). Rhys is careful to emphasize that women remain more exposed to an objectifying gaze than men do, and there are also several women who mirror Sasha's present situation: "the girl who writes to her lover, the destitute girls at the convent, the 'sketches of little women' on the menu, who all need money, like her" (Angier p. 388). And no less than three times does Sasha

encounter a pair of women, mother and daughter. First there is the woman who tries a myriad hair ornaments on her bald head, while her daughter waits restlessly in the background (Rhys p. 20). Then there is the enormously wealthy mother-daughter duo she unsuccessfully attempts to guide through the streets of Paris (Rhys p. 27), and finally the two she overhears chatting superficially about Verlaine and Rimbaud in the lobby of her hotel (Rhys p. 33). Put together these figures make up a veritable procession of pairs and mirror images, which “undulate” through the novel much like the procession of streets and rooms (Rhys p. 91).

Though the multitude of minor characters that we have just listed represents many intriguing dualities, Rhys allows them to mirror each other and Sasha mostly just in passing. As the narrative moves along, they continue looking and being looked at, judging and being judged. Sasha participates in both respects, feeling herself the object of scrutiny in one moment, before using her wit and observational skills to level a damning characteristic in the next. Some of the passing faces she judges just for fun, others prove to resemble her a little more than the rest, causing Sasha to become prone to resentment and envy. We have already mentioned the girl in the window and the woman humming the melody to “Gloomy Sunday”, and there is also Paulette, the “patronne” of Sasha’s hotel, and to a certain extent even René. All of which are characters that mirror Sasha in some respect and whom she appears to envy for their security in themselves. What comes across very clearly throughout the novel is that she greatly prefers looking at others, rather than being looked at, because the latter position leaves her exposed. Although it is a rarity, the few moments in the narrative when she appears happiest Rhys significantly describes Sasha as watching others (Angier p. 380). When Serge begins dancing in his studio for example, and requests that she join him, her decline for once is clear and unwavering: “No, I’d rather watch you” (Rhys p. 77). While maintaining her outsider position in the room, Sasha thus shields herself from judgment and at the same time retains the opportunity to observe and evaluate the other two. A similar dynamic characterizes every single one of her meetings with René, where there at one point is a curious reversal of roles, and Sasha instead of being an object of desire for the male gaze is left to examine René’s looks and appearance, evaluating his teeth almost as if he were a horse for sale, or alternately a slave being presented for auction (Rhys p. 62). What underpins both of these moments is Sasha’s preference for regarding others, and that she only feels safe when no one is looking at her.

6.3 Diverging Paths

On either side of this sentiment, we find positioned another important duality. At one extreme of the spectrum, Sasha wittily describes an ideal woman which she models after the “three or four elongated dolls, beautifully dressed, with charming and malicious oval faces” that stand on display in Mr. Blank’s shop (Rhys p. 16). Unlike herself the dolls show no signs of aging, their static beauty is frozen in time. And they never betray themselves with uncertainty or sadness, wearing their hearts, or any other emotion for that matter, on their sleeve. With their “[s]atin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart – all complete”, Sasha can’t help but think “what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women” (Rhys p. 16). While Sasha is constantly struggling to make her appearance acceptable, toiling to secure her social status despite being fundamentally adverse to the judgment it entails: the dolls are everything she can’t bear to be. Not only are they gorgeous, even more importantly, they were made to be visual objects, made to withstand being looked at because it fulfills their purpose. With their sawdust hearts they are not only malicious and cold, they are the ultimate masks: all façade, through and through.

At the other end of the spectrum is a vastly different creature. One that is characterized instead by all the things the extremely respectable people shun. She is ageing, ugly, vulgar and mad. Observing one such specimen, Sasha halts outside a shop window, transfixed, looking through the glass at the two people inside, the sales woman and the customer: “Her expression is terrible – hungry, despairing, hopeful, quite crazy. At any moment you expect her to start laughing the laugh of the mad” (Rhys p. 57-58). Despite trying on hats at a furious pace, the woman can’t seem to find one that fits. She is unable to smooth over the outer characteristics in herself that society cannot tolerate, too far gone for a hat or any other pretty thing, to bring her back into the fold. Considering her own future, Sasha several times imagines herself as a “mad or drunk old woman, wandering the streets of London and Montparnasse” (Angier p. 389). Yet, at the moment of the story we feel her to be somewhere in between the two extremes. Still striving for that elusive appearance of respectability, though definitely not with a heart of sawdust just yet. Instead Sasha is faced with a choice, of two diverging paths.

But she is better than the other one, the smug, white, fat, black-haired one who is offering the hats with a calm, mocking expression. You can almost see her tongue rolling round and round inside her cheek. It’s like watching the devil with a damned soul. If I must end like one or the other, may I end like the hag. (Rhys p. 58)

What differentiates the two women in Sasha's description is the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the sales woman, which barely masks her contempt. The hag may be many of the things that Sasha fears becoming: ugly, unkempt and slightly loony. But at least she is unafraid to be herself. There is sincerity in her madness, and though she is trying on hats, there is no pretense in her face. Though the choice between two paths is something Sasha articulates explicitly, it is by no means appears to be an easy resolution for her to commit to. Within her there are forces pulling in both directions, causing an internal division that is neatly summed up by her subconscious.

In a dream, Sasha finds herself suddenly caught in a crowd surging through subterranean passages, everyone moving the same way: "I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition – I want the way out" (Rhys p. 12). Giant signs point the way in a certain direction, and the imagery of underground tunnels give the feeling of a restrictive, claustrophobic environment. It evokes a truly nightmarish feeling, which lingers even after Sasha wakes. A path has been carved out ahead, yet Sasha is adamant that what she wants is the exit, even though she seems to be the only one who is struggling to deviate from the prescribed route.

I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me. I say: 'I want the way out.' But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: 'Just like me – always wanting to be different from other people.' The steel finger points along a stone passage. This Way – This Way – This Way to the Exhibition. ... (Rhys p. 12)

When Sasha reaches out to one of her companion travelers hoping to receive assistance, she is met by an image typical of the dream-state. The man she approaches quite literally morphs into a sign, his hand pointing in the same direction as all the others: it is now made of steel. And as the people around her become no better than signposts, Sasha grows shameful of her individuality. Thrown into relief against what is quite literally an undifferentiated gray mass, she experiences an acute awareness of her own selfhood, separate from all the rest. It is a point to which we keep returning, and which also constitutes one of the character traits we have most consistently associated with Sasha throughout our analysis. Yet because this particular scene takes place in a dream, we have valid grounds to interpret both of the two contradicting forces as impulses of Sasha's mind. As it ends with a confrontation with an absurd patriarchal authority figure, the "I" of the dream comes across as representing Sasha's

struggle against the strictures and conventions of the extremely respectable. While the grey mass of people who must be said to resonate with Kierkegaard's negative description of anxiety, are by virtue of being present in Sasha's dream-state also internalized. Though Sasha's efforts to reinvent who she is may have begun with the cosmetic, its impact on her sense of self is profound. We perceive that deep down she longs to forsake everything that makes her stand out, even her role as self-conscious observer, in order to obtain a less challenging existence of borderline unconsciousness, safe in the fold of the multitude. In other words, the internal division we described on the formal level as a split in Sasha's narrational voice is underpinned by the novel's central images and metaphors. As Sasha's life and past is gradually uncovered, we see that she is torn between longing to be like everyone else, and perceiving the community they share as restrictive and suffocating. While she watches the two women in the hat shop it is as if her internal conflict is acted out in front of her own eyes: a smugly sane devil and trickster torturing a damned soul. Even though she resolves that she would prefer being the latter, the conflict is always gnawing at her insides, making her unable to find peace or happiness anywhere. Unable to fully embrace anything, she is all the more alone, and cannot move decisively in any direction without hurting the other internal half (Angier p. 395). Thus she is trapped, not only in the impasse where her hotel is located, but even more so in herself.

6.4 There Always Remains Something

Constantly drawn between the two extremes, Sasha dreams that going to the exhibition is unavoidable, yet in the end, after tiffing with René at a restaurant, she is the one who suggests they go and see it. Looking down from Trocadéro at the Star of Peace, Sasha muses that it is: "Cold, empty, beautiful – this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted" (Rhys p. 137). The exhibition in itself represents a recurring image and metaphor, which Carole Angier among others has explored. There is of course The World Exhibition, but also Sasha's constant fear of making a scene in public, and thus turning herself into an exhibition. In addition there are two peculiar episodes that take place in café's, one where a group of Chinese troop into the establishment before changing their minds and trooping back out (Rhys p. 38). And one where the clients pay for the right "not to have a drink, but to sleep", which Enno takes Sasha to see, as if the resting figures were on display for their amusement (Rhys p. 35). Yet through every absurd situation, tragedy, joke or anecdote, there is a persistent "sense of doom, of something hidden and waiting beneath the surface", that

permeates the mood of the novel (Angier p. 404). Still Sasha keeps on trying, for the length of the narrative, vacillating between the two basic impulses. Resenting the establishment and everything they stand for, while at the same time trying to piece together the different components of her mask. Emulating the smooth outer facade of the extremely respectable, despite succeeding “in flashes only too damned well” (Rhys p. 88). In fact, whenever the occasion requires that she put up a front, she can’t seem to convince anyone. She isn’t very good at fooling herself, and she certainly isn’t very good at fooling other people. When she does succeed, once in a blue moon, it is mostly by happenstance and often to the opposite of the desired effect. Which constitutes a dynamic of which Sasha’s relationship with René is perhaps the prime example, because of the repeated inversions and the fact that both her fragile hope and the utter tragedy of the ending hinges on the plausibility of his judgment of her. The irony is that in this context, Sasha’s old fur coat gains renewed importance, because she is convinced that René has zeroed in on her as a “rich bitch”, and potential target, precisely because of it (Rhys p. 64).

Yet the effort is wearing on her, so much so that Sasha is beginning to get the expression in her eyes “when you are very tired and everything is like a dream and you are starting to know what things are like underneath what people say they are” (Rhys p. 102). Certain elements of her dream logic thus appear to linger and seep into her waking hours. Though she vows to have a nice and sane fortnight, her alarm clock answers her affirmation with “a noise between a belch and a giggle” (Rhys p. 29). Thus even ordinary objects are acting obscenely in her presence, so that when Sasha sees a chair with the word “merde” written on it, she considers whether it may be the final answer, to everything (Rhys p. 76). At one point, Sasha also claims that she feels herself plunged in a dream, where “all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets” (Rhys p. 75). Her close-up of human nature thus reveals no humanity at all: only determinism, blind façades and emptiness within. So that even truth and reality are called into question, because appearances once again turn out to be deceiving.

[I]t's always when a thing sounds not true that it is true,' he says. Of course. I know that. ... You imagine the carefully pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is truth. That is just what it isn't. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it's in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth. (Rhys p. 63)

In the end, the most carefully curated façade may turn out to be the least authentic. A mask is just a cover, and does not necessarily say anything about the person underneath. Rhys ensures

that every notion of identity twists and turns in front of our eyes. And we are lead to distrust easy truths, and look instead at the distorted, complex and paradoxical in order to find the genuine and sincere. And at last, having skirted the truth for most of the narrative, Sasha reveals her most painful tragedy. That after her baby boy was born the nurse wound her tight in bandages, promising that they would leave her just as she was before. But when the baby died, no lack of creases in her skin could change the fact that her heart was “heavy as lead, heavy as stone” (Rhys p. 116).

And five weeks afterward there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease. And there he is, lying with a ticket tied around his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease. (Rhys p. 52)

Considering herself as if in a mirror, Sasha thinks: “Besides, it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail” (Rhys p. 37). Her consciousness is conflicted, and so the narrative becomes conflicted as well. What we take for granted is repeatedly destabilized and undermined to allow the formation a truly complex relation between identity and pretense. Sasha’s own relationship to masking embodies much of this same ambiguity. On the one hand, she is absolutely dependent on masking. It appears to be the only survival strategy that is still accessible to her, and one she must embrace in order to stay afloat. On the other hand, the very insincerity that saves her in the moment must be said to cause so much internal turmoil that it threatens to consume her in the next. Yet the romantic in Sasha’s heart still clings to the miracle of a prettily made up face and beautiful tailored dress, even though she is fully aware of the illusion on which her hopes are contingent. In an existential sense, wearing a mask constitutes a fundamentally indirect and inauthentic way of appearing in the world, which is closely connected to our discussion of both insincere language and narrative fragmentation. It is a complex dynamic which appears to guide almost everything Sasha does. Along the way she demonstrates that a mask can function both as armor and as a way to disguise identity. It can also be salvation, but only for a time. With her appearance primed and polished, she considers herself: “Saved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set. Nobody would know I had ever been in it. Except, of course, that there always remains something” (Rhys p. 10). The discrepancy between Sasha’s hopes and her reality, between the composure she emulates and the chaos that rules inside, tells us that no matter how hard she tries she cannot outrun, cannot undo, cannot alter certain fundamental aspects of her self.

7 The Dead and the Living

The ambiguity of *Good Morning, Midnight's* ending has divided scholars and readers alike ever since the novel was first published. There are those who hold that Sasha's surrender to the commis constitutes a triumph of sorts while the majority of secondary literature written about the novel emphasizes the prevalence of imagery pertaining to emptiness and death. Rather than just reiterate one argument or another, we will in this next to last chapter attempt to turn the question on its head, and ask instead what it is about the ending that makes it so ambiguous. Looking closely at the imagery and narrative devices Rhys employs, which are culled from throughout the novel, but appears to convene over the last few pages. We are offered no easy resolution, so that fundamentally our analysis of the ending becomes a question of interpretation, of the individual reader emphasizing certain nuances in the text over others. Yet the persistent difficulty of reaching an agreement at the same time bears witness to the narrative resistance that Rhys and Kierkegaard share. A resistance that is instrumental for the ending in particular, and part of what makes the novel and the concept of anxiety both so powerful, each in their own ways. And Sasha's narrative not only resists interpretation, it also employs dissonance as a strategy, and is structured around dualities that create a similar sort of tension. By the end, Sasha has lost faith in everything, "Venus is dead; Apollo is dead; even Jesus is dead" (Rhys p. 156). Perception, identity, language and reality have all lost their clear referential function, the jumble of Sasha's mind and interior monologue is all that remains, and even that is split and divided. She has unsuccessfully tried to shut the world out, find a safe place to hide in, and run from the tragedies that have marred her life. Both the disappearance of love: "there was a monsieur, but the monsieur has gone" (Rhys p. 68). And her deepest, most painful secret, divulged at last. That her child died in the hospital, and that even though the bandages they wrapped her in left her without a physical trace, there always remains something of an existential pain so profound (Rhys p. 116). "It is cold and dark outside," Sasha thinks, "and everything has gone out of me except misery" (Rhys p. 87).

7.1 The Whirlpool

The novel ends where it began, in Sasha's hotel room and a blind alley. Though the fleeting possibility of love is improbable, it lingers until the very end. During Sasha's retrospection we have glimpsed passing moments of happiness in her life. For instance when Enno

manages to get his hands on some money, and she proclaims: “I’ve never been so happy in my life. I’m alive, eating ravioli and drinking wine. I’ve escaped. A door has opened and let me out into the sun. What more do I want? Anything might happen” (Rhys p. 104). A door has opened, and in her moment of happiness it seems to represent all the possibilities in the world. Or alternately, in Serge’s studio, when she drifts off into a dream and imagines lying “in a hammock looking up into the branches of a tree. The sound of the sea advances and retreats as if a door were being opened and shut” (Rhys p. 77). In these moments she feels carefree and present, and “the thing that is bound to happen” is tinged with hope and the promise of escape (Rhys p. 83). Yet as we noted in the last chapter, rather than observing Sasha go through a traditional process of change during the course of the narrative, we have seen her uncovered, dissected almost, by her own self-conscious mind. Her history, personality, behavior and beliefs have all been picked apart. And because the narrative remains so firmly situated within Sasha’s head, the rest of novel’s characters, even the three most important ones, appear a little ghostlike in comparison. While Enno retained a central role in the retrospective Part Three, he vanishes altogether as soon as Rhys shifts to the fourth and last section of the novel, leaving René and the commis to play out their respective parts. Once again Sasha appears to be faced with the choice between two diverging paths, and yet the movement is also circular. Not only for the novel as a whole, but even more so when Part Four is considered on its own:

At the beginning René enters the room instead of the commis, at the end the commis enters instead of René; briefly Sasha comes back to life from death, only to fall back from life to a deeper death again. Within this circular, entrapping structure there are constant, poetic repetitions. Sasha’s ‘little life’ repeats itself, becoming more and more desperate. (Angier p. 385)

So that though Sasha has associated doors with hope and possibility at some point, they also come to represent change in general, or even the lack thereof. For instance when Sasha thinks about the prospect of having the baby, and “a door shuts” in her head (Rhys p. 114). As the metaphor morphs and changes during the course of the narrative, much the same way we watched masking morph and change: the sensation of a circular movement is maintained by slightly altering repetitions. While Sasha’s little life becomes ever more desperate, the momentum seems to increase. The deeper we are allowed to delve into her consciousness, the more of her dark secrets are revealed, and we realize that the circular movement coincides with a movement from periphery to center, much like a spiral or whirlpool. It is an image

Sasha uses to describe her own life as well, and which the structure of this thesis has come to mirror to some degree. Sasha says: “It doesn’t matter, there I am, like one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm” (Rhys p. 38). The ending is much like the fulcrum of a spiral, which brilliantly intertwines and fuses the themes, images and metaphors that have been established earlier in the novel. Sasha imagines that in the dead center everything is still, and though images of stasis are prevalent in the novel as a whole, they gain renewed importance when related to the ending. We have already commented somewhat upon Sasha’s problematic sense of time. It seems she “cannot live in the present except in the few moments she’s happy; she cannot imagine the future; she tries not to remember the past” (Angier p. 390). In fact, for Sasha, time is mostly about endless repetitions: “I don’t believe things change much really, you only think they do. It seems to me that things repeat themselves over and over again” (Rhys p. 56). Space is also defined largely by stasis and blockage, as we saw in Chapter 2: from the impasse, to the endless line of hotel rooms, restaurants, lavatories and locked doors. Though Sasha repeatedly states that a light room may change her life for the better, she is presented with a window looking straight into a “high, blank wall” (Rhys p. 33).

Sasha is nearing the end of her tether, and the “short staccato words, the tiny contrasts, the constant halts make us *feel* what they tell us: the entrapment, the barely alive-ness” of her existence (Angier p. 385). By all rights she has had it coming for a while now. Her life is an excruciating process of wearing out, where not caring anymore whether you live or die is a state achieved only “after a long time and many misfortunes” (Rhys p. 76). She has been rescued, yes, and has tried very hard to live behind a mask and be like everyone else. A bit of an automaton, but “dry, cold and sane” (Rhys p. 10). Yet, judgment, ridicule, and scornful laughter have its own way of undoing the hard-won equilibrium of Sasha’s mind. She is still too cowardly to end her life by drowning, and though she has tried to drink herself to death she can’t seem to succeed in ending it all. But physical death is only half of the equation. Serge tells Sasha the story of a mulatto woman who used to live in the same building that he did. And the story is significant because it functions as another mirror of Sasha’s present situation and potential fate. Serge describes the woman as being at the end of everything, and when she tells him her life’s story he says: “I got an extraordinary sensation, as if I were looking into a pit. It was the expression in her eyes” (Rhys p. 80). All the while maintaining the feeling that he is speaking to something that is “no longer quite human, no longer quite alive”, he sees in the mirrors of her soul nothing but a bottomless abyss (Rhys p. 80). And we

can almost feel the dizziness, the pull that Sasha's whirlpool exerts, which in turn cannot fail to remind us of the concept of anxiety. Though the term belongs to Kierkegaard, the words Rhys utilizes to describe Sasha's misery seem fundamentally relatable: "You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past – or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same" (Rhys p. 144). Thus Sasha seems enveloped in a kind of nothingness and despair, which threatens to consume her, but might also set her free.

Serge, on the other hand, claims that only by making love to the desolate woman would he have been able to do her any good, a sentiment that is echoed later by René. Whether or not we believe that lovemaking could cure an existential anguish so deeply rooted, it certainly speaks to Rhys's concern with the power politics of sexuality. Serge does not such thing, however, he only sends the ill-fated woman on her way with a drink, before watching her be tormented even further by a young child who knew "so exactly how to be cruel and who it was safe to be cruel to" (Rhys p. 81). Because the woman has been crying so much, it is impossible to tell any more whether she is "pretty or ugly or young or old". Though the external markers of her identity are what initially singled her out as a target, they at some point cease to matter: she is dead to the world, not as a result of her body caving in to the pressure of age or sickness, but because she is dead in an existential sense. Her soul or spirit, individuality or self has perished: leaving the outer shell of her body to go through the motions of a life lived. It is a description that resonates well both with Sasha's existence at present, but also with the end she is approaching. After the incident Serge describes developing an astonishing hatred of the house in which he used to live: "Every time I went in it was as if I were walking into a wall – one of those walls where people are built in, still alive" (Rhys p. 81). Thus through the voice of another character several familiar images are combined to articulate one of Sasha's deepest fears. Which brings to mind the instance where she imagines having the lid of a coffin shut above her head with a bang (Rhys p. 37), as well as the young girl she observes doing the dishes in a closet that also looks more like a coffin than anything else (Rhys p. 87). In this manner the images of blocked space are united with the notion of the living dead, and we realize that there is no better way to describe Sasha's struggle. For the entirety of the narrative Sasha has been in deep in despair, isolated, marginalized, poverty-stricken, sometimes angry sometimes sad. She has desperately wanted a better life, thinking that what makes it droll is not surviving tragedy and hardship, but "the way you forget, and every day is a new day, and there's hope for everybody, hooray" (Rhys p. 118). With her trademark singeing irony Sasha makes it clear that she does not believe her

own words, that she is walled in, with no way to escape her misery. And in the end, when faced with the prospect of being metaphorically buried alive, Sasha seems resigned, relieved almost. Facing the worst is met with a despairing welcome reserved for “someone in unbearable pain” (Angier p. 383). Much like the protagonist of “Gloomy Sunday”, and the merciful death of the kitten we mentioned in Chapter 5. What Rhys tells us, is that there is an existential difference between the death of the physical body and the metaphysical death of the mind, and that the latter is the one of importance: “Well, that was the end of me, the real end” Sasha says, and we know just what she means, “I no longer wish to be loved, beautiful, happy or successful. I want one thing and one thing only – to be left alone” (Rhys p. 37).

7.2 Ambiguous Awakening

When René first visits Sasha in her room during the beginning of Part Four, he comments jokingly that it contains “[n]othing but beds”, and so the tension between the two characters is lightheartedly established (Rhys p. 126). They arrange to meet for a drink later the same night, and suddenly Sasha is in the strange position of having to contain her excitement:

Well, there I am, prancing about and smirking, and suddenly telling myself: ‘No, I won’t do a thing, not a thing. A little pride, a little dignity at the end, in the name of God. I won’t even put on the stockings I bought this afternoon. I won’t do a thing – not a thing. I will not grimace and posture before these people any longer.’ And, after all, the agitation is only on the surface. Underneath I’m indifferent. Underneath there is always stagnant water, calm, indifferent – the bitter peace that is very near to death, to hate. ... (Rhys p. 128)

She sets out intending René no kindness. Sasha is nearing the center of her whirlpool, she is tired of masking her identity, cold and indifferent, a living dead already. And yet the flash of unconstrained excitement suggests that her indifference may also be a mask of sorts, and that there might still be a little life left in her, if only just the fraction of a possibility. René claims he wants to see Sasha again because he thinks she brings him luck, but the question of whether he approaches her as an outsider would another equal, or as a target he might squeeze a little money out of, remains hanging between them. And several times Sasha thinks she sees René evaluate the ring on her hand, and comments that it isn’t worth much while worrying that her fur coat contradicts the words that are coming out of her mouth. She even contemplates ways to hurt him, the way she herself has been hurt, but as their conversation continues it instead becomes apparent how similar they are in many ways. They are both outsiders, and lead relatively comparable lives, largely dependent on friends and the opposite

sex for money. Sasha has lost some of the naiveté René displays through his optimistic ideas about England, but perhaps he is only younger than she is. In fact, not only do they both appear to have lived in the home of the same wealthy woman in Antibes, even in the way he speaks he often sounds a lot like her. So much so that Sasha appears to recognize elements of herself in him, while he mirrors her situation more than any other character (Angier p. 399). Their meeting that night is marked by several significant repetitions and reversals. This time it is him who waits outside on the freezing terrace, while she remains inside where it is bright and warm. Together they retrace Sasha's steps by going to Pecanelli's restaurant for dinner, they visit the World Exhibition, stop for a drink at Deux Magots where she makes another trip to the familiar lavatory, before they return once more to her hotel.

Throughout, Sasha's mood seems to change every so often, from hopeful amusement to bitter despair. She is clearly conflicted, and her frenzied internal monologue takes her out of the moment of the conversation and throws her into an existential "misery of utter darkness" (Rhys p. 145). The human race is a "pack of damned hyenas", and their looks, their laughter is well worth being afraid of, everything is "spoiled, all spoiled" (Rhys p. 144-145). Sasha thinks to herself: "You haven't left me with one rag of illusion to clothe myself in. But by God, I know what you are too, and I wouldn't change places", thus repeating the sentiment we explored in the last chapter (Rhys p. 145). When Sasha's consciousness returns from her internal ramble to the present, René's face is full of sadness. He shows her that he too has scars from the past. In fact he has a literal one across his throat. He shows her this not in a boastful way, but as if to say I have been wounded, like you: "I know. I can see that. I believe you.' 'Well,' I say, 'if we're going to start believing each other, it's getting serious, isn't it?' I want to get out of this dream" (Rhys p. 146). For the fraction of a second there seems to exist a genuine connection between Sasha and René, but her continued internal confliction is suggested by a series of small details. She worries again about making a scene, and directly after René has shown her his scar she watches as a "little grimacing devil" in her head, wearing a ridiculous outfit of top hat and suggestive underwear, sings a sentimental song and thereby undermines any attempt at a sincere emotional attachment (Rhys p. 146). Reality has lost its realness, all she wants now is to get out of the dream, and leave the nightmare behind. Yet as soon as they are in a cab, her "film mind" starts going, and though they are traveling towards "l'Hôtel de l'Espérance", the Hotel of Hope, all she can imagine is a destructive and abusive relationship (Rhys p. 147). The narrative flits back and forth between Sasha's internal monologue and her conversation with René, creating an atmosphere

of confusion where the two planes are conflated, but intermittently allowing certain images, like the gramophone record, to bridge the gap and bring the situation back into focus.

Sasha is exhausted, so she rejects René and they part in front of the hotel. Though it is not the end, not nearly. She has still not reached the bottom of her spiraling whirlpool, because any fall requires a certain high point from which the tumble can take place. It arrives in the shape of a moment of genuine happiness and sincere laughter, when René secretly follows Sasha up the staircase. As the hallway is suddenly plunged into darkness when the light goes out, Sasha senses the presence of someone else, and calls out: “‘Who is it? Who’s there? Qui est là?’ But before he answers I know. I take a step forward and put my arms round him. I have my arms round him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy” (Rhys p. 148). Instinctively, she knows that it is René, and for a moment everything else is forgotten. They share a kiss on the landing, but already something has gone wrong, “I am uneasy, half of myself somewhere else. Did anybody hear me, was anybody listening just now?” (Rhys p. 148). The prospect of being watched causes Sasha to revert back from her unselfconscious happiness to her fragmented self, and when she notices the commis’ shoes by his door, it can only constitute a bad omen (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 130).

Still Sasha and René keep on playing an odd sort of courting game, half cliché and half sincerity. With sardonic humor, she suggests they have a drink to lighten the mood before exclaiming to her private mind in instant irony: “That’s original” (Rhys p. 149). Even René comments that her behavior borders on performativity at one point, saying that she loves “playing a comedy” (Rhys p. 150). Though he may be lying about where he comes from, and the rich American he claims to have hooked, René appears to maintain honest intentions when it comes to Sasha. He attempts to temper her drinking, and keeps trying to find ways to get close to her. He sees that she is afraid, but cannot for the life of him figure out the reasons why. Perhaps because Sasha’s fear bears certain resemblances to anxiety, in that they have no specific object and tend to galvanize her selfhood. She is afraid of people, of laughter, of living, of her future and of remembering her past. So René tries to approach her gently, tries to shock her with an obscene story, he even considers whether she might be afraid that he is out kill her. At which point Sasha silently admits that she would have given herself over in an instant, if she really thought he would end her misery. And even though, deep down, she may be longing desperately to lower her defenses, gradually wanting to love and trust René, coming alive is no easy feat when you have been a living dead for who knows how long. In a sense, Sasha has walled herself in as a matter of self-preservation. That she is sometimes brittle and hostile speaks primarily to the defense mechanisms at work within her,

which constitute a powerful protection against any feelings she might harbor for René, indeed any feelings at all. Her behavior thus seems to confirm the interpretation that Sasha, at the present time of the novel, is already leading the existence of a living dead. It makes sense that much of her actions appear dominated by a certain “terror of intimacy”, which in turn lead Sasha and René to a tragicomic struggle on the bed (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 77).

When I open my eyes I feel the tears trickling down from the outside corners. ‘That’s better, that’s better. Now say “I tell you to go, and you’ll go”.’ I can’t speak. ‘That’s better, that’s better.’ I feel his hard knee between my knees. My mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive. (Rhys p. 152-153)

Slowly, painfully, Sasha is coming back to life. Everything hurts, though any pain must still be preferable to complete numbness. So she cries, and softens, and the suppressed emotion leaves her unable to speak. But tragically, before she finds the time to put her arms round René and ask him to stay something inside her head takes control of her vocal chords and rings out in a “high, clear, cold voice. My voice” (Rhys p. 153). By offering René money she instantly reduces their relationship to nothing more than a transaction (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 78).

7.3 Split in Two

Though she has driven René away, something has happened within Sasha, a change haltingly set in motion. The latter part of their exchange has been increasingly punctuated by Sasha’s interior monologue. So that despite being only two people present in the room, it at some points sound more like a three-party conversation. As such the passage harbors an excruciating division and fragmentation of Sasha’s self. While out loud, she spares “no pains to humiliate René, casting him into the role of a begging gigolo who lives off mercenary sex” (Maurel p. 125). In effect forcing him into a game of play-acting, where he is coerced into behaving precisely in the manner she fears he will, a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. At the same time she mutely implores him to stay, saying to her private mind, though not aloud, “that’s not me speaking. Don’t listen. Nothing to do with me – I swear it” (Rhys p. 153). In accordance with the rest of the novel, the split within Sasha is built upon paradoxes and ironic reversals. Though she claims indifference, she hugs René happily on the landing. And while her voice taunts him, she silently begs him to stay, marking a discrepancy between the internal and external comparable to what we have already discussed. While René crosses the

room to Sasha's dressing-case, she keeps her arm over her eyes because she doesn't want to see him take her money as instructed, doesn't want to see him go.

Who is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other – how do I know who the other is? She isn't me. Her voice in my head: 'Well, well, well, just think of that now. What an amusing ten days! Positively packed with thrills. The last performance of What's-her-name And Her Boys or It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat. Positively the last performance. (Rhys p. 154)

At which point in the narrative, Sasha's fragmented self appears to have split distinctly in two. She acknowledges both selves, the first of which appears to be a more authentic, true identity. While the latter is described instead as "the other", whose voice is simply present inside her head, creating dissonance, much like the intertextual material we explored in Chapter 5. We also note the interesting feature that "the other voice" seems incapable of much else than stinging irony, thus drawing its power precisely from a distancing inside Sasha's self, an internal alienation. Calling Sasha's sojourn "amusing", and "packed with thrills", the voice not only belittles her misery, but at the same time counter-intuitively speaks to the depths of her emotional damage. And as a result of this complex narrative construction, which becomes of utmost importance as we near the ending, our intuitive impression of Sasha is confirmed and radicalized. Though she attempts to dispel from her insides the "need to love and trust; she tries to become cold, hard, invulnerable. But she only half succeeds: and so she breaks in two, into a cold hard self who sends René away, and a soft loving self who cries for him to return" (Angier p. 400). Being unable to connect with herself, it comes as no surprise that Sasha experiences problems connecting to other people, demonstrating that her self is after all, fundamentally alone.

From a painful awakening of hope, of "love, youth, spring, happiness," everything Sasha thought lost she has now lost again, even more irrefutably (Rhys p. 148). And we realize that is how it must be, that "even when René makes her feel young and happy it cannot last" (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 78). The schism inside her makes Sasha lost, to herself and to others. And her actions have thus been interpreted as a retreat back into "callous, self-protective mockery" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 131), and as a deliberate choosing of "the reassuring routine of mortiferous repetition" (Maurel p. 124-125). Still, we are left to wonder, if Sasha's confrontation with René results in an awakening of sorts, does the ending reverse this change completely? Does she simply go back to being the way she was before, a living dead once again? Because René has eluded her worst expectations, he did not take her money

after all. There is at least some good left in the world. Though it may be too little, too late, Sasha finally succeeds in stifling the other voice in her head, by drinking it into submission. Her conversation with herself goes on, but she is no longer fragmented and dissonant, she is whole. The final pages appear significantly calmer, more collected than ever before. Sasha takes off her clothes and gets into bed, leaving the door ajar for whatever fate awaits her.

7.4 A Waking Nightmare

The sophisticated ambiguity of the final passage hinges on the use of the pronoun “he”. Sasha has left her door open, and follows René in her mind, “watching every step he takes” (Rhys p. 158). Her imagination allowing her to look on as he makes his way back to her, affixing all her last, most desperate hopes on his return: “He is coming up the stairs. Now the door is moving, the door is opening wide. I put my arm over my eyes. He comes in. He shuts the door after him. I lie very still, with my arm over my eyes. As still as if I were dead” (Rhys p. 158-159). Within these few simple sentences, Rhys has fashioned an almost imperceptible shift. From the romantically hopeful cliché that is Sasha’s dream, to a reality that resembles a waking nightmare. It is not René that has returned her, to share her newfound capacity to live and love as a sort of rebirth, like his name suggests (Angier p. 382). Instead Sasha’s reality proves both sinister and tragic: “I don’t need to look. I know. I think: ‘Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one? I must find that out – it’s very important” (Rhys p. 159). Gradually, it dawns on the reader, that in a complete reversal of the first scene of the novel’s Part Four, the commis has entered the door instead of René: there will be no happy ending.

The white nightshirt that appeared in Sasha’s subterranean dream subtly foreshadows the first of the commis’ six appearances and reappearances. She calls him “the ghost of the landing” (Rhys p. 13). The outer circumstances appear unassuming enough: he is a man, he rents the hotel room next to Sasha’s, he often hovers about in the hallway without any apparent purpose, and she imagines that he makes his living as a traveling salesman (Rhys p. 28). And yet, the impact he comes to wield on Sasha’s life, and on her narrative, is anything but unassuming. The terms used to describe his countenance all revolve around the nightmarish, so that his presence is a consistent menace to Sasha.

He is as thin as a skeleton. He has a bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing. What’s he want to look at me like that for? ... He is always wearing a dressing-gown – a blue one with black spots or the famous white one. I can’t imagine him in street clothes. (Rhys p. 13)

The images evoke a figure that hardly resembles the human. He is skinny as a skeleton. Another, though slightly different, member of the undead walking. The commis has a bird-like face, with dark animal eyes, which stare at Sasha accusingly. No matter what time of day she crosses the hallway to enter or leave her room, he seems always to be hanging around, as if he were a vulture circling overhead, biding his time. Always present to watch and implicitly judge her appearance and behavior. He is a hallway specter, which she claims unable to imagine wearing street clothes. Thus he is in and of the hotel and its atmosphere, described in meticulous and grotesque detail, yet hazy and dreamlike. He is completely apart from the solid world of outside streets, restaurants and people. For the length of Sasha's stay he has been skulking around in the background, a haunting presence she has dreaded and fled repeatedly in fear. Before, at long last, he catches up to her in the moment when she is at her most vulnerable. The commis is everything that Sasha abhors, he is death incarnate, and much of what she herself fears becoming, "mad, grinning, babbling to himself, never going out" (Angier p. 382). Rhys's use of color in this instance is also significant. The commis wears an immaculately white dressing gown, and thus evokes certain ghostly connotations. But Sasha also says that he looks like a priest of "some obscene, half-understood religion", giving him an additional air of ironical religiosity (Rhys p. 30). She calls him a "damned man", and we surmise that the description applies both as an epithet and in a more existential sense (Rhys p. 13). Sasha's acceptance of him into her own body, "which has just so painfully come alive" is deeply appalling (Angier p. 382). It constitutes an acutely disturbing conclusion, in essence "a surrender to the end of love, a female wasteland" (Savory, *Intro to Jean Rhys* p. 79).

And yet, the final few pages present several additional ambiguities that by virtue of the alternate interpretations, and general disagreement they have inspired, we would be doing Rhys a disservice to simply ignore. Arnold Davidson is among those who have written to emphasize a hopeful interpretation of the ending: finding in the last lines a form of transcendence in Sasha (Davidson p. 363). And the final passage does offer some intriguing nuances on the descriptive metaphors that Rhys has utilized throughout.

I take my arm away from my eyes. It is the white dressing-gown. He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering. He doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time. ... Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: 'Yes - yes - yes. ...' (Rhys p. 159)

Now fully aware of whom and what she is facing, Sasha uncovers her eyes and meets the glance of the commis. Interestingly, we remember that when she is describing the saleswoman and the crazy old lady earlier in the novel, Sasha calls them a devil and a damned soul (Rhys p. 58). Though in the end, the commis, who is seemingly constructed to be an ultimate villain, is not nearly condemned in the same powerful terms. Sasha appears to have no qualms about judging the saleswoman, but she does not afford the commis the same harsh treatment, even though he appears to deserve it most. Instead she claims to look at him, and “despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time” (Rhys p. 159). Calling him a poor devil, the same expression she used when speaking of her baby, the ultimate innocent (Rhys p. 50). It is perhaps for this very reason that these sentences have often been referenced as evidence of a little good amidst the utter tragedy. As Angier writes: “*That isn’t horrible, surely?*” (Angier p. 382). She goes on to emphasize that Sasha’s emotional logic is, “as always, paradoxical”, and that the hopeful interpretation therefore proves unsatisfactory (Angier p. 382). And it has been argued convincingly that Sasha appears to retreat “from the challenge of a relationship of equals”, and can be understood to despise the commis for the last time because she is “moving entirely beyond a place where she can understand feeling at all” (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 131). And yet, we cannot deny that the passage harbors both of these conflicting strains of emotion. In choosing one interpretation over another, and arguing despite certain nuances of the text, any analysis runs the risk of, if not indirectly questioning the intentionality of Rhys’s words, then at least reducing a paradox to a platitude. And if our juxtaposition of the novel and the concept of anxiety have taught us anything, it must be the value of the paradoxical. For that very reason, the jarring notes in the construction of the ending become even more intriguing. We grant Sasha every right to hate the commis, and yet she does not. Instead she calls him a poor devil of a human being, and thus creates a communal humanity between them. It constitutes a departure from her mentality of “us” and “them”, of outsider and insider, which Sasha has clung to up until this point. Instead suggesting a recognition of the commis as just another consciousness, isolated and struggling to make sense of its own existence. We even note that the commis remains outwardly silent, a quality we have generally associated with Sasha. She may be beyond feeling, yet she has claimed indifference before, at which point it turned out to be wishful thinking: a mere mask.

Throughout the novel, Sasha has shunned judgmental stares, has retreated out of the line of sight, forever evasive. So that when she looks the commis straight in the eyes we cannot fail to recognize it as somehow significant. In the end, all that is left of Sasha’s world is “an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel.

Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara” (Rhys p. 156). Sasha’s nightmarish vision is accompanied by a hastening tribal chant and a terrifying background of grey skies. A very modernist image, which is followed by a description of the commis’ eyes as “flickering”, much like a light bulb would before going out (Rhys p. 159). In meeting that gaze, Sasha comes across as courageous in a way we have never seen her before. Facing her fate with eyes wide open, and no attempts to avoid what is coming. Assuming a strange sort of responsibility for her own life, even as it is ending, as opposed to the curious life philosophy of supposed blamelessness we outlined in Chapter 3. In a sense Sasha both demonstrates and undermines the idea of people’s cruelty. At the same time, Rhys appears to institute yet another dimension related to the act of looking and being looked at. Right before driving him away, Sasha says to René: “I’m strong as the dead, my dear, and that’s how strong I am. ‘If you’re so strong, why do you keep your eyes shut?’ Because dead people must have their eyes shut” (Rhys p. 152). While the story of the mulatto woman led us to consider Sasha as a living dead, in a metaphysical sense, or at least that she is hovering on the boundaries of that state for the length of the narrative. And since her confrontation with René signifies a slow and ambiguous awakening, the paradoxical imagery of the ending remains deeply intriguing. Because Sasha concludes her narrative by gazing freely, which is a trademark of the living. While she has kept her eyes shut or averted until the very last, which Rhys positions as a trademark of the dead.

8 Paradoxical Truths and Sasha's Anxious Self

The ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* entails Sasha's physical and sexual surrender to a recurring ghost, and yet Rhys once wrote concerning the novel that she never meant it to "be hopeless" (Rhys, *Letters* p. 34). Ever since, her readers have asked themselves as we do now, what the paradoxical nature of Sasha's demise may be able to tell us about her existence. In the previous chapter we explored some of the ending's most crucial ambiguities in detail, tracing the conflicting strains of emotion that dominates the final pages of the novel. Granting the more hopeful images a little more attention, because they have often been dismissed without much notice. Elaine Savory has indicated that Rhys's statement about *Good Morning, Midnight* suggests that the honesty inherent in Sasha's exposure of her own self-destructiveness, perhaps "could be understood as a dynamic: that even though Sasha does appear to have chosen a kind of spiritual suicide, she might ultimately come through it to another spiritual space beyond the novel's scope" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 116). Through our detailed analysis we have found no reason to doubt that the three final dots on the last page signify not just the end of Sasha's narrative, but the end of her life as well. Yet the many conflicting images that appear to convene in the moments just before she embraces the commis, lead us to consider a sentiment that was originally uttered in relation to modernism, but might just as well have been directed at Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety. It states that solely a "juxtaposition of contradictions" can provide resolution, that only out of paradox will we be able to find anything resembling truth (Bradbury p. 48). In fact modernist literature often presents an image of holding "transition and chaos, creation and de-creation, in suspension", which provides it with a distinctive sensibility (Bradbury p. 49). And as Sasha herself says, a truth is only valid if it eludes our understanding at first, if it is "improbable" and "fantastic", something you would see in a distorting mirror (Rhys p. 63). Thus instead of downplaying the conflicting images that make the ending paradoxical, when both emotional strains are arguably apparent in the text at the same time: let us conclude this thesis by allowing the concept of anxiety to resonate with Sasha's narrative. And thereby enable us to grasp the ambiguities of *Good Morning, Midnight's* ending in an existential context.

Fairly consistently throughout the novel, Sasha has demonstrated the entrapment that she feels to characterize her life. Both in terms of geography, national identity, social status, economy, gender stereotypes, intertexts, words and language. All of these factors implement certain expectations to which she feels compelled to conform. And it is true, even on a

narrative level, Sasha cannot seem to “escape the circle of her self. However hard she tries she remains locked inside her own head” (Angier p. 404). The whirlpool deep in her insides seems constantly to be pulling her towards the utter nothingness at its center. And Sasha’s sensation of being walled in is in fact so prominent that we were led in the previous chapter to conclude that her life, at the present time of the novel, is that of a living dead. And that even though she speaks several times of escaping her “fate” into a particular hotel room (Rhys p. 32), or about avoiding the more sinister connotations of the “thing that is bound to happen”, there remains only the faintest glimmer of hope for an emancipation from her half-life (Rhys p. 83). And we sense that as long as Sasha remains trapped inside herself, the outside world will never be able to provide her with the escape for which she yearns. As mentioned briefly before, Sasha at one point describes her life as if controlled not by herself but by a puppet master, while most of her actions remain governed largely by coincidence (Rhys p. 75). And yet in the very moment that Sasha appears to throw herself into submission of all these external factors, there is something about her words that makes the scene resemble a paradoxical epiphany, a deep and wordless truth about the fundamental freedom inherent in her existence and self. In the first chapter of this thesis, we briefly established that Kierkegaard positions the concept of anxiety to circumvent the determinism of original sin. By stating that the individual is “both himself and the race”, he ensures that anxiety is built upon a notion that sinfulness comes into the world anew with every human being that follows in Adam’s line (Kierkegaard p. 31). And that anxiety therefore embodies the ambiguous possibility of choice and freedom, as well as the possibility of a metaphorical captivity within oneself. And interestingly, the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* appears to both institute and undermine a deterministic notion of fate. Though Sasha has arrived in her present situation as a result of external pressures and a string of chance events, the end is contingent on two of her own conscious choices. The first occurs when she leaves the door ajar, while the second takes place when she despite her characteristic inertia, pulls the commis down towards her on the bed. While Sasha has spent the length of the narrative struggling to behave according to the expectations of the extremely respectable, in the end her actions appear to defy all social norms, when she quite literally embraces her own demise.

If we take into consideration that Sasha has been leading the life of a living dead, and that her confrontation with René results in an awakening of sorts, the most prevalent interpretation of the ending entails Sasha returning to a similar, though perhaps even deeper state: “she gives herself up most chillingly to a death-in-life, to a *zombi* state” (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 131). And yet, we might argue that we have never seen Sasha more alive than in the

moments directly preceding her demise. In fact, her behavior somewhat resembles the tactic she employed to subvert the language of the extremely respectable, which we observed in Chapter 3. Making it worse, but making it her own, and thereby commandeering a certain amount of power over the situation. Sasha's ambivalence towards her own identity and self lies at the center of the novel, and we have discussed at length the ways in which this preoccupation manifests itself both in terms of narrative technique and central metaphors and images. Yet when we place *Good Morning, Midnight* into context with the concept of anxiety, Sasha's internal fragmentation appears to take on additional existential importance. In which we might understand the fragmentation of Sasha's narrational voice as an expression of the fragile coherence of her self. Given that anxiety is a reflexive state, the challenge lies rather in thinking too much, than thinking too little. And Sasha most definitely falls into the previous category. She even says about herself that she is of "no use to anybody" because she is a "cérébrale", a thinker (Rhys p. 135).

8.1 An Experience of Anxiety

The synthesis that Kierkegaard describes denotes the fragile cohesion of body and soul, temporal and eternal, past and future, and thus indicates: "the central connection between anxiety, time, and being oneself" (Grøn p. 8). Viewed in this light, the split in Sasha's self come to speak of an internal misrelation, in which the different factors are imbalanced, and therefore unable to unite into an elevated third entity: the spirit. When Sasha speaks to her own consciousness in two distinct voices, it therefore resonates profoundly with Kierkegaard's description of failing to cohere with oneself. A negative synthesis of this kind, which we also described in our first survey of the concept of anxiety, often prompts one of two reactions. Either the past becomes so oppressive that it closes in on the individual, or the envisioned future becomes "light" and "fantastic" (Grøn p. 12). During the course of the narrative, Sasha has gone through experiences that resemble both of these modes. Her present has been interrupted by unwanted reminiscences to the point of almost taking over the narrative completely, and on the other hand, her future has at times become quite impossible for her to imagine: "when I think 'tomorrow' there is a gap in my head, a blank – as if I were falling through emptiness. Tomorrow never comes" (Rhys p. 133). Reading Sasha's consciousness alongside an experience of anxiety therefore seems to have its merits.

But as remembered, Kierkegaard goes on to define several variations on anxiety, of which despair that is ignorant of being despair constitutes the first. Though this initial

conception does not appear to contribute much to our understanding of Sasha, as the individual is described as being too sensate and obstinate to “have the courage to venture out and to endure being spirit” (Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* p. 43). The example does resonate fairly well with the extremely respectable that Sasha defines herself in opposition to, not least the grey mass of people she encountered in her subterranean dream. The despair that entails not to will to be oneself, on the other hand, speaks to Sasha’s internal torment insightfully. Kierkegaard characterizes the state by various levels of self-consciousness:

*To some degree, he is aware of being in despair, feels it the way a person does who walks around with a physical malady but does not want to acknowledge forthrightly the real nature of the illness. At one moment, he is almost sure that he is in despair; the next moment, his indisposition seems to have some other cause, something outside himself, and if this were altered, he would not be in despair. (Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* p. 48)*

At which point we are instantly reminded of Sasha’s tendency to invest her surroundings with elements of her psychological interior. Alternating between bewailing her situation and insisting that a new room, or dress, hat or hairdo will surely change her life for the better. Finally, there is the kind of despair that is a will to be oneself, but in defiance. And that is often manifested as an “*acting self*”, which lacks earnestness and is wont to loose itself in pretense (Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* p. 68). These are the three fundamental ways of being in despair, though Kierkegaard does also differentiate between a few subtypes. The latter approach resonates well with the many metaphors in the novel that concern masking practices, be it in terms of external appearance, language, narration or identity itself. Having thus allowed the concept of anxiety to supply the novel with an additional existential dimension in which to interpret Sasha’s personality and behavior, we may conclude that she spends most of the narrative alternating between the two last negative forms of anxiety, and that they come to characterize her existence as an automaton and living dead. Sasha thus appears to have lost both herself and her freedom in a misrelation with anxiety, though the ambiguity of the phenomenon entails that anxiety should also be able to restore them to her.

8.2 Sasha the Child

We remember that Kierkegaard begins his treatise by describing how anxiety comes into the world when Adam eats the forbidden fruit, and as a result, sexuality appears to become linked to the definition of the concept. It prompts our seeing ourselves from the outside, as objects of another’s desire, which seem naturally related to the constitution of our self. Though in

Sasha's world, sexuality is essentially a question of power: "Instead of being associated with desire, warmth, affection, enjoyment, sex is involved with money, power, self-punishment, coldness, exploitation" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 128). In the previous chapter we suggested that though the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* is still deeply conflicted, it appears to be conflicted in a slightly different way than the rest of the novel, suggesting that there has indeed been a change, or transformation in Sasha at last. From the very beginning she has suffered an internal fragmentation, which culminates with a definitive split in her narrative voice, causing her to drive René away. Though after he has gone, Sasha finally succeeds in subduing the other voice inside her mind, which along with her willingness to meet the gaze of the commis constitutes our most compelling evidence of an alteration within. As a result, Sasha's exasperated self-consciousness, which has played such an important role in the novel, both thematically and as a narrative device, seem markedly less prominent in the final pages. In the moment before the commis enters her room, Sasha says to herself: "But it doesn't matter. Now I am simple and not afraid; now I am myself. He can look at me if he wants to" (Rhys p. 158). There is an eerie sense of calm to her statement, and a converging of her selfhood and identify we have never before seen. Whatever existential despair haunted Sasha in the past appears to have disintegrated. She does not cling to external hopes, and the mask she wore has been discarded. Yet her calm does not appear simply to be indifference, instead Sasha seems to be present in the moment, frank and unconstrained. A passage from earlier in the novel springs to mind. While walking in the street with René, Sasha thinks:

I am no longer self-conscious. Hand in hand we walk along, swinging our arms. Suddenly he stops, pulls me under a lamppost and stares at me. The street is empty, the lights in the bars are out. 'Hey, isn't it a bit late in the day to do this?' He says: 'Mais c'est complètement fou. It's hallucinating. Walking along here with you, I have the feeling that I'm with a - ' 'With a beau-tiful young girl?' 'No,' he says. 'With a child.' (Rhys p. 67)

Even though the scene takes place early in the narrative, at which point they barely know each other, we feel instinctually that René's words touch upon a paradoxical, though fundamental truth about Sasha. Just as her life is about to end, this is where the concept of anxiety comes to yield its most profound impact on our analysis. Because what characterizes Sasha's few flashes of happiness is a childlike abandon that stands in stark contrast to her usual mode of heightened self-consciousness. The "iron band" round her heart loosens, allowing her to be free of herself, if only just until the moment passes (Rhys p. 83). So that when René surprises her on the landing, Sasha hugs him happily and without reservation.

Walking hand in hand on the street they swing their arms and she forgets her internal torment for a while. Which brings us back to the connection between anxiety and sexuality.

One of the most universal examples of Kierkegaard's possibility of freedom relates to the change a human being goes through in puberty, when sexuality, and thus also sin comes into his or her life. When the individual sees a new and indeterminate future open up ahead, and has to choose how to relate to that possibility (Grøn p. 15). We have already explored the negative ways of being in anxiety, while the positive remain perhaps even more elusive. Though Kierkegaard does speak of a certain innocence in anxiety, one which cannot simply be lost, but endures as a state almost like the innocence of childhood (Grøn p. 23). It is therefore intriguing that Sasha is characterized as a child precisely in the moments when she appears to cohere with herself. She does also speak of herself as a child at one point, of listening to a conversation in a language she does not understand: "It was like being a child again, listening and thinking of something else and hearing the voices – endless, inevitable and restful" (Rhys p. 95). If nothing else, René seems to understand this childlike quality about Sasha (Angier p. 399). And even though he has left, by her words and by her actions, Sasha is very much like a child in those few moments before she throws herself to the commis. The outside world and its expectations have ceased to matter, her internal split has healed into a whole. In the end she is faced with a choice, and even if her choice is to embrace the commis and thereby her ruin, Sasha does so wholeheartedly.

8.3 The Power of a Paradox

We have followed Sasha's narrative while she has attempted to change and adapt to a world that seems at times both sinister and overwhelming. And though she travelled to Paris in order to affect a transformation of sorts, the one she achieves in the end is of a different kind than the one envisioned. *Good Morning, Midnight* describes how Sasha struggles with her existence, despairing and lost, stuck in impenetrable solitude and a self-destructive pattern of behavior, yet still harboring the faintest glimmer of hope. Pitted against a social system in which she is an outsider and underdog, a context of moral distinctions and honesty that Rhys insisted it was crucially important to describe: because even though "people are likely to fail morally, she thought it essential to keep an acute eye on that failure" (Savory, *Jean Rhys* p. 116). The paradoxical nature of Sasha's narrative appears to be able to destabilize established structures from within, potentially turning everything upside down. And the emotional complexity and ambivalence of the ending, where we have argued that Sasha returns to a

child-state with her experience still intact, is one that appears to largely circumvent the entrapment and oppression that have caused her so much strife. Informed by Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety we have come to realize that, in an existential sense, Sasha is in a better place as she is going under than she has been during the length of the narrative. She is more alive, more present than her zombie-state has allowed her to be for a long time. Sasha has neither self-pity nor excuses left. There is no more use in hiding, no point in pretense. Although her story is also a tragedy and utter horror, there is something very genuine about Sasha's existence until the end:

Part of the remarkable achievement of Rhys' fiction is that she brings together the terrifying anger and despair of abjection with the impulse of hope, hatred with the longing for human love and tenderness, the brutishness of human existence with its moments of beauty and compassion. (Carr p. 79)

We have argued that the final passage of *Good Morning, Midnight* embodies two paradoxical and conflicting emotions simultaneously. And thus in Sasha's last moments it indeed seems as if life and death, creation and destruction, is held in suspension by the novel's narrative. The ambiguity of Rhys's words and images have challenged and frustrated her readers, but in the end the paradox serves to make Sasha's fate even more powerful and heartbreaking, in fact only deepening the tragedy of her demise. Because there was hope, and because Sasha's struggle was a courageous one. She becomes a child in the world again, unconstrained and sincere, she welcomes her end as a mercy. There is nothing left to say but *Good Morning, Midnight*. From childlike innocence, to three simple dots, we come to see Sasha as an anxious self: first consumed by the paradoxical power of anxiety, then set free by the same ambiguous force. And ultimately? Ultimately that is all there is.

8.4 Conclusion

And at that we have come full circle. Through an existential reading of *Good Morning, Midnight* and all the way back to the concept of anxiety. To Kierkegaard, who writes:

In one of Grimm's fairy tales there is a story of a young man who goes in search of adventure in order to learn what it is to be in anxiety. We will let the adventurer pursue his journey without concerning ourselves about whether he encountered the terrible on his way. However, I will say that this is an adventure that every human being must go through—to learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish either by never having

been in anxiety or by succumbing to anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate. (Kierkegaard p. 155)

We began this thesis with a juxtaposition of a novel and a concept, separated by a seemingly insurmountable distance. And though there is no direct link to connect the two components, we have found that there is an existential vein running from Kierkegaard and the concept of anxiety, through modernism, to Rhys and *Good Morning, Midnight*. By allowing a philosophical concept and an aesthetic work of art to resonate with each other, we have been able to demonstrate certain affinities in subject matter and narrational technique. We have taken our cue from Kierkegaard's indirect communication and made indirectness into our own approach, allowing Kierkegaard to bookend our analysis of the novel. And now, when the moment has arrived to gather our thoughts, we realize that this strategy may not be wholly unfit in relation to *Good Morning, Midnight*. That there is in fact something about Rhys's utilization of metaphorical images that functions in a similarly indirect manner. As Angier says, the "fearful, enigmatic images" of Rhys's novels, have a tendency to "slip under our conscious guard, and persuade us before we have noticed" (Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* p. xii). In Sasha's consciousness the form and content of *Good Morning, Midnight* appears to convene, revealing not just a preoccupation with existential themes, but also a related resistance to narrative and semantic closure, much like the one we have attributed to Kierkegaard. Analyzing Sasha's existence with the concept of anxiety in the back of our minds has in a sense allowed us to anchor a complex philosophical concept in the more concrete experience of a fictional consciousness. While the concept of anxiety at the same time has enabled an exploration of the novel's existential themes, illuminating Sasha's experience, articulating an anxiety that has been expressed mostly by the metaphors and images of *Good Morning, Midnight*. In short, delineating Sasha as an anxious self.

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