

THE TURNING POINT: THEMES IN *GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT*

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## 1. Ghosts and Dreams

On the last page of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the protagonist, Sasha Jansen, having insulted and finally alienated her gigolo friend, imagines that he is returning for a reconciliation. She suddenly realizes that the figure standing beside her bed is that of the stranger from the hotel room next to hers. This man has been characterized throughout the novel as "a ghost," "thin as a skeleton," "a paper man," and he has appeared to her in a dream at the opening of the novel as someone involved in murder. The passages used to describe him almost always have had sinister overtones. We have been led to think that Sasha might be killed by this stranger. Her premonition of this possible final outcome is now suggested by her total immobility before his entrance: "I lie very still, with my arm over my eyes. As still as if I were dead...." She goes on:

I don't need to look. I know.  
 I think: 'Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one? That's very important. I must find that out - it's very important.'  
 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....'<sup>1</sup>

This is the end of the novel.

Since Sasha's fears and mistrust have brought about the end of her love affair with the gigolo, it might seem that the final yielding to another man signified for her a new awareness, a rebirth to life and love. The page, however, is filled with gothic suspense and the stranger dressed in white may be seen as death, creeping in and willingly embraced. The ambiguity is emphasized by the phrase "for the last time," repeated twice, coupled with the final "Yes - yes - yes..." - a parody of Mrs. Bloom's triumphant surrender?<sup>2</sup>

One of the most successful elements of the book's structure is given by the recurring motif of this stranger haunting the heroine and the reader with his sinister appearances. When the novel begins, Sasha has spent five days in Paris at the hotel, has seen the man, and has already registered his presence through a figure appearing to her in the opening dream:

Now a little man, bearded, with a snub nose, dressed in a long white night-shirt, is talking earnestly to me. 'I am your father,' he says. 'Remember that I am your father.' But blood is streaming from a wound in his forehead. 'Murder,' he shouts, 'murder, murder.' Helplessly I watch the blood streaming. At last my voice tears itself loose from my chest. I too shout: 'Murder, murder, help, help,' and the sound fills the room. (12-13)

Shortly after this ominous dream the "real man" appears on the landing:

The man who has the room next to mine is parading about as usual

in his white dressing-gown. Hanging around. He is like the ghost of the landing. I am always running into him.

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. (13)<sup>3</sup>

on, in one of her rare optimistic moments, Sasha tries to exorcise this haunting by imagining for him a shabby existence as a commercial traveller, a *commis* *gour*, which would place the nightmarish figure within safe bounds. Her conclusion is solely from the careful attention he seems to pay to his worn-out shoes, neatly laid outside his room for polishing. But at her next encounter with the man he is again a gothic connotation:

I have just finished dressing when there is a knock on the door. It's the commis, in his beautiful dressing-gown, immaculately white, with long, wide, hanging sleeves. (...) He looks like a priest, the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion. (30)

She pushes him away from the door, thinking "It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist" (31).

The hideous ingratiating smile of the stranger reminds the reader of villains in a Dickens novel.<sup>4</sup> Then, toward the end, the smile turns into a scowl and finally into a stinging insult - "'Vache! Sale vache'" (125) and the commis is clearly revealed as a serial Jack the Ripper, full of hatred for impure, loose and destitute women. Still he is so "a paper man," the unreal projection of Sasha's mind, a figure generated by her fears or hopes. The irony lies in the fact that Sasha has rejected her gigolo, who might have healed her wounds and cured her fears, because to love again would imply for her the giving up of her defensive shield and "it hurts, when you have been dead, to be alive...." (153). The definite preference of the Rhys heroine for the man who will die for her is thus clearly confirmed in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Here the irony is confirmed by a dialogue with the gigolo which takes place shortly before what has been called the "unnerving ending,"<sup>5</sup> while they are still sitting at the Deux Magots and Sasha decides to go to the hotel with him:

'Afraid,' he says, 'afraid! But what are you afraid of? ... You think I'll strangle you, or cut your throat for the sake of that beautiful ring of yours. Is that it?'

'No, I'm sure you wouldn't kill me to get my ring.' (143)

(.....)

'You are afraid of me. You think I'm méchant. You do think I might kill you.'

If I thought you'd kill me, I'd come away with you right now and no questions asked. And what's more, you could have any money I've got with my blessing....

'I don't think you're any more méchant than anybody else. Less, probably.' (144)

Love is rejected because Sasha finds it safer to think that all is finished for her. It is safer to be "not sad, not happy, not regretful, not thinking of anything much" (153). In short, to be emotionally dead is safer than to be alive. Maybe Sasha has learned to fear from René except "coming alive" again, and much more to fear from the man who has frightened her so much that she tries to find another room in a different hotel. And yet, paradoxically, it is death that Sasha seems to want. Her silent comment to René, "If I thought you'd kill me, I'd come away with you right now and no questions asked" - can be read as an anticipation and, together with other hints, it

contributes to the increasing pace of the final part of the novel, up to its extraordinary ending. The pitch of intensity of the last pages illustrates Ford Madox Ford's ideas concerning the *progression d'effet*:

every word set on paper - every word set on paper must carry the story forward (...) the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity.<sup>6</sup>

In light of this *progression d'effet*, Sasha's dreams acquire particular importance and should therefore be analysed. The structure of *Good Morning, Midnight* is defined by two dreams, the first at the beginning of the narration, the other at the end. The latter is an hallucination expressing Sasha's desire for total mechanical impermeability to emotions:

All that is left in the 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. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes - others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me. (156)

Shortly before this, Sasha's visit to the Exhibition had partaken of the same mood of relieved detachment: "Cold, empty, beautiful - this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted" (137). The motif of the Exhibition is also somehow related to the first dream in which the heroine did not want to go to the Exhibition while everybody else did:

Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition - I want the way out. (...) 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.' (12)

The two visions are connected by the common mechanical element - the arm or hand of steel. While in the first dream Sasha is restrained from leaving the Exhibition by a man with a hand of steel, in the final hallucination the steel machine or robot is not threatening. It has replaced the crowd of men and women - "a pack of damned hyenas."<sup>7</sup> The glaring light from the robot's arms is less frightening than the grey sky. The eyes with "the eyelashes stiff with mascara" are the welcomed substitutes for real human faces. These counterpointed nightmares seem to indicate that while "going to the Exhibition" in the first dream was for Sasha an ordeal in which she would become a mechanical marionette like all the other faceless passers-by, a way of exposing herself in which she would cease to exist as a person, the last vision on the contrary suggests a detached contemplation, her ultimate resolution and acceptance of steel robots, of death. The "way out" sought in the first dream is thus found in the last desolate hallucination. And yet, in spite of her ironical statements, Sasha is not like the others:

I am a respectable woman, une femme convenable (...) Faites comme les autres - that's been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you. (88)

What distinguishes her is a complex mind and "a generous nature that have gone unappreciated in a conventional, unimaginative world,"<sup>8</sup> in a world of robots. The images of robots, dolls and artificial limbs strike Sasha's consciousness all throughout the book. Sasha registers at first the presence of some artificial limbs in a London shop window just before meeting Sidonie, the friend who will give her the money to go to Paris.

So in a way, that casual glimpse is relevant to the development of her oneiric obsession (flashback, 11). Once in Paris she indifferently thinks: "I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely" (10); and after the first dream, in another flashback, while recollecting her earlier job as a *vendeuse*, she describes the mannequins in the boutique:

I would feel as if I were drugged, sitting there, watching those damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart - all complete. (16)

When she first entered the shop the same mannequins appeared to her as "elongated dolls, beautifully dressed, with charming and malicious oval faces" (16). At the opposite pole of mechanical artificiality, Sasha's perception lingers on the few quiet oases of natural peace and order in the city, like the Luxembourg Gardens where, for a moment, she sees "nothing but the slender, straight trunks of the trees." (46). In one of the flashbacks the two contrasting images of puppets and trees are set one against the other: to Sasha, "plunged in a dream (...) all the faces are masks and only trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets" (75).

Later on, after the important episode during which Sasha has bought a painting from a Russian artist, she contemplates the figure of the old banjo player of the painting who is "double-headed and with four arms" and she is struck by the fact that in the painting the poor old player and his misery can be contemplated "as if it were in another life than this." This makes her happy.<sup>9</sup> In the final hallucination - a kaleidoscopic arrangement of broken impressions and images - the arms of the banjo player, the steel hand of the first dream and the artificial limbs seen in the shop overlap, as an indication of Sasha's confusion. The robot seems beautiful to her, it is aesthetically contemplated, seen "as if it were in another world."

In the novel, however, there are two Sashes: the woman who can cry and regret and the sneering, detached, revengeful<sup>10</sup> Sasha who contemplates the other. The ironical, spiteful asides of the "*cérébrale*," often in parentheses, punctuate the book, but when the hardened Sasha prevails, the phrases in parentheses offer the sentimental counterpoint. And so Sasha's consciousness oscillates between the sharp, irreverent voice and a softer voice the other can make fun of, referring to it as "the cheap gramophone in my head" or "the film in my mind," that unites a tune or an image of the past with the present, and explores past scenes of happiness or dejection. This split is made more obvious in Part IV, especially during the passages in which Sasha's conversations with the gigolo are related. He seems to see in Sasha a woman of feeling while she claims to be a *cérébrale*, lost in dreams. Sasha's two selves are fully dramatized and appear more and more distinctively towards the end of the novel owing to René's "threatening" presence, but in the end the grim, hard Sasha seems to prevail. It is this latter Sasha who experiences the hallucination, but, when the grim voice fades out, the earlier helpless woman is alone, awaiting her lover or her death.

The ambivalence of the heroine's consciousness is thus restated in the open ending of the novel. This brings us back to its title. If we examine its paradox, we find that *Midnight* - the night Sasha enters - is after all bravely faced, in spite of regrets. *Death* - life without love? - is almost courted and sought, greeted with relief, embraced, accepted like the ghost lover embodied in it. It would make it possible for Sasha to become supremely indifferent, invulnerable.

## 2. Names and Nationalities

The elements in *Good Morning, Midnight* that anticipate the thematic organization of *Mido Sargasso Sea*, a novel Jean Rhys began to write about ten years later, are its gothic overtones, the dream structured narration and a dialectic of being and seeming. This last element, which leads to the major theme of identity and destiny, is related to the motifs

of names, of the double, of the mask.

Sasha Jansen has no name. From her interior monologue<sup>11</sup> of 1937 we learn that at a certain point in her life - around 1926 or 1927 - she started calling herself Sasha:

I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder - calling myself Sasha? (11)

Somebody in London,<sup>12</sup> an extremely respectable man whom she hates, used to call her Sophia:

It's so like him, I thought, that he refuses to call me Sasha, or even Sophie. No, it's Sophia, full and grand. Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine, Sophia? ... (36-7)

Mrs. Jansen is, presumably, her married name. Names are often delayed in the novel,<sup>13</sup> and not only because of its almost diary-like form. Until the very last scenes we do not know that the gigolo is called René, but probably that is not even his real name. Sasha seems to think that everybody lies about names and nationalities. Even Delmar, a young Russian who, like her, "has his feelings and sticks to them," arouses her suspicions: "He says his name is Nicolas Delmar, which doesn't sound very Russian to me. Anyway, that's what he calls himself (...)" (54). Nationalities are blurred or purposely hidden. We are not told Sasha's, and Delmar "slides away from the subject of Russia and everything Russian (...)" (54). One of René's problems is that he needs a passport. He says he is French-Canadian but Sasha does not believe him:

'I'll tell you one thing I don't believe. I don't believe you're a French-Canadian.'

'Then what do you think I am?'

'Spanish? Spanish-American?'

He blinks and says to himself: 'Elle n'est pas si bête que ça.'

Well, that might mean anything. (63)

Sasha's former husband - Enno Jansen - might be Belgian or Dutch but not Danish as his name seems to imply; Sasha is a Russian name but nothing in the book indicates that she might be Russian. Another character whom she believes to be French is probably a Turk. In many cases names are merely convenient, temporary labels: "He has a friend called Dickson, a Frenchman, who sings at the Scala. He calls himself Dickson because English singers are popular at the moment" (97).

At times names emphasize loss more than identity: Sasha's respectable English boss in one of her recollections is called Mr. Blank. At other times names convey a sort of *trompe l'oeil* quality: another rich and respectable acquaintance, Mr. Lawson, characterized by glassy eyes and not very respectable desires, is apparently the very embodiment of the unwritten law which allows wealthy men to take advantage of girls in distress. There are also names, both acquired and real, which seem to fit perfectly some of the most sympathetic or pleasant characters: the philosophical nun, Sister Marie Augustine,<sup>14</sup> the famous hairdresser, Felix, an obvious distributor of happiness, and Mr. Salvatini, the manager of the dress shop who, as the name implies, tries to rescue Sasha from Mr. Blank more than once. But in general, people are seldom addressed by their names: Sasha is never addressed as Sasha by anyone except herself. She is referred to as "The Englishwoman" by waiters or café clients, as Mrs. Jansen during the flashbacks, or as "madame" by her Russian friends. Her nationality, never explicitly revealed (cf. 13), seems to have made the people in the hotel suspicious.

It seems reasonable to assume that during the thirties which Rhys recreates in the novel, names and nationalities took on symbolic value. They are temporary useful devices, hopeful attempts to change one's fortune. The name motif helps to establish the gloom

atmosphere of Rhys's metropolis: a place filled with political refugees<sup>15</sup> and various kinds of misfits looking for passports and money, looking for a "way out." In fact, they are trapped by the impasse of their lives and of history.

In later years these haunted figures were to appear as the heroes and heroines in films like *Casablanca* (filmed in 1945). But what in the film is stale romanticism, exemplified by the stereotyped, pure and brave hero (Ingrid Bergman's husband) and the disillusioned expatriate (Humphrey Bogart), acquires real pathos in the novel because of the lucidity of the "intelligent narrator": Sasha's dramatized self, divided between detachment and sentimentality, irony and feeling, courage and dread.

### 3. Masks and Fate

Sasha believes that most things people say about themselves are lies and also knows that "the carefully-pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you" is not 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" (63). If "the carefully-pruned, shaped thing" is not the truth, Sasha Jansen is not what she seems. Above all, she is not what she wears: in spite of a whole afternoon spent choosing a hat, in spite of the newly blonde cendré hair dye, in spite of her new make-up and fur coat.

The fur coat plays an important part in her thoughts, and consequently in the book. Sasha's double - the cold voice inside her head - finds a fitting title for the affair with the gigolo - a title resembling that of a cheap song or play: "It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat" (154). The fur coat is old but still somehow impressive. It is because of that René decides to speak to her, thinking that she must be a rich woman. The sad truth is that it would have been useless for Sasha to get rid of the fur coat ("if you knew what you really get when you try to sell things it would give you a shock," 64). The fact remains that the coat is old and does not resist a close survey. At a distance Sasha may seem rich, but she is not. The same sort of *trompe l'oeil* quality evident in Rhys's choice of names can be applied to the hotel where Sasha stays. It may look decorous at first, but the landing on the fourth floor where her room is located is "the wreckage of the spectacular floors below" (13). The hotel and the room correspond to Sasha's aspect of mind, as if her life were an accumulation of different layers and only by guessing at what is hidden beneath the cosmetics<sup>16</sup> would one discover her personal wreckage. Through the subtle organization of symbolic details, Rhys attributes to Sasha a desperate awareness and ironical insight: to her the fur coat is "the last idiocy, the last incongruity" (14) and the room on the fourth floor perfectly expresses her situation. She identifies with its shabbiest detail; she is like the room, the room is herself:

It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible. The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse. (9)

And this is my plane. ... Quatrième à gauche, and mind you don't trip over the hole in the carpet. That's me. (12)

The smell of cheap hotels is faint, but real: Sasha cannot get far enough from poverty no matter how hard she may try. Both the room and the fur coat have a protective function, and both are traps. Sasha's complex emotions oscillate between the impulse to hide ("faites les autres, damn you!") and plain hatred for the mask she has to wear. Since both the room and the fur coat are the embodiment of her fate ("It Was All Due To An Old Fur Coat"), her consciousness, which is divided between rebellion and resignation, chooses to identify with both as a target. If the coat is "the last idiocy, the last incongruity," the room is the sheer insult:

I put the light on. The bottle of Evian on the bedtable, the tube

of luminal, the two books, the clock ticking on the ledge, the red curtains....

I can see Sidonie carefully looking round for an hotel just like this one. She imagines that it's my atmosphere. God, it's an insult when you come to think about it! More dark rooms, more red curtains.... (11-12)<sup>17</sup>

The hotel room is the central metaphor of the novel. At the start of the book Sasha has already spent five days there. Her "monologue" begins on a Friday and ends on the Friday of the following week.<sup>18</sup> The book is divided into four parts and at the end of each Sasha is back at the hotel, back to her fate, in spite of all her attempts to escape. After being frightened by the commercial traveller, she tries to find another room in a different hotel, but her search is marked by impossible expectations:

Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219, with bath - number 219, with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath. 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. Just try me, just give me a chance. (32)

But number 219 is still occupied. The place which could change Sasha's life is not to be found. It is totally out of reach or too expensive, like the "black dress with wide sleeves embroidered in vivid colours" in which she would "never have stammered or been stupid" (25). The beautiful dress, the glamorous room she cannot have, the hat and the cheap cosmetics she buys are essentially the means through which Sasha tries to escape from the destructive core of her personality; they are screening devices and, at the same time, a sort of survival kit. That is why the entire ritual of buying a hat or having one's hair dyed is so important and so minutely described. Take the blonde *cendré* hair dye, for example. Sasha hangs on that thought "as you hang on to something when you are drowning" (44):

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?) (44)

While the whole difficult operation goes on, Sasha reads in a magazine the answers to the women readers where hope is carefully distributed in tiny dosages:

No, mademoiselle, no madame, life is not easy. Do not delude yourselves. Nothing is easy. But there is hope (turn to page 5), and yet more hope (turn to page 9).... (53)

In this way the hair dye and the quotations from the magazine counterpoint one another: both are acts of rescue, both uncertain rituals of transformation. The business of dyeing one's hair is described as some sort of rebirth, but to achieve it bleaching is needed first. To obtain a successful mask the client must remove the previous layers of her personality. An enormous amount of energy must go into the enterprise. If Sasha's wonderfully determined hairdresser succeeds in getting for her the right shade of hair colour, however, Sasha is not able to change her room. And so she ends up saying to herself that if the purpose is to hide, any place will do. The very shabbiness and anonymity of her hotel room reflect Sasha's uncertain identity. Although the topography of Paris is most carefully given in the novel, so that the reader could follow Sasha's movements and wanderings with a map,<sup>19</sup> the name of the "awful hotel" and that of the street on which it is situated are deliberately not reported:

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. (120)

I have no pride - no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad... 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. (38)

Sasha's reaction to the room has been bitter from the start because she has immediately recognized in its aspect the repetitive pattern of her past. Later she sees in it the failure of her life, her lack of money and a future:

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. (91)

I'll lie in bed all day, pull the curtains and shut the damned world out. (68)

The room speaks, stirring up memories. The first and recurrent phrase in the book is "'Quite like old times,' the room says. 'Yes? No?'" (9).<sup>20</sup> So in a way, the "yes" with which the novel ends may be read as an answer to that question, implying that the repetitive compulsive pattern in Sasha's life has not been overcome; she is still a prisoner of her past, of her various rooms. And confinement to her room is also a premonition of the final restriction, the final imprisonment; the place where Sasha can remember or forget (with the help of a sleeping pill), the place in which she can hide from "the wolves outside" may become the place in which to die.

In his Preface to *The Left Bank* (1927), Ford Madox Ford had written of Jean Rhys's sketches that they "begin exactly where they should and end exactly when their job is done"<sup>21</sup> and suggested that "the almost exclusive reading of French writers of recent, but at the most recent date" had helped the young writer. The authors to whom Ford Madox Ford referred were the French realists according to whom

the story of a novel should be the history of an Affair and not a tale in which a central character with an attendant female should be followed through a certain space of time until the book comes to a happy end on a note of matrimony or to an unhappy end - represented by a death. That latter - the normal practice of the earlier novelist and still the normal expedient of the novel of commerce or escape - is again imbecile, but again designed to satisfy a very natural human desire for finality.

a novelist [must carry] the subject- the Affair - he has selected for rendering, remorselessly out to its logical conclusion.<sup>22</sup>

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, as well as in her other novels and short stories, Jean Rhys followed this rule. If the appearance of the stranger in a white dressing-gown ("Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one?") on the last page of the novel conveys a sense of finality; the ambiguity, however, remains. After all, Sasha's question could only be a superstitious bet, a childlike form of exorcism. Should we really ask ourselves whether the murder announced in Sasha's first dream will actually take place? A reader afflicted by a "very natural human desire for finality" might want to decide whether Sasha's death will be metaphorical or real, sordid or brave, blind or fully aware. Whatever it is Sasha has to face, there is no doubt that she is fully aware: "I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time.

For the last time...." One more thing is certain, however: the Affair is over. The gigolo has disappeared from the scene forever; the Sasha we have known will not tell us more than what she has. In any case, she has finished one more cycle, has concluded a phase: the subject - the Affair Rhys has chosen to render - has been "remorselessly carried out to its logical conclusion."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, London, Constable, 1939. Quoted edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, reprint of 1978, p. 159. All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>About Jean Rhys's casual acquaintance with James Joyce cf. David Plante: "Jean Rhys: A Remembrance" in *The Paris Review*, Autumn 1979, p. 260. In the same article Rhys is reported to have said that she never read Joyce. On this point cf. Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979, p. 97, and Helen Nebeker, *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage*, Montreal, Eden Press Women's Publications, 1981, pp. 117-118. Both seem to think that Rhys must have read Joyce and both see mythic connotations in the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight*.

<sup>3</sup>Neither Staley nor Nebeker identify the little man of the dream with "the ghost of the landing." The elements of this identification are: a) the long nightshirt, which combines and replaces the white dressing-gown and the nightshirt of other encounters; b) the word "bearded" replacing the "bird-like face" of the man of the next room because of the similar sound of the two words; c) the word "murder," expressing Sasha's fears and premonitions related to her neighbour.

<sup>4</sup>Dickens was an author whom Jean Rhys loved and read extensively (cf. Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, London, André Deutsch, 1979, p. 145. Cf. also David Plante, "Jean Rhys, a Remembrance," op. cit., p. 277) and with whom she has elements in common: glimpses of lurid and desolate city streets, rapid sketches of minor characters vividly evoked, rhythmic phrasing, the metaphorical quality of the images and a fascination with the world of the underdog.

<sup>5</sup>See Francis Wyndham's Introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (consulted edition: Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968, p. 9) on *Good Morning, Midnight*: "This involved episode is worked out with great subtlety; its climax, which brings the novel to an end, is brilliantly written and indescribably unnerving to read."

<sup>6</sup>Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, London, Duckworth, 1924, p. 240.

<sup>7</sup>Men and women are often seen by Sasha as wolves, or hyenas laughing at their defeated prey. Compared to wild beasts, robots are less threatening and can even be considered "beautiful." Cf., however, in Rhys's autobiography (op. cit., p. 147) the words attributed to a Madame Bragadier: "Imagine having a robot doing up your dress at the back! Those steel fingers! *Quel horreur!*"

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Francis Wyndham, cit., p. 9: "This is not only a study of a lonely, ageing woman, who has been deserted by husbands and lovers and has taken to drink; it is the tragedy of a distinguished mind and a generous nature that have gone unappreciated in a conventional, unimaginative world."

<sup>9</sup>The painting of the old man playing the banjo reminds one of Chagall's two-faced fiddlers, or of "The Green Jew." Marc Chagall may have inspired the character of the painter Serge Rubin in the novel. Jean Rhys may have met Chagall, perhaps through Carco, whose novel, *Perversité*, she translated. (Cf. Richard M. Ludwig ed., *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965, pp. 176-77.) Both painters are Russian Jews, both worship Van Gogh; vivid colours and subjects also coincide.

- <sup>10</sup>In Francis Wyndham's reading of the book, Sasha's revenge is an important element in her tortured relation with the gigolo: "Sasha wants to work off on this boy her resentment at all men." (Francis Wyndham, "Introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea*," cit., p. 9). Staley too emphasizes the revenge motif in the novel. Rhys relies a great deal on the technique of the parenthetical counterpoint, especially in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to render the divided self of the protagonists. Here is a fine example in the former book: "No more pawings, no more prying - leave me alone ... (They'll do that all right, my dear)," p. 37.
- <sup>11</sup>The narrative technique of *Good Morning, Midnight* is really that of the stream of consciousness novel.
- <sup>12</sup>Presumably a relative. It reminds the reader of the character of the uncle in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*.
- <sup>13</sup>Or they recur only once. The name of Enno, Sasha's former husband, occurs more frequently. The name of Serge, the painter, is mentioned several times but the surname, Rubin, is given only once.
- <sup>14</sup>There is another philosophical nun with the same name in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (op. cit., pp. 50-51) in which the character is treated more extensively.
- <sup>15</sup>Politics is the subject most carefully avoided by all the characters in the novel: it is a dangerous subject. Only Delmar makes some hints in his irritation against the painter: "I've had enough of these people of the extreme Left. They have bad manners. Moi, je suis monarchiste. ..." (p. 86). There is also one pessimistic outburst from Sasha about a possible revolution.
- <sup>16</sup>Cf. Peter Kemp, "Deep beneath the cosmetics" in *Times Literary Supplement*, August 28, 1981, p. 972.
- <sup>17</sup>I cannot help thinking that the name "Sidonie" was suggested to Rhys by Colette. It was the name of Colette's mother and of Colette herself. On Rhys's reading of Colette cf. "Jean Rhys interviewed by Peter Burton" in *Transatlantic Review*, 36, Summer 1970, p. 109.
- <sup>18</sup>According to my calculations, which may be wrong, because it is at times difficult to decide whether Sasha lies in bed because she is too miserable to go out or because the day is over. She does, however, spend an entire day in bed and that is Thursday. Time expands towards the second half of the novel. Parts III and IV include Thursday night and Friday, respectively.
- <sup>19</sup>On topography too Jean Rhys seems to have followed Ford Madox Ford's advice, at least beginning with *Quarter*. Cf. Ford's preface to *The Left Bank*: "I tried - for I am forever meddling with the young! - very hard to induce the author of *The Left Bank* to introduce some sort of topography of that region, bit by bit, into her sketches - in the cunning way in which it would have been done by Flaubert or Maupassant, or by Mr. Conrad 'getting in' the East in innumerable short stories from *Almayer* to *Rescue* ... But would she do it? No! With cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work. Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions: the locality in which these things are endured is immaterial." (Preface reprinted in *Tigers Are Better-Looking*, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 139). Some of the topography given in *Good Morning, Midnight* during the flashbacks correspond to that given in the autobiography. Rue Lamartine, for example, where Jean Rhys and Lenglet lived and where Rhys sets Sasha and Enno. Jean Rhys planned the topographical details of her novels carefully and went several times to Paris to check locations while writing *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. Cf. Staley, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

20 There are many phrases that appear repeatedly throughout the book as motifs. This is one of many possible examples.

21 Ford Madox Ford, Preface to *The Left Bank*, op. cit., p. 138.

22 Ford Madox Ford, *The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad*, London, Constable, 1930, pp. 124 and 123.

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§ § §

#### VOYAGE IN THE DARK: DEUIL D'UN MYTHE

Chantal Delourme

Dans *Voyage in the Dark* la représentation apparaît comme une scène scindée en deux pans. Deux objets y sont convoqués: l'île, là-bas; l'Angleterre, ici. Entre ces deux objets, une différence irrémédiable que la narratrice parcourt sans relâche. Deux objets qui sont suscités par deux écritures qui s'entrelacent dans un même texte et pourtant clament leur différence.

#### Différence:

Le premier objet, celui qui remplit l'avant-scène de la représentation, c'est l'objet absent, l'île édenique qui sans cesse défait les bandeaux de l'oubli et affirme sa présence à une mémoire qui l'accueille. C'est plutôt le non-objet que l'objet. Il n'appartient pas au champ de l'actuel que la fiction a suscité. Il est essentiellement absent.

Il est pourtant différent, élu parmi les autres pour sa différence d'avec ceux-ci. Il est donc avant tout différent de l'objet présent l'Angleterre, auprès duquel ses qualités sont mesurées pour ne s'en détacher que mieux:

The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you were different inside yourself was different. (7)

Cette différence n'est pas seulement la mesure qui sépare un objet d'un autre, mais cette autre, absolue, qui oppose l'objet à un autre. Opposition des odeurs, des couleurs (47). Si absolu est cet état de fait ne peut l'atténuer. L'objet unique tel que le soleil devient autre de part et d'autre des deux lieux, atteint par la différence qui les frappe. A l'intérieur même de la ressemblance s'affirme toujours la différence qui annule le mouvement de rapprochement que la ressemblance avait esquissé:

All the way back in the taxi I was still thinking about home and when I got into bed I was awake, thinking about it. About how sad the sun can be, especially in the afternoon, but in a different way from the sadness of cold places. (49)

L'expérience du soleil distingue de part et d'autre de cet irréconciliable sans jamais pouvoir faire autrement que constater l'impossibilité de toute conciliation: