Narrative Identity in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark*: A Hermeneutical Interpretation.

MA Thesis

Ane Faugstad Aarø

Department of Foreign Languages

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Abstract in Norwegian

Denne oppgåva utforskar omgrepet *narrativ identitet* i Rhys sine to mellomkrigsromanar *Good Morning, Midnight* og *Voyage in the Dark* ved hjelp av Paul Ricœur sin teori om narrativ identitet i *Oneself as Another* (1994 [1992]). Gjennom å analysere bruken av temporalitet, minner, og indre monolog viser oppgåva korleis protagonistane sin narrative identitet er definert av historiske og geografiske samanhengar. Eit føremål i oppgåva er å vise korleis romanane presenterer protagonistane som historisk situerte litterære karakterar. Det historiske aspektet ved protagonistane dannar bakgrunnen for den politiske og ideologiske kritikken i romanane. Oppgåva argumenterer for at dei to romanane skapar narrative situerte subjekt ved ei samanfletting av fortid og notid i som avdekkjer eit topos og ei historie frå Vestindia og Paris, som den staden som det blir tala frå. Gjennom denne samanflettinga av notid og fortid dannar protagonistane sin narrative subjektivitet og *si livshistorie.* Oppgåva analyserer om romanane sine ulike stemmer i den indre monologen fungerer som ein mot-diskurs til det sosiale systemets maktstrukturar i språk og normer. Stemmene representerer ein motstand mot samfunnets maktspråk ved å nytte eit overskridande språk som handlar om den marginaliserte, migranten eller den utstøytte sitt perspektiv. Oppgåva søkjer å vise korleis romanane skaper eit samband mellom stadar, minner og identitet som saman formar protagonistane sin narrativ identitet. Difor viser analysen korleis romanane vektlegg forholdet mellom politiske forhold og identitet, og korleis identitet er betinga av stadar i narrativa. Oppgåva argumenterer for at protagonistane sine brotne narrative identitetar blir skapt av minner, draumar og stadar som setting og topos. Framstillinga av den indre monologen i romanane der protagonistane søkjer å skape meining i livet, gjer at ei lesing ved hjelp av omgrepet narrativ identitet utdjuper protagonistane sine ulike historiske kontekstar.

1. Introduction

> Deep, dark river …
> 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. Yes, there always remains something.
>
> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*

Dominican-born Jean Rhys (1890–1979) was a modernist writer known for her independent style, form, and imagery in a concise and experimental language. Her works carry a political engagement that addresses class, gender, and postcolonial issues. While she wrote four of her novels in the years between the two world wars, she is best known for her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which refashions the narrative of the Creole first wife of Mr Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Its publication in Britain in 1966 brought the Caribbean context to the readers' attention, whereas her inter-war novels had often been read as autobiographical accounts of female inadequacy – the "Rhys woman." Her inter-war novels *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) need a different approach than autobiographical, which my thesis aims to show by the hermeneutic concept of narrative identity, the idea that our identities are formed by the various continuous narratives we create to give a unified sense to our life.

This thesis explores the concept of narrative identity in Rhys' the two novels by studying the use of temporality, memory, and inner discourse through the prism of Paul Ricœur's theory of the narrative identity to show how the novels fashion their narrator-protagonists as historically situated characters. The characters' narrative identity is defined by historical and geographical conditions. The historical aspect of the protagonists' narrative identity will aid in revealing the political and ideological critique embedded in the novels. The thesis argues that the novels display narrative subjectivities that portray conscious, embodied selves by interlacing past and present in memories, through which the narrator-protagonists form a narrative subjectivity and a *story of their life*. It analyses whether the various voices in their inner discourse function as a counter-discourse to the social system's display of power through its language and norms, and

whether the voices in the novels represents a resistance by dissolving society's language of power through a transgressive language.

Good Morning, Midnight borrows its title from Emily Dickinson's poem "Good Morning – Midnight," which also suggests the novel's melancholy mood. The dark river of melancholy permeates the pages, in the voice of the first-person narrator and in the mood, language, and setting. As in Dickinson's poem, saying 'good morning, midnight' is also to say good night to day. The title indicates the narrator-protagonist Sasha Jansen's withdrawal from life and flight into the night of drink, sleep, and oblivion. The text expresses the protagonist's resignation and abjection in its focus on loss and longing – there is always something of the past that one cannot rid oneself of. The title's use of Dickinson's poem thus posits resignation and withdrawal as something that may express a common experience in the face of society. The line Good morning, Midnight may also be read as a modern *spleen de Paris* associated with Charles Beaudelaire's *Fleurs de mal* – a state of mind when a person finds herself lost and despondent in a big city – Paris. Precisely in the midst of others, the modern self experiences the infinite loneliness of the human condition. The melancholy mood of the novel is pervasive. However, the reading in this thesis considers the political context in which the novel appeared in 1939 to a greater extent than has been usual in Rhys scholarship. Drawing on insights from Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical perspective, as well as Michel Foucault's discourse theory, I aim to show the ideological critique embedded in the protagonist's existential suffering, particularly through the novel's setting. The role of the novel's setting will thus be a focus in the thesis, which brings in psychoanalytical criticism briefly to present the broader literary context in Rhys scholarship and its influential voices.

Voyage in the Dark (1934) displays similar features as *Good Morning, Midnight*, such as the melancholy mood and the existential suffering in a cold city of London and its topography of streets, bars, and rooms. The narrative is presented in the first-person perspective where memories and reflections play an important role in portraying the young protagonist Anna Morgan. The narrating voice is often an inner voice engaged in an inner discours that reveals stills from a Caribbean past, and which often contradicts the society in her present English setting. The novel thematizes the time's social conventions concerning feminine erotic life and its regulating structures, particularly present in Anna's illegal abortion. However, there are some important differences between the two novels. Whereas in *Good Morning, Midnight* there are only two short references to a childhood in a warmer climate, *Voyage in the Dark* thematizes the West Indies of the protagonist's

childhood. The tropical climate and the vibrant, colourful plant life of the family plantation are portrayed in vivid memories. The colonial history is therefore brought directly into the story of the young Creole girl trying out life in London as a chorus girl – a context that invites a postcolonial and hermeneutic reading. The Caribbean context of the novel calls for a consideration of the postcolonial perspective, and by the aid of V. S. Naipaul's reading of Rhys and his concept of 'a break in a life,' this thesis discusses the significance of the family's colonial past as slave owners and Creole identity in *Voyage in the Dark*.

The thesis aims to demonstrate how the novels establish connections between place, memory, and identity which enable the protagonists' to give meaning to their lives. Hence, it also analyses how the novels emphasize the relationship between political conditions and identity, and how identity is conditioned by place in the narratives, where the West Indies and Paris figure as *topoi*. It especially focuses on how the protagonists' broken narrative identity and selfhood, are produced by memory, dream, and the cityscapes of London and Paris. The prominent display of inner discourse in the novels, lends itself to an interpretation from the perspective of the hermeneutic theory of the narrative identity.

Chapter 2.

2.1 Why literary hermeneutics?

How can hermeneutics inform us when reading literary works today? In this section I will attempt to delineate the theory's most central tenets and its relevance in the interpretation of literary works in general, and in Jean Rhys's novels. I will also show the context and scholarship in which *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* have been read, primarily because Rhys criticism has become more nuanced and appreciative of the political significance in the last few decades with the emergence of postcolonial critique.

Hermeneutics is the traditional philological method of interpretation. Literary hermeneutical theory concerns the interpretation of literary fiction. The theory has come more to the fore internationally in recent years, for example, with the publication of an English edition of Szondi's *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics* (1978/1995), which made literary hermeneutics more accessible to English-speaking readers. Originally associated with the interpretation and translation of ancient religious texts, it has been largely forgotten in contemporary scholarly work in literature. However, hermeneutics may still help us engage with narratives in literature in combination with insights from critical works from postcolonial, postmodern, or materialist perspectives. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, Paul Ricœur delineates a theory of narrative identity of persons and characters in *Oneself as Another* (1994 [1992]).[1]

Ricœur offers a theory of the narrative identity that is both applicable to persons and literary characters. Literature engages with life and persons in a manner that reflects real life matters, or it plays with the boundaries of real life and breaks off into the fantastic. One might say it works mimetically, engaging the reader's imagination in producing involvement and emotions. A literary character may thus be understandable in our response to his or her life and story – the literary real. A certain degree of recognition must be elicited by a literary text for a mimetic effect to occur, in the sense that there must be enough information to begin engaging with the character according to our horizon of understanding. The narratives present obstacles and problems – in coping with life, and in

[1] *The Gifford Lectures* of 1985–86 were published as *Oneself as Another* in 1992.

making sense of their experiences. In other words, the narratives create complex and divided literary characters for readers to engage with. Analysing their narrative identity may thus shed light on the elements in their histories that constitute their most profound difficulties.

Ricœur's theory is useful in the interpretation of literature in three ways: in the linguistic nature of the *I*; in *character*; and in the *narrative identity of the self*. The linguistic nature of the *I* refers to the linguistic utterance of *I* and the sameness implied by its use. It always refers to a single individual, differentiated among other subjects such as 'you' and they'. The *I* is identifiable as a separate unit, an identifying reference, though not yet a full-blown self with a psychic life (Ricœur 1994, 39). However, as speech act and sign of an agent, the *I* singles out a unique perspective: 'As the expression of a sense intended by a speaking subject, the voice is the vehicle of the act of utterance insofar as it refers to an "I," the irreplaceable center of perspective on the world' (Ricœur 1994, 55). The character, on the other hand, circles in a fuller account of the self. In the complexity of an autobiography, for instance, a life's cohesion and identity are sought in an entire life of brief actions. This complexity calls for a narrative theory that considers the temporality and situatedness of the characters (115). The narrative subjectivity of the character (or person) justifies the emphasis on the temporal dimension of the self, who has a history in addition to the *I* as identifying reference and agent of action (113). History and situatedness require that we consider the context in which the protagonists' narratives were formed. By looking at influential strands in Rhys scholarship in the following section, the choice of texts and the theory of narrative identity as a tool for understanding the Caribbean and Creole history underlying the two novels will be clarified.

At the time of its release in 1939 *Good Morning, Midnight* was reviewed as one of many journal-like revisions of the author's own life. In her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of 2000, while acknowledging the portrayal of social injustice in the novel, A. L. Kennedy writes: 'With Jansen and *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys could be said to have finally reached her ideal rendition of her imagined stranger's – and, thereby, her own – life' (viii). Kennedy is not alone in reading Rhys' novels as attempts at semi-autobiographical *romans-à-clef* or confessions of melancholy despondency. Carol Angier, in her biography of Rhys, assumed she read very little and wrote mainly about herself

(Angier 218).[2] Jean Rhys was not the first woman writer to be underestimated by critics as writing novels based autobiographical material, and the "Rhys woman" became known and cemented by central critics or biographers.[3] At this first stage of Rhys criticism, it was common to apply psychoanalytic theory to her novels to interpret and explain the despondent state of the female protagonists. Feminist readings of critical theory were prominent in the latter part of the twentieth century and many critics linked her production to the condition of women in a patriarchal world order. Marxist readings analysed the material conditions of the people as a class hierarchy where the Rhysian character is the underprivileged and supressed. After postcolonial theory emerged and came to have an impact in the 1970's and 1980's, a more geographically conscious perspective on Rhys's novels developed, notably in the 1990's and 2000's, taking into consideration Rhys' West Indian origin as a white Creole at Dominica, which is an important aspect of her novels. A third stage of Rhys scholarship came into being in the 2000's that has considered the subversive expression in Rhys's novels, which questioned imperial European cultural domination and gender division, as well as values and humanity in light of the Second World War. Simultaneously, scholarship of a feminist, Marxist and/or postcolonial orientation exist side by side with critical perspectives.[4] Rather than seeing Rhys's characters as *romans-à-clef*, we may now read Rhys's work as autonomous works of fiction displaying acute testimonies of colonialism, class, and gender and a critique of European ideas just before the outbreak of the Second World War. The narratives in *Good Morning Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* are recounted in a first-person perspective and represent their characters' narrative identity. Reading the texts in a hermeneutic perspective may reveal other stories of the colonial experience and unlock the novels' possible undermining of Europe's self-expression in the twentieth century. Ricœur's hermeneutic theory of the narrative identity of the self*,* treats the connection between identity, history, memory, and language. To my knowledge, hermeneutic theory has not been widely applied in Rhys scholarship. However, the historical depth of the narrator-protagonists is a prominent characteristic of the novels. The diachronic character of the

[2] For a further discussion of Rhys' own reactions to the charge of autobiographical content and the mixing of the author and the character, see Hite, 1989, p.21.

[3] Another example of a critical work that underestimate women writers might be the critical biography of Sylvia Plath's life and writings, *Method and Madness* by Edward Butscher, that arrogantly butchers both Plath's life and her poetry (Butscher 1976).

[4] For example, Cathleen Maslen's *Ferrocious Things: Jean Rhys and the Politics of Women's Melancholia* (2009).

narratives calls for an interpretation of the narrative subjectivity of the self as a temporal being. with Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical theory of narrative identity.

A hermeneutical interpretation of narrative identity may take as its starting point the sense of selfhood in the narrative representation of the characters Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and Anna in *Voyage in the Dark.* Paul Ricœur's *Oneself as Another* arises out of questions of selfhood, such as in what consists the identity of the self? The questions are both linguistically grounded and existentially embedded in personal *narrative*. Thus, we may first ask what is meant semantically by the *I* as a reference. Second, the view of narrative identity developed in *Oneself as Another* is centred on a reciprocity between persons. Ricœur explicates the question of selfhood in terms of continuity and history as a narrative of selfhood under the continuous changes in time. The question of a narrative identity of the self comes to the fore in the opposition between the fixed *idem* identity and the dynamic, evolving *ipse* identity in the continuity in a life history. Permanence is what characterizes any stable identifiable self (116). There is continuity in the course of time, but when flipping through a family photo album, for example, we also see our changing selves, as well as dissemblance, divergence, and difference, at various stages of our life (117). A character is never completely the same throughout life. Individual permanence means that the idem identity stays the same, even if the ipse identity undergoes changes over time with new experiences, events, traumas, or growth. Hence, a narrative identity that encircles the temporal dimension of the ipse identity is necessary for the person's identity to fully unfold itself, also in the sense that the novel offers such a character with a history. The notion of a narrative self has at least two meanings in fiction. First, the fictional character is at the centre of the story, and the ways in which this character is narrated and portrayed as taking part or having a stake in the story (Rimmon-Kenan, 1989; Ricœur, 1994, 143; 117; 157). Second, if we understand the fictional character as a subjectivity that encompasses a past and a present, that character may be said to be a narrative self. The character's interiority is portrayed as active in forming that narrative self, as the protagonists in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark.*

The Fifth Study in *Oneself as Another* treats the narrative of the character and personal identity under the pressures of time, change, and divergence (117). How we assign to ourselves a stable identity over time and with the dissemblance, divergence, and difference in our development is one of the central questions in the theory of narrative identity. In Ricœur's words:

> Looking back, the greatest lacuna in our earlier studies most obviously concerns the temporal dimension of the self as well as of action itself. Neither the definition of the person from the perspective of identifying reference nor that of the agent in the framework of the semantics of action, considered nonetheless an enrichment of the first approach, has taken into account the fact that the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends *have a history, are their own history.* (Ricœur, 113, emphasis added)

The core of Ricœur's understanding of human existence is connectedness of life, and the ethical demands of human beings. For Ricœur literature is 'a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgements of approval and condemnation through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic [i.e. preparation] to ethics' (115). The ethical dimension of novels such as *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* is represented by the encounters and dialogues between the protagonists and characters in London or Paris, each of which are instances of an ethical imagination in which readers reflect on and consider the ethical concerns, such as inequality or injustice. Ricœur's theory of narrative identity and interpretation is thus sensitive to personal, ethical, and societal concerns in literary fiction (Ricœur, 169).

As such, the concept of narrative identity includes the character's historical and political context. This analysis of *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* focuses on the character's temporality and the narrative identity of the self. Narrative identity emerges from the text's temporal aspects such as inner discourse and memory, or oscillations between the past and present in the text's discourse. The novels' recursive use of memory reaches back into the character's history in reading and interpreting the texts. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the problematic memories of past events – for example, the birth and death of her infant son – tell us that there are important factors in the narrator's story that influence her sense of selfhood. Her narrative is thus key to her subjectivity and selfhood. In *Voyage in the Dark* childhood memories play an important role in showing how the narrator is separated from her forming years in terms of identity. Furthermore, the ties to her family and home country are severed, leaving her thus deracinated in the England.

The shock of World War I and the rise of fascism in Europe had devastating consequences for the human condition and psyche. Colonialism and the growth of fascism in many European countries led many intellectuals to flee Europe at the time. Helen Carr argues that Rhys's fellow Caribs recognized that her fiction was 'exploring a troubled and divided subjectivity at a very particular historical and social nexus' (Carr, 17).

> Rhys saw colonialism at first hand, she witnessed the growth of fascism in Europe, she experienced the harshness of a sexual code which gave no quarter to impecunious women who transgressed it.

> Her view of the human condition can be terrifyingly bleak. Jean Rhys is, I shall argue, both a deeply disturbing social critic, who radically questions European society's values and assumptions, and a subtle and unsettling delineator of modern subjectivity. (Carr, 16)

Modern subjectivity as it is represented in Rhys's fiction explores the version of the modern, migrant consciousness in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight.* The portrayal of the human psyche in the novels may be read as embodying a change in the modern human psyche. *Voyage in the Dark* also shows the time's struggle after the First World War and the Depression years.

2.2 Scholarship and theory

The reception of Rhys's works has been divided into three periods in critical scholarship. David Plante's *Difficult Women: A Memoir of Three* (1983), in which he belittles Rhys's significance and repeats early misreadings was very influential. Early criticism failed to see Rhys's fiction as anything other than poorly disguised versions of her own life and female melancholy and passive victimhood in variations. Her heroines came to be known as the 'Rhys woman'. Helen Carr maintains that Rhys's work suffered the same treatment as Sylvia Plath's in being read as a version of her life: 'Similarly, Jean Rhys' fiction has been read as the retelling through her heroines of her own melancholy tale of defeat, whether this defeat is judged to be at the hands of callous men or the result of her own apathetic ineptitude' (Carr, 5). Furthermore, this 'mythic portrayal of feminine distress' has obscured the range and intelligence of their work, in Rhys's case the crucial political dimension of her work (ibid.). Rhys's rediscovery and recognition as a writer in the late 1950s, with the television reading of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1957 and the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, coincided with second-wave feminism and a trend of confessional writing. The critical theory of feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial perspectives came more strongly to the fore during the 1970s, with the postcolonial perspective being more prolific in the 1990s and into the 2000s recognizing Rhys's Caribbean themes with V. S. Naipaul's review in the *New York Review of Books* in 1972 as a notable transition. Feminist psychoanalytic criticism of Kristevan and Lacanian orientation plays a prominent role in the literature on Rhys, along with materialist/Marxist readings that see Rhys's novels as critiques of social power structures and oppression (Carr, 112). Cathleen Maslen is prominent among scholars of the materialist perspective and argues in her book *Ferocious Things: Jean Rhys and the Politics of Women's Melancholia (*2009) that Rhys was a modernist writer whose fictions 'are concerned with

the repression of feminine suffering and speech in social contexts of capitalism and patriarchy' (Maslen, 124). Many critics employ psychoanalytic theory in their readings of Rhys' works. Kristin Czarnecki (2009) and Anne B. Simpson (2005) are but two of the notable contemporary scholars of the psychoanalytical school who use Kristevan and Lacanian theory respectively in their works on Rhys and depression.

In psychoanalytical readings, Julia Kristeva's work has been applied by critics because of her emphasis on the loss of the maternal, depression, and the concept of *chora*. According to Julia Kristeva, *chora* describes the child's earliest pre-verbal stage when perceptions cannot be properly divided from the attachment to the mother. This stage in the child's development may come to expression later in life as a longing for the lost attachment.[5] Melancholy and depression are conveyed through *language*, and what Julia Kristeva saw as deep-seated semiotic signs of the feminine, where mourning the loss of the maternal is important. Kristin Czarnecki explains:

> Rhys and Kristeva highlight throughout their work the paradoxes of human behaviour, the experiences of women trying and often failing to forge and articulate an identity. Exploring the manifold interconnections between language, womanhood and psyches under pressure, Kristeva provides fresh insights into Rhys's female avant-garde. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva maintains that 'the root of women's depression lies in thwarted mourning for the loss of the maternal and the semiotic *chora*, the space of the womb where identity and threats to identity do not yet exist.' (Czarnecki 63)

Czarnecki therefore highlights identity, the loss of the maternal, and depression in Rhys' work. Psychoanalytic theory is unquestionably a fascinating tool to work with in interpretations of *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark.* Although I will only discuss these theories briefly in this text to present the literary context in the Rhys scholarship, concepts such as the semiotic *chora, the loss of the maternal*, and *melancholia* seem to be productive tools in reading Rhys's novel through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. Moreover, the unity of the self and the *death drive* also lie at a deeper level in psychoanalysis, as Freud formulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) as a tendency to return to the inorganic state and homeostasis, an imagined or unarticulated notion of the pre-unified sense of self, or self-less state (Kristeva 1989: 16). The melancholic sense of self is threatened by disintegration or non-integration. Melanie Klein expresses it thus:

> The early ego largely lacks cohesion, and a tendency towards integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits . . . the anxiety of being destroyed from within remains active. It seems to me in keeping with the lack of cohesiveness that under the pressure of this threat the ego tends to fall to pieces. (Klein, cited in Kristeva 19)

[5] *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*, Oxford University Press, published online 2017.

At the core of psychoanalytic theory lies the problem of integration, unity, and cohesion and the corresponding challenges posed by the loss of the maternal, the death drive, and depression. The mood and thematic in the Rhys novels, with the compelling sense of danger, desperation, and drive towards disintegration, and the presence of death correspond to strands of thought in psychoanalytic theory. Kristevan analyses have also helped unlock how the novels' language is itself imbued with mood and affects, representations of the literary creation's battle with the non-representable or pre-linguistic senses of psychological content (Simpson 2005). Especially in literature and religion the threats of impending doom, death, and annihilation come to life in imaginative variations of language and sounds, rhythm, and flow. In Kristeva's words:

> Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect – to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality. But that testimony is produced by literary creation in a material that is totally different from what constitutes mood. It transposes affect into rhythms, signs, forms. The 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic'[6] become the communicable imprints of an affective reality, perceptible to the reader (I like this book because it conveys sadness, anguish, or joy) and yet dominated, set aside, vanquished. (Kristeva 24)

Precisely these *rhythms, signs,* and *forms* may inform us of the sense of mood and affect Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* convey, and its display of semiotic and symbolic elements that inform us of the mood and state of mind of the character. The reference to Kristeva's own *Revolution in Poetic Language* in this citation may be of relevance as the affinity between literature and psychology in this respect, in the work's portrayal of subjectivity and inner discourse.

Although psychoanalytic theory has informed literary criticism in a profound way and provided valuable insights into the human psyche, the connections between literature and psychoanalytic theory are not straightforward. We may legitimately ask whether the focus on the human psyche in psychoanalytic theory in literary interpretations occludes the more formal aspects of the novel as aesthetic entity. A novel is a literary work with literary forms, devices, techniques, which employs an aesthetic form that expresses and emphasises the character's psychic discomfort and anxiety. To interpret Rhys's work in the light of modern psychoanalytic thought and feminist theory – a rich theoretical landscape in which we must navigate between critical thought and psychoanalysis – while

[6] Reference is made to her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984, and the difference between the semiotic and the symbolic spheres delineated there.

bearing in mind the formal aspects of the novel as an aesthetic unity, allows us to approach the novel at an analytical literary level. While my reading is informed by Ricœur's theory on narrative identity, I do not intend to disregard insights gained by psychanalytic readings in the past.

Modernism and psychoanalytic theory coincided during the first part of the twentieth century with Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce, to mention but a few, and with Sigmund Freud's publications of his works in psychoanalysis and cultural analysis. We may read Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight and Voyage in the Dark* as examples of fictions of their time and as a shift to the human consciousness and its psychic workings in modernist literature. How the novels portray the mind and construct complex and ambiguous characters in their worldliness and situations, with both a psyche and a history, resonates well with psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis on introspection, dreams, and free association. Rhys's fiction displays a narration of mind in close affinity with psychoanalytic theory, as in many other modernist writers of the time such as Woolf and Joyce. Furthermore, there is an intertextuality in *Good Morning, Midnight* that clearly refers to nineteenth-century French poets and authors, and as Judith Kegan Gardiner has shown, is a product of an author who was well read in French and British literature (Gardiner, 247). The polyphonic nature of *Good Morning, Midnight* and intertextuality in its allusions to authors of both the French and British traditions constitute a meta-fiction we associate with literary ideas surfacing in Europe in the early twentieth century.

The mask is also worth examining in terms of tropes in in both novels, where we find masks reappearing as forceful images of the condemnatory and hateful other, questioning the right to exist. At the painter Serge's flat, *Good Morning, Midnight*'s narrator Sasha sees his sculptured masks:

> 'West African masks?' 'Yes, straight from the Congo. … I made them. This one isn't bad.' He takes it down and shows it to me. The close-set eye-holes stare into mine. I know that face very well; I've seen lots like it, complete with legs and body. That's the way they look when they are saying: 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine? That's the way they look when they are saying: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vielle?' That's the way they look when they are saying: 'What's this story?' Peering at you. Who are you, anyway? Who's your father and have you got any money, and if not, why not? Are you one of us? Will you think what you're told and say what you ought to say? Are you red, white or blue – jelly, suet pudding or ersatz caviare? (76)

The accusing 'other' is projected onto the face of the mask, which represents the condemnation of her existence and exposure of her lack of social standing. The inverted commas are omitted in the latter part of the paragraph, perhaps indicating that she has

internalized their accusing voices. The reference to drowning that we noted earlier in the phrase 'out of the deep, dark river' recurs. 'I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely – dry, cold and sane' (10). Sinking into water and suffocating serve as images of depression and defeat in face of others' social demands. Its counterpart 'sane' does not bear entirely positive connotations but is rather a mark of a cold and passive state, almost that of an automaton, bereft of any human feeling. In such a state of cold passivity every encounter appears an eternal repetition of the same (56). The mask is also prominent as a symbol and motif in *Voyage in the Dark* where it gains a Caribbean significance. In the next chapter I will analyse the reading of Good Morning, Midnight through the prism of narrative identity.

Chapter 3.

Narrative identity in *Good Morning, Midnight.*

In *Good Morning, Midnight* we learn that the protagonist Sasha returns to Paris, where she lived for eight years as a young woman. She finds the familiar streets and restaurants. Her memories return 'like an old gramophone record' (14). Nietzsche's *eternal return* plays a role in at least two mentions *(*56 and 91*).* 'But 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' (56). She can never escape her past. She carries with her memories of past events and traumas, her childhood, and relationships, and when she returns to Paris for a holiday, she finds only the losses she once experienced there, and which she strongly associates with the city of Paris. The same occurrences repeat themselves in new forms. It represents a cyclical world view where everything returns in new shapes. She walks past the hotel where she used to live (72) and is quickly swept back in time to her previous stay in Paris, when she had nothing to eat for three weeks except coffee and a croissant every morning. She wore a black-and-white check coat then, which serves as a marker of time. Now that she wears an old fur coat, she is reminded how much time has passed. The sense of repetition is marked by alternately leaving and returning to the hotel room. Back at the room after meeting with Delmar she unrolls a painting of a man playing his banjo. She stares back at him and is reminded of being hungry, cold and ridiculed 'as if it were in another life than this' (91). She sees herself in the painted figure, a poor street musician, 'a

little mad'. She imagines that he is singing a tune connected with the passage of time: 'it has been', and 'it will be', as if the inversion of the sentence has no significance for the experience of time, which rather consists of endless repetition revolving around rooms and streets:

> 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 1939, 91).

The Paris of the 1930s was in many ways a uniquely international city that saw the convergence of many different people shortly before World War II. The city attracted artists, immigrants, refugees, and businesses, and was perhaps the first truly cosmopolitan city, which welcomed people of many nationalities, religions, and cultures. During the decade Paris was the pivot of European politics, with the rise of fascism in Germany, the recent Spanish Civil War fresh in minds, and the fascist dictator Mussolini's stronghold in Italy. Intellectuals had much on their minds. Paris, as a centre of all these influences, conflicts, and impending dangers, was a vibrant city of artists, intellectuals, and politicians, and the rise of working-class awareness and Marxism in the 1920s also made its mark on the city. As the *topos* of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the significance of Paris therefore calls for a closer analysis.

The protagonist Sasha Jansen travels to Paris, where formative experiences unfolded, such as finding a job, meeting a partner, getting married, and having a son, only to lose him in infancy. These episodes are all included in Parts Two to Four of the novel. If the place or *topos* defines a narrative identity, entwining the protagonist's memories of the past and present while wandering the streets and bars of Paris, the city might stand for Sasha's life as such, as well as relations with others at a time when European identity was deteriorating into the perverse extremes of fascism and nationalism. The novel dissolves identities and places everyone on the stage of pre-war political and ideological mayhem. Everyone's identity is uncertain, vulnerable, and a piece of the social machinery that structures who goes where and when in the greater social fabric on the eve of World War II and the brutal force of antisemitism. It is thus reasonable to believe that race, gender, and identity are central aspects of the novel and its portrayal of the many encounters between different nationalities in Paris. Several modernist writers were concerned with the impact of the political changes in Europe – for example, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and James Joyce, – who were concerned with portraying the conditions under which the modern human being struggled. Viewing Paris as a *topos* for depicting the modern individual in general allows for a fuller account of Sasha Jansen's narrative identity and

selfhood in the light of the epoch's social and political problems, and bourgeois society's conventions. I will return to the significance of Paris as the novel's setting later in this chapter after a closer reading of the significance of dreams and memories in the novel.

3.1 Narrative identity and memory

The self in *Good Morning, Midnight* is shifting, evolving, and open-ended in a modernist sense. Narrative identity in fiction reflects identity in real life in the sense that identity is in a constant process and open. The openness implies that the self is never completely accessible to itself – it is always a little 'ahead,' or slipping away in new directions. The open-endedness and experimentation with psychic elements in Rhys's novel may also imply that interaction with other selves is difficult, even strained. Whether in reading literature or in real life encounters, the ungraspable nature of the other person is always present as an enigma. There are always lacunas in the perception of the other person/character that are impossible to reveal – in other words, there will always be something beyond the perception of a human being which is out of reach, and which denies being laid bare and transparent. Jean Rhys's characters possess an open-ended quality. The idiosyncrasies in their speech and errant behaviour leave room for questions, new interpretations, and explorations. The narrative of the self is conveyed by and through language, which carries its own dynamics. The long passages of interior monologue, which drift onwards and in circles, as well as the narrative's short, rhythmical sentences carry a musicality and rhythm, and give an impression of a unified voice through narrative gaps in time, voice, and perspective. As A. L. Kennedy states in the introduction to the novel: 'This sense of over-arching rhythm can bind together jumps in time and viewpoint, sections of impressionistic interior monologue, social comedy and lament, marking them as the unmistakable fruits of one mind, one desire to communicate' (Kennedy 2000, vi). The inner voice of Sasha jumps back and forth in time, her memory binding her story in a coherent, though insecure self:

> Paris is looking very nice tonight … You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be! But you didn't kill me after all, did you? And they couldn't kill me either. … Just about here we waited for a couple of hours to see Anatole France's funeral pass, because, Enno said, we mustn't let such a great literary figure disappear without paying him the tribute of a last salute. […]
>
> I walk along remembering this, remembering that, trying to find a cheap place to eat – not so easy round here. The gramophone record is going strong in my head: 'Here this happened, here

> that happened. …' I used to work in a shop just off this street. I can see myself coming out of the metro station at the Rond-Point every morning […]. (15)

The character's narrative identity is constituted in representation in and through language, memory and emotions in interaction with other selves, in the sense that the identity of the protagonist of the novel is produced, or constructed, as a self. The phrase "Here this happened, here that happened" is a sign of the memory working through place and orientation in those places. The assuming of another's sexist, threatening voice in the passage marks the protagonist's voice as conscious of the antagonistic voices of the place.

As previously mentioned, *Good Morning, Midnight* displays a narrative subjectivity that portrays a conscious embodied self with a history and a social context – they are their own history (Ricœur, 113). The novel builds a narrative identity and selfhood in which past and present are interlaced in memory and by reflections on various experiences, memories, and emotional reactions that have formed the character's life and constitute her subjectivity. The diachronic nature of her inner discourse indicates that the temporal dimension and continuity of her identity are important elements in the novel's textual form in the sense that the inner discourse dominates the text throughout. Time is essential in all narration: there is a now, a before and an after. Situating the character along this temporal axis is simultaneously an example of embodiment and locality in the text, where time, memory, emotion, and place condition identity in the narrative. In the case of Rhys' novels, the setting also concerns the relationship between political conditions and identity, where the settings figures as a dissolving *topos*. The setting seems important as an active and dynamic property of the place with voices of its own. Its political climate of the place has bearings on Sasha's speech in the sense that the polyphonic nature of her inner discourse allows it to function as a counter-discourse to the social system's display of power through its language and norms. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Paris thus figures as the place where her subjectivity unfolds itself.

Memories mark this novel from the first pages. The protagonist-narrator, Sasha Jansen, is a middle-aged woman who suffers a crisis and returns to Paris for a change on the advice of a friend. Her friend Sidonie insists on lending her money for a stay in Paris with the words 'I can't bear to see you like this' (Rhys*, 1939,* 11). Sasha reluctantly accepts the offer and finds herself at a small Parisian hotel, reflecting on her life and her emotional make-up: 'I had not seen this woman for months and then she swooped down on me. … Well, here I am. When you've been made very cold and very sane you've also been made very passive. (Why worry, why worry?)' (Ibid.). In this state of cold, passive

clear mindedness, she tries to get her life in perspective and face the day. The hotel room's worn familiarity gives her ample scope for reminiscences about her earlier stays in Paris, events, people, and the return to Paris is catalyst for the onset of the memories, which are the main theme of the novel. The narrator reveals her personal and psychological history through an inner discourse that functions as a vehicle for the memories, but also for a continuous commentary to herself or to people she meets. The four parts of *Good Morning, Midnight* take the reader elliptically from the present to gradually progressing chronological planes of the narrative and back again. The narrator moves between the present and the past, memories from Paris when she lived there and had a son, and emotions from earlier events, to how she deals with encounters in Paris in the present. The text's narrative revolves around memory to such a degree as to place all the different narrative planes simultaneously in the present in Sasha's inner discourse.

The shifts from the past tense to the present tense is a central feature of the text. It is worth examining some examples from the novel to show how the narrator is marked by time and memory. The novel's narrative planes figure as background material in the reading of Sasha's story from the beginning as she reflects on her situation in the hotel room in Paris, with its recognizable threadbare atmosphere, and the events that took place in similar rooms in the city a long time ago. Sasha's history is thus brought into play in the present through the setting in Paris – the hotel room in the narrow street:

> '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. The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse.
>
> I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life. (9)

The hotel room confines Sasha to the inwardness of private recollection brought on by the repetition or review of her former self in Paris long ago – sleepless, the clock ticking on the bed stand, the luminal waiting. Her mind drifts back to a Paris of many years ago, blurry memories of a distant past, a past that has nevertheless marked and defined her life, and threatens to tumble her sense of self into self-forgetful abandon and careless self-destruction.

> Was it in 1923 or in 1924 that we lived around the corner, in the Rue Victor Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? 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? (11)

The narrative thus meanders between Sasha's present and various events in her past, producing a sense of permanence of the self and an impression of an active mind searching her past while struggling to settle in the present situation. We might ask how the interplay of the various narrative planes in *Good Morning, Midnight* is brought together and becomes a singular self – the character Sasha Jansen – wherein each reflection, action, or emotion originates. It is this question that leads me to a hermeneutical interpretation of the narrative identity of the *I* of the novel, which will be outlined in the following pages.

The narrator-protagonist reflects on the feelings, thoughts, memories, and observations of her own persona at cafés, bars, and in the streets of Paris. Her vivid interiority is particularly awakened by the hotel room. She is self-consciously aware of her displacement in the city, brought on by the gap in time since her youth and the vacuous years in which she has increasingly come to a standstill. Her sudden shifts in mood and emotion absorb her, a feature of the narrative which testifies to a reflexivity at play in her self-scrutiny, her past, and her present situation. Shame is only one part of this reflexivity when she feels people's look on her person. Encounters with others are often marked by distance, defeat, humiliation, and regret, such as in the very first pages of the novel when she meets a couple at a bar, starts crying during their conversation, and flees to the restroom. The paragraph quickly and effectually introduces the reader to melancholy, one of the central themes of the novel:

> I stayed there, staring at myself in the glass. What do I want to cry about? … On the contrary, 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. 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. Yes, there always remains something. (10)

Something remains of the wound of the depression, a lingering vulnerability perhaps with which she is still battling. The waiter recognizes her state as 'emotional' – in other words, drunk. The shame of facing the other, the waiter, is present in her own recognition of his knowing look: 'When I got upstairs the American and his friend had gone. "It was something I remembered", I told the waiter, and he looked at me blankly, not even bothering to laugh at me. His face was unsurprised, blank' (10). The looks of others and facing their responses (or their lack) have the curious effect of placing the character in relief, of disclosing something deep and shameful, loss and failure, a wound to the narrator's sense of selfhood. However, the theme cannot be summed up in a word such as depression. Many layers of reflection and emotional response come to the fore as the text unfolds, in which a melancholy mood is present in language and style. The encounter with

others is central. Respect and self-respect evolve out of personal interactions. However, when self-respect tumbles, her sense of self is very vulnerable, even threatening to dissolve, in situations involving others.

The *I* of the narrative is engaged in a constant inner monologue. The style of the narrator's discourse characteristically reflects her perceptions and thoughts. There are places in the narrative where the voice shifts slightly from *I* in free indirect discourse to a *she* in a dialogue between the *I* and her inner interlocutor, for instance, towards the end of the novel: '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"' (154). However, the shift in voice does not alter the identity of the voice or perspective. It only bears witness to the openness of her identity, in the sense that to the question 'who are you?' we might answer by indicating how the self is of a complex character that is always in a process of making her identity comprehensible and meaningful. The narrator encounters flaws, inconsistencies, and contradictions continuously in the flow of thoughts and reflections.

A narrative identity may be read from the various forms in which the character addresses the important events in her life story, and in the character Sasha's case it is often presented in an inner discourse that rekindles memories. The narrative of *Good Morning, Midnight* thematizes the uncertainty of identities to a great extent, and dreams play an important role, in my reading. For example, the quite enigmatic dream recounted early in novel – a dream to which I will return towards the end of this chapter – describes how, after settling into her Paris hotel room and inspecting the black splashes of dirt on the walls, the narrator has a troubling dream. 'I take some more luminal, put the light out and sleep at once' and in her luminal- and Pernod-infused sleep, she enters an absurd nightmare (12). This is one of the first nights in Paris. She is trapped in the passage of a tube station in London trying to get out but is directed by a man with a steel hand to the *exhibition*. The exhibition is apparently the Paris World Exhibition of 1937, the *International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life.* The narrator's contradictory feelings in the dream are reflected towards the end of the novel, where she visits the exhibition in the company of the character René, a gigolo, when she finds the exhibition 'Cold, empty, beautiful – this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted' (137). However, in the dream she is trying to get away from the crowd pushing her onwards to the exhibition, ashamed with head bent, 'thinking: "Just like me – always wanting to be

different from other people"' (12). In the dream, a man dressed in a nightshirt says he is her father. There is blood streaming from 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. I wake up and a man in the street outside is singing the waltz from *Les Saltimbanques.*'C'est l'amour qui flotte dans l'air à ronde,' he sings (13).

The words at play here, *father, blood, murder,* and *love,* give us a sense of the powerful themes in the narrator's imagination. The next paragraph tells us nothing of her reflections on the dream, but continues to comment on the fine day outside and the bad light in the room, which we know from beforehand is rather worn, shabby, and dirty. The air and light in the room are poor, which may make it difficult to *see* and *breathe*, and ultimately, to exist. Next, she goes on to reflect on the landing outside her room. Here the words play on *dirt* and *wreckage,* and *clutter*. There is disorder just outside the hotel room where she will stay for a fortnight in Paris. The man on the landing who is always watching her is ghostlike, thin as a skeleton, has a bird-like face, knowing, *damned* (Rhys, 13). In these extremely dense paragraphs one gets a glimpse of the text's forceful motifs. By these two figures' juxtaposition – the father, whom she does not recognize as her father, and the knowing, ghostlike man on the landing – in passages that follow each other almost directly on the same page, the narrator's imagination, memory, and present situation are brought effectively together to form a deeply troubled mind struggling to face the other's knowing, male look:

> 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 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. […] I don't like this damned man. (13)

There are at least two possible interpretations of the father and the man on the landing. The father figure seems strange, absurd, both authoritarian and prostrate, and dressed, like the man on the landing, in spare and nocturnal clothing indicating a domestic setting. The troubling image of the man being wounded and bleeding from the forehead, which somehow has a bearing on and claim to her, may be interpreted as a sign of the narrator's feelings of insecurity and guilt concerning male figures and male dominance, possibly connected with her memory of her father. Death and love are motifs that are clearly present in the dream about the father figure in the *underground* tube station. The nameless

man on the landing, however, bears qualities traditionally assigned to the devil and dark forces: the knowing dark look, skeletal cringing body, and ghostlike appearance. Death, damnation, and the numerous references to death by suicide in the novel are clearly strong motifs in the narrative. The dreamlike unconscious images, fears, and drives on these two pages clearly justifies a psychoanalytic interpretation. However, in the passage, the underground as a symbol of the subconscious seems slightly too accessible, and the reader is justified in being a little skeptical that irony may be at work here. If we read the passage as irony, would the result be a mocking of psychoanalysis and the subconscious as the carrier of significant information about the psyche of its bearer? Furthermore, the passage would read as an opposition to the prevailing zeitgeist or the direction in which people were going at that time in the pre-war European continent. In this passage the narrator is ashamed, because she is the one 'always wanting to be different from other people' (12). The dream now reads as if Sasha is the individual thinker who is unwilling to be moved by the masses and march in the direction they are led – to the Exhibition. The murder of which she screams on waking could be a forewarning of the brutal consequences of the fascist movement and the population's unwillingness or inability to awaken to its threats. 'This way to the Exhibition' (ibid.) is the imperative. The *Exposition International des Arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne* in Paris in 1937 displayed grand works of art symbolizing the various nations, and the Star of Peace was symbolic of the intention of international harmony at the exhibition (Camarasana 51). Here René, the gigolo, refers to the monument as 'mésquin', wretched, mean, or pitiful. 'How mésquin! It is vulgar, the Star of Peace!' (137).[7]

The question of the protagonist's identity is raised again shortly after the father figure and the man on the landing appear in the text. A paragraph follows directly after the encounter with the man on the landing concerning the uncertainty of her identity. When she goes downstairs, the hotel manager asks for her passport. The manager comports himself just like a man 'in the pawnshop in Rue de Rennes', the narrator thus, in very few words, reminding herself of her poverty and low social standing (13). Like the man in the pawnshop, taking her items away like a thief, '[a] fish, lording it in his own particular tank, staring at the world outside with a glassy and unbelieving eye…,' the manager similarly makes claims to her identity like a thief. Sasha is bewildered: 'What's wrong

[7] Are we justified in reading into the character René, who served in the French Foreign Legion, a representation of a French colonialist viewpoint that treated the African colonies as possessions, as Linda Camarasana does in 'Exhibitions and Repetitions: Jean Rhys's Good Morning, Midnight and the World of Paris, 1937' (2009:51)? One is tempted to understand the René character as representing Franco's Spain, but the thought of him representing the French army in Africa is certainly compelling.

with the fiche? I've filled it up all right, haven't I? Name So-and-so, nationality So-and-so. … Nationality – that's what has puzzled him. I ought to have put nationality by marriage' (13). The nationality of Rhys's heroines is often a theme in her fiction, and this is the case in *Good Morning, Midnight*. However, it is not only the protagonist-narrator's nationality that is of concern. Other characters in the narrative are also placed by their nationality: Russian, Dutch, French, Jewish, Chinese, and notably the English, as well as a Caribbean, the Martinican woman, a character who experiences racism in England (80). Serge, the Russian painter, tells the story of the woman who had been isolated in the apartment she shared with an Englishman to whom she was not married – the double offence of being an unmarried Martinican woman living with a man – not daring to go outside except in the evening for fear of meeting with discrimination. Until she breaks down:

> There was that sound in her sobbing which is quite unmistakable – like certain music. … I put my arm around her, but it wasn't like putting my arm around a woman. She was like something that has turned into stone. She asked again for whisky. […] I said to her: 'Don't let yourself get hysterical, because if you do that it's the end.' But it was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because I had all the time this feeling that I was talking to someone that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive (80).

The narrator then compares the Martinican woman with herself, having cried and asked for a drink herself. '"No, no," he says. "Not like you at all"' (79). Identity is negotiable in terms of nationality, gender, marriage, the colonized, and social class. The narrator appears rich and elegant, though lonely and sad, to the Russians she meets and with whom she engages. She is anxious of the inevitable transformation in attitude when the men realize that she has no money, and that she will not 'part'. That is when they become 'unkind' (150) or 'anxious and surly' (83).

An unease concerning nationality as a common characteristic of the time-place setting in cosmopolitan Paris in the 1930s between the World Wars is ironically portrayed in a passage about a hat. She decides to buy a new hat, as her hat gives her away as *English*. The younger Russian, 'the melancholy one' 'is wearing a black felt hat. Just like all the fathers attending the prams. Very correct, very respectable' (54). As an identity marker, the new hat is part of the narrator's transformation in Paris in an attempt to blend in or be accepted as a 'convenable', respectable woman. Time and ageing are also frequent tropes in *Good Morning, Midnight*, as well as in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (15) – for example, in this passage that takes place outside the hat shop, where Sasha witnesses an elderly woman trying on hats in the shop inside. 'As I watch she puts on a hat, makes a face at herself in the glass, and takes it off very quickly. She tries another – then another. Her expression is terrible – hungry, despairing, hopeful, quite crazy' (57). Sasha is

reminded of the finitude of life and her encroaching old age. 'Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that?' (58). On entering another hat shop the girl in the shop repeatedly says: 'The hats now are very difficult, very difficult. All my clients say that the hats now are very difficult to wear' (58). The purchase itself takes nearly two hours and is only concluded when Sasha decides to trust the girl to choose a hat for her. She feels comforted that today's hats are difficult for everyone else too, not only for her. When she goes out to dinner wearing the hat, nobody stares at her. The metaphor may be an easy one, but the tragicomic has its place in *Good Morning, Midnight* along with the more serious themes.

By going back and forth in time in her mind, the narrator reveals a vividly present personal and psychological history. *Good Morning, Midnight* is divided into four parts, taking us from the present to successively progressing chronological planes of the narrative and back again. Memory figures prominently in the narrative, with the effect of placing all the different narrative planes in the present at the same time. The narrator slips in and out of the present, the past, memories, and emotions of earlier events. The text shifts seamlessly from the past to the present tense in passages like this, constituting a turn to an earlier plane in the narrative:

> The shop had a branch in London, and the boss of the London branch had bought up the whole show. Every three months or so he came over to the French place and it was rumoured that he was due to arrive on a certain day. What's he like? Oh, he's the real English type. Very nice, very chic, the real English type, le businessman … I thought: 'Oh, my God, I know what these people mean when they say the real English type.' He *arrives*. Bowler hat, majestic trousers, oh-my-God expression, ha-ha eyes – I know him at once (17 emphasis added).

The memory of her time in Paris as a young woman working in a dressmaking shop continues in the present tense, recounting the humiliating experience with the English manager of the two branches. The authority 'Mr. Blank' exercises over her utterly defeats her, and she breaks down and cries for her poverty, her class and gender, her inability to respond, and her apparent exposure as an 'inefficient member of society' (25). Thus, time, place, and narrative are intimately connected to the character's narrative identity and selfhood, produced by memory, dreams, experiences of gender, and power relations.

I will continue to explore the narrative identity of the character Sasha in the next section by more directly applying Ricœur's hermeneutics of the narrative identity of the self. The memories of her dead infant son especially interfere with her thinking, as we will see, as it is introduced more clearly in the narrative later in Part One and in Part Three, and I will attempt to show how the death represents a break in her narrative identity.

3.2 The break in narrative identity in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

Sasha Jansen's many-faceted character is shown above all in the prevalent use of inner discourse and the emotional responses given in free indirect discourse throughout the novel. Emotion in *Good Morning, Midnight* is tightly linked with Paris and its topographical points that bear a signifier for emotional response. Its modernist characteristics are is perhaps open-endedness of the self, the use of sarcasm and irony, and the play with death tropes and especially drowning. Drowning is already thematic in the opening lines of *Good Morning, Midnight* in the words 'deep dark river,' 'fished out', and the despondency connected with that feeling. Furthermore, emotion is prevalent throughout the text in the minute details of its dialogues and encounters. The inner discourse perhaps functions as a negotiation of the narrator's contradictory impulses or her revulsion to the society she meets – and with which she fails to comply. The landscape (or cityscape) of Paris is thus the location for her self-scrutiny and self-esteem, not without irony (74). It seems to be a critical and suspicious reflection of the self, where she is always evaluating her own worth (35–36; 43; 46).

At the time when *Good Morning, Midnight* was published, Paris was a seething meeting place of individuals of various European origins and with conflicting political ideologies. With its introduction of various characters who involve themselves in the Paris scene, the setting is thus quite realistic. However, it is striking that the interaction between emotion and place is pointedly placed in the foreground at the expense of a thematization of the contemporary political atmosphere in France. The emotional significance of the hotel rooms and the constant inner discourse in which the streets speak back to the narrator bear witness to a sensitivity to place and surroundings to the effect of producing a separate 'voice of Paris' in the novel. The voice of Paris speaking back to Sasha and the emotional impact on her are notable characteristics of *Good Morning, Midnight*, and it may indicate that the setting is central to the novel – the setting as a character in itself with its reverberating political and ideological undercurrents. It is in the streets of Paris that the narrator finds herself, confronts herself, and realizes how she is denigrated and reduced as an individual. The street is a mighty opponent, with which she struggles throughout the novel: 'Nobody else knows me but the street knows me' (25). It is in the street that Sasha feels her vulnerability most strongly. Locality is central to Sasha's emotional state, and the novel may illuminate the relationship between emotional life and space, as Tone Selboe argues in her article 'Emotional Mapping in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*'. The

personified city figures as a '*dramatis persona*' by way of its voice speaking back at her in the form of streets, hotel rooms, and bars (Selboe, 331). The city is thus made into a powerful interlocutor with which the narrator fights her inner battles. She seems fragile even in the privacy, or confinement, of her hotel room, which reminds her of previous hotel rooms, always threadbare and slightly less comfortable than she expected. The walls speak back to her. To go from one hotel room to another is representative of her striving for dignity and respect. She isolates herself in the hotel room to be sheltered from society's judgement but finds her shelter suffocating and coffin-like. The result is that she discovers that changing places is an illusion that obscures her fundamental condition of loneliness (Selboe 329).

The protagonist's movement from place to place creates the narrative's oscillation between past and present, and the memories that are reproduced are embedded in emotions closely linked with places of various qualities. Embodiment in a spatial structure and locality is thus a catalyst for the narrator's painful and destructive memories. Emotions are profoundly linked with life's temporal dimension, and the memory of our history is interwoven with places in which our embodied life unfolds itself. As Martha Nussbaum points out, all emotions bear the traces of a history that is both personal and commonly human, and emotions are expressed in language, as well as other forms of symbolic representation (Nussbaum 177; 232, cited in Selboe 327; 339). The narrated time in *Good Morning, Midnight* creates a sense of temporal unity of the past and present through its use of the spatial structure of the city's environment, which helps visualize the past. This feature of the text has the effect of making the difference between past and present private and public indistinct (Selboe 327). At a textual level narrated time is distinguishable, but place in *Good Morning, Midnight* is metonymical for memory in the sense that specific places stand for memories and emotions connected with those places, and the Paris setting allows for the invasion of the past into the present in the narrator Sasha's inner discourse. Memories connect the interrelated spaces of the past and make themselves vividly present in her present impressions. In other words, emotions are engendered by her embodiment in space and significant places – an emotional topography.

The novel's structure mirrors the protagonist's emotional topography in the sense that each part elliptically takes the reader back in time, and then back to the present in Part Four, underlying the narrator's meanderings in her painful memories. This aspect of the text is particularly strong in Part Three, in which Sasha's story of previous marriage, pregnancy, and how her husband left her is recounted in an analepsis. When returning to the present in Part Four, her narrative is more comprehensive and meaningful. The city

appears colder and barer, the night sky more lucid and crisper, such as in the last image of Paris and *The Star of Peace*. Through being reminded of previous events by streets and places in her narrative, the narrator's present is invaded by the past. We might say that the chronological sequence of events is interwoven in the narrative in the same manner that it imposes on the narrator's experience of the present (the *syuzhet*, to borrow a structuralist term). In other words, the novel's formal characteristics, such as its narrative structure, voice and perspective, style and mood, emphasize its theme – the character Sasha's broken narrative, caused by grief, dislocation, and alienation in a cold pre-war Europe. From the abundance of citable paragraphs in *Good Morning, Midnight*, an example of the coincidence of theme and formal qualities could be the section in Part One which recounts the onset of childbirth, and the situation that incites this memory – the visit to the hairdresser Félix to go through with her transformation, having grieved for her infant son for five years:

> It's all right. Tomorrow I'll be pretty again, tomorrow I'll be happy again, tomorrow, tomorrow. …
>
> •
>
> I get up in the room. I bolt the door. I lie down on the bed with my face in the pillow. Now I can rest before I go out again. What do I care about anything when I can lie on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket? Back, back, back. …
>
> … I had just come up the stairs and I had to go down them again.
>
> 'No, no, your room's not ready. You must come back, come back. Come back between five and six.' 'What time is it now?' 'It's half past ten.'
>
> 'Courage, courage, ma petite dame,' she says. 'Everything will go well.' (49)

The visit to the hairdresser and transformation is here a synecdoche of the overcoming of the grief for her son – one in which she barely believes. Furthermore, the transition to a significant memory is clearly shown in this passage, in which she lies down on the bed and pulls the past over herself like a blanket, with the vivid memory of the day of the childbirth present in her mind. Her personal narrative, the story of her *self*, is broken precisely by this event, which constantly recurs in her present. In the formal qualities of the passage, with the textual jumps in time, the thematic of her broken narrative is clearly represented in the city that evokes these memories most clearly.

Paris is significant in more than one way in the text. The city as a character with a voice of its own is especially present in Sasha's wanderings at night, when she invariably meets with difficulties and resistance in bars, shops, and hotel receptions. Encounters with the characters in Paris are very sparsely conveyed, with a bare framework of streets and hotel rooms to uphold the setting. The minimal portrayal of events creates the impression

of highlighting the inner workings of the narrator's mental reality. A certain defamiliarization is at play when her inner discourse goes on alongside these encounters as commentaries being played in her mind, disrupting her impressions of her surroundings. While looking askance at her surroundings and her fellow Parisians, she continues her ongoing commentary on her life and its inadequacies and sees through appearances. The city's voice is condemnatory, spiteful, and denigratory, challenging her worth, place, and abilities. Memory is related to the topography, which makes the plot circle around places rather than events. The setting is thus pivotal to the novel's structure and its portrayal of the protagonist's emotions.

Defamiliarization and mirrors also help place things in perspective. Mirrors and looking into mirrors show an expanded view of that which is the focus, a view that is indirect but at the same time more accurate, revealing some truth about the world that is otherwise hidden. From her hotel room, surrounded by hostility and the deathlike resident next door, the narrator learns the truth about herself and society – a society from which she feels excluded, and which she no longer hopes can be improved.[8] The Paris setting gives a sense of displacement to the character's narrative from the outset, as a city of undecidables with no fixed place of origin is a characteristic of the Rhys oeuvre. Paris, where migrants of various nationalities met, was undergoing change, and its political climate was tense. The novel thus renders various characters of foreign origin indeterminable in like measure. The narrator's image in the mirror tells her that age is slowly making its mark, and that the attractiveness on which she has relied for financial support and comfort by men is fading and bound to fail. Judith Kegan Gardiner, writing on intertextuality in Rhys's works and the many references to French and English authors in *Good Morning, Midnight*, points out that Sasha's friend Sidonie, who lends her the money to travel to Paris, is a play on the first name of Colette, the author of *Chéri* and *La fin de Chéri* (Kegan Gardiner 244). In *Chéri* an older woman keeps a young lover until he is pressed to marry a younger woman. In that story the roles are reversed, and the woman holds the financial means and position. Mirrors may thus function as symbols in more than one sense, as reversing the truth, much like a mirror image is a reversed representation of an object.

[8] In the mirror she sees a tormented face, similar to the woman in *La Femme Rompue*, Simone de Beauvoir's novel from 1968 (English translation: *The Woman Destroyed* [1969]2006*)*. The existential conditions under which the discarded woman lives are terrifying and hopeless. The struggle for authenticity in life in *Good Morning, Midnight* can be viewed as a precursor to the existential philosophical authors of the 1940s.

As previously mentioned, Paris talks back to the narrator, sometimes in the form of rooms and streets, at other times in the shape of restaurant guests. The following lines from the novel may illustrate the status of the street in the narrative:

> Sometimes somebody comes in for stamps, or a man for a drink. Then you can see outside into the street. And the street walks in. It is one of those streets – dark, powerful, magical. … (89)

In this extract from the novel there are grounds for concluding that the street, along with hotel rooms, is to be regarded as the novel's antagonist because of the power they exert on her sense of self-esteem, agency, and worth. They are personified forces of the painful loss of her son and the longing for moments of happiness. For example, the rooms figure as 'literary Stilleben emanating pain and longings' (Selboe 336). She fends off society by wearing a mask but is harassed by the room's voices in her own (rented) bedroom. The voices represent the other, society or the outer reality in which she needs to muster sufficient 'self-control necessary to keep up appearances' and to be able to face the world (Rhys, 1971, 21). The internalized conflict between the self and other is most notably personified in the form of the hotel room, which is among the entities that receive a voice in the vital interiority of the narrator's narrative. As mentioned, a question arises as to whether the city of Paris, phenomenologically constituted in the text as Sasha's lifeworld, can be read as an antagonist in the novel. Markedly hostile and intimidating, the city's many voices threaten her existence on several planes: in the exposure in the open streets, the scrutiny and condemnation of the other's look in hotels, shops, and cafés, and the loneliness of the hotel room from whence a forceful adversary emanates, and is internalized and reproduced in her inner discourse. In the light of the ideological tension implicit in the Paris scene, reading the Paris setting as an antagonist most effectively transfers the function of inner antagonist to the outer sphere. As I will clarify towards the end of the chapter, the city's role should be seen in the light of the World Exhibition, which figures in the text where its textual function in the section on the final pages of *Good Morning, Midnight* and The Star of Peace points to a narrative of a nation.

The special use of inner discourse in *Good Morning, Midnight* exemplifies the division of the self from others and produces an acute sense of loneliness. What I have termed an 'inner discourse' may also be interpreted as a split between the self and other, which is created in the first-person narration as an interior monologue that can be said to consist of two voices, one contradicting the other (Selboe 338). I would add that these are subversive voices, sometimes personifying the narrator's talking back to society, as in the early pages, where the shop manager Salvatini treats her with arrogant condescension

(19). Sometimes these voices mimic social conventions presented in conflicting voices. There are several poignant examples of a form of inner discourse that indicate the workings of a stream of consciousness in the text in which the protagonist's internalized norms, fears, and visions of the abject interrogate her and her relationship with her surroundings. This stream of consciousness aspect is especially present when the narrator's inner discourse takes place in real time alongside the dialogue in which she is engaged. For instance, in the adjacent pages concerning the encounter with the boss of the London branch, Mr Blank, Sasha's inner responses run in parallel with the interview, which the passage cited at length below illustrates:

> […]'I was told the receptionist spoke French and German fluently,' he says to Salvatini. 'Sometimes,' I say idiotically. Of course, sometimes, when I'm a bit drunk and am talking to somebody I like and know, I speak French very fluently indeed. At other times I just speak it. And as to that, my dear sir, you've got everything all wrong. I'm here because I have a friend who knows Mr Salvatini's mistress, and Mr Salvatini's mistress spoke to Mr Salvatini about me, and the day that he saw me I wasn't looking too bad and he was in a good mood. Nothing to do with fluent French and German, dear sir, nothing at all. I'm here because I'm here because I'm here. […] For God's sake, I think, pull yourself together. (18)

In this passage the narrator responds both to her own inadequacy in answering the question about her competence in French and the ignorance of Mr Blank, who has 'got everything all wrong', and the hypocrisy of Mr Salvatini, who has been persuaded by his mistress to give her the job. The example shows how her voice functions both at the level of the actual conversation and a simultaneous conscious inner debate with herself.

The interconnectedness of place and emotion constitutes the space, the *Umwelt* or world, in which the narrator-protagonist's subjectivity unfolds itself, and which is thus part of her narrative process and identity. Spatiality and the city landscape are thus of special significance, permeating the text from the first page to the last. The meaning of place in the text is not only a highly subjectivized space that the protagonist constitutes for herself. Place also signifies a marked division between the inner and outer world, the private and the public, a division represented by the hotel room versus the outer world, and the vulnerable face versus various forms of masks – in other words, appearances in a wider sense. The mask can perhaps function as the narrator Sasha's internalized cultural norms, which demand a disregard of emotion and consideration. The mask motif casts the contrast between the individual being and the city's social localities into bold relief. The inner/outer divide functions on a concrete plane in which the hotel room is where the narrator hides from the wolves outside (33). It also comprises the greater dimension of the

individual as opposed to society, norms, conventions, and traditional discourses. As such (and contrary to Selboe's claim), the *specific* locality is not important in my reading. As I will attempt to show, the *Star of Peace* epitomizes a symbolic vantage point from which one might survey the entire social fabric and ideological machinery of European culture at the time. However, the hotel room functions like any private space in which one can escape from the other's look, and whose locality does not in itself matter:

> A beautiful room with a bath? A room with a bath? A nice room? A room? … But never 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 a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is. Why should I worry about changing my room? (33)

The repetition and reduction of the words in this passage undermine and challenge the significance of the particular hotel room, reducing it to a bare room in which the individual's private existence can unfold itself apart from the demands of the social world. In this twofold manner place is on the one hand essential as that which instigates the protagonist's memory process, and on the other unimportant as a geographical or topographical marker in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Rather, the hotel room is a universal private space:

> Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe. … Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name. You press the button and the door opens. 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.
>
> The room says: 'Quite like old times. Yes? … No? … Yes.' (120)

Descriptions of interiors and stairs, doors, and windows play a central role in *Good Morning, Midnight*. However, among the countless passages concerning hotel rooms the two quotations above point to the minimal significance of the particular room or its locality, and instead create the two opposite spheres of private and public, as well as emphasizing the division between them. The result is that Paris as the novel's main setting is sharply set against the individual needs of the protagonist, to the extent that it appears as a strong adversary, a character in its own right with its moods, methods, conventions, and regulating power.

The Paris of the World Exhibition in 1937 is described as a city between the old and the new eras, a growing cosmopolitan city, harbouring migrants of many different origins, classes and occupations, set against Parisian bourgeois customs. It should be remembered that the novel's Paris is the city perceived from the narrator Sasha's

perspective. Her struggle to cope with the urban environment is the novel's main dramatic conflict; it is connected with the emotional impact of the city's interiors and exteriors, and the interaction of the cityscape and the narrative of the text is a characteristic of the novel's formal qualities as text (Selboe 331). The most striking features of the text's Paris setting are perhaps the many nationalities that meet in the urban environment, and that their identities, including the narrator's, are vague and uncertain. In her inner commentaries the alienation and displacement in the environment generally associated with Rhys's fiction are often voiced, for example, in this passage from a visit to the Luxembourg Gardens:

> I turn my chair around with its back to the pond where the children sail their boats. Now I can see nothing but the slender, straight trunks of trees. They look young, these trees. This is a gentle place – a gentle, formal place. It isn't sad here, it isn't even melancholy.
>
> The attendant comes up and sells me a ticket. Now everything is legal. If anyone says: 'Qu'est-ce quelle fout ici?' I can show the ticket. This is legal. … I feel safe, clutching it. I can stay here as long as I like, putting two and two together, quite calmly, with nobody to interfere with me. (46)

The phrase '*Qu'est-ce quelle fout ici, la vielle?*' is repeated and elaborated on in the narrator's self-reproaching existential inner discourse in the text from its beginning (35, 43, 150). The above quotation seems to convey a need for justification, to have a right to be where she is, wherever she is in the city. There is also a sense of hope in the young trees, and a contrast at play between young and old. This may indicate new growth, a hope in approaching new times. She is also very conscious of her age, or ageing, as if the justification for her existence is fading as her age advances. In the words 'putting two and two together' we may read an insight into or acknowledgement of reaching the truth about her deprived existence of poverty and lack of social acceptance. Her inner voice is her most ardent critic, as the following lines convey:

> Last night and today – it makes a pretty good sentence. … Qu'est-ce quelle fout ici, la vielle? 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? … I quite agree too, quite. I have seen that in people's eyes all my life. I am asking myself all the time what the devil I am doing here. All the time. (46)

The setting is thus coloured by her perceptions of and responses to it, as well as an inner commentary that questions every event and encounter. That she has seen the disapproval of her existence in people's eyes all her life testifies to a psychological and existential lack of meaningfulness – a nihilism so to speak. The text describes a protagonist who is present but secluded from the outer world and alienated from the space around her.[9] It could be

[9] Several theories of the 1940s, such as those of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, express the existential difficulties in facing the other's look and its associated lack of meaning and nihilism, as with

described as a setting in which the protagonist is inhibited from embodying and situating herself in her surroundings. The sparse descriptions of the surroundings convey a skeleton of a setting and one might add produces an impression of a dreamlike or nightmarish image of the city in which the protagonist is wandering in an almost black-and-white vision with very few details. This tendency to avoid painful memories connected with places and to have a set programme testifies to an important interaction between city and narration in the novel. It also constitutes its dramatic conflict by fashioning the protagonist's movement in the cityscape on a limited emotional map in which the two are interwoven in an emotional topography (Selboe, 331). She perceives Paris through the past and projects her memories onto the setting and is thus beyond interacting with her environment.

Places have an atmosphere, which the narrator explicitly states in the text as a reflection:

> My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, 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, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on (40).

Sasha's subjectivized perceptions of places in the city is thus a sensitivity that is fully acknowledged and part of her interiority. Her inner voice often takes on conflicting voices and thus creates a commentary, a sarcastic speaking back that imitates male attitudes: 'Paris is looking very nice tonight. … You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be!' (15). By invoking the prejudices of society, and often male misogynist attitudes, Sasha is introducing a polyphony of voices in the stream of consciousness that is at play in the text. As I have argued earlier, the use of a special form of stream of consciousness technique in *Good Morning, Midnight* is a subversive critique that negates the European cultural machinery's social conventions and traditions. There is in part a confirmation of this in Selboe's article: 'Connecting city and woman, the words display her as a self-conscious ventriloquist for male attitudes, thereby unmasking them by showing them as clichés' (Selboe, 332). Furthermore, according to Helen Carr (108) Rhys's narrative technique represents a Foucauldian notion of society's power, and the nature of the stream of consciousness at work can be interpreted as a challenge to the

Albert Camus; as well as the essentially bodily presence and life on which humans depend, inhabiting the physical surroundings, which is predominantly found in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

dominant discourses in the Foucauldian sense; a reading which will be treated in the section on the birth in Part One of *Good Morning, Midnight*.

Selboe has noted that there are very few historical markers in the novel's portrayal of the milieu (Selbo, 332). While it is true that the setting is sparsely described, and that historical events of the day are absent, there are elements in the text that place the novel's setting within a France that was divided and unstable, and torn by ideological pressures by the rising powers surrounding it. What is most striking in the setting is the presence of people of various nationalities who stay in Paris for a while and travel onwards, like René, the gigolo *sans papiérs*, who has escaped from the Foreign Legion. In 1937 Paris is a city of transit for many people, made explicit in the novel by the presence of René and the Russians she befriends. The great International Exhibition figures at the beginning and end of the novel, an exhibition which displayed symbols of the rising powers of the Soviet Union in the East and neighbouring Germany to the South. As Helen Carr writes, 'In the year Rhys spent writing this novel, the threat of war steadily grew. To read Rhys' continental fiction as divorced from this political context is as mistaken as it would be to ignore the impact of colonialism in her Caribbean stories' (Carr 55). Mary Lou Emery has proposed that the references to the International Exhibition reflect the political situation of the time and situate the novel,

> […] within a Paris of intense social and political conflict, symbolized best perhaps by the two major buildings of the exposition which confronted one another directly on each side of the Champs de Mars – that of the Soviet Union, topped by giant figures of a marching man and woman with hammer and sickle held high, and that of Nazi Germany, crowned by an immense gold eagle grasping a swastika in its claws (Emery, 144; cited in Carr, 55).

The presence of these powerful symbols elevates the setting. We may therefore justify an interpretation of the Paris setting as a powerful adversary (in more than one way) and an existential threat. Politics plays an important role in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The suspicion, the looks, the spiteful comments in the narrator's perceptions of her surroundings may all be read as signs of the division and conflict of the France of her time. In England, too, fascism was receiving unexpected support when she was leaving for Paris, which the portrayal of her own family and in her uncle's words illustrates in its cruel harshness and indifference to her fate: '"Why didn't you drown yourself,' the old devil said, 'in the Seine?"'(36). René's cruelty may likewise reflect the hard society and the need to survive. His character could serve as an example of the ambivalence in human nature and the presence of cruelty. He is streetwise, having escaped the Foreign Legion

through Morocco and Spain, and travelled to Paris, depending on wealthy women to support him; he is both caring and ruthless. This is partly made explicit in the text when the narrator is talking with the Russians:

> Then we talk about cruelty. I look into the distance with a blank expression and say: 'Human beings are cruel – horribly cruel.' 'Not at all,' the older one answers irritably, 'not at all. That is a very short-sighted view. Human beings are struggling, and so they are egotists. But it's wrong to say that they are wholly cruel – it is a deformed view.' (41)

René's character can be read as that of one of the destitute migrants who struggled for survival and exploited others on their way. The metropolitan setting at a time of threatening ideologies accentuates the cruelty of the people crossing the city. As I have argued, the setting is a pivotal force in the novel, and something which also shapes the protagonist's narrative identity as an adversary with which she struggles, although the political theme is downplayed. The discussion about love and cruelty peters out after a while because the Russians are reluctant to discuss politics, Sasha notices. 'It's rather strange – the way they sheer off politics. Nothing more to be discussed' (41). Of course, this leaves a void in the text where politics should have been addressed, especially by the Russians who might have had a sense of the conflicting ideologies of communism and fascism in Europe at the time. Human nature, yes; politics, no. For example, Serge Rubin, the Russian-Jewish painter, is of the extreme left, something which Delmar questions (*86).* Thus, political ideologies are not explicitly thematized as pertinent contemporary issues. Politics is rather found in the unequal encounters, the struggle for survival, and the portrayals of the 'unplaceables' and the unfortunate; all portrayed in the private encounters. The private sphere might be said to mirror the public, political, and social spheres. Rhys was probably sympathetic to the leftist cause, judging by Helen Carr's research on her biography and letters, although not in any unambiguous way. Helen Carr summarizes it as follows:

> In spite of their leftist sympathies, Woolf and Rhys both, it seems clear, were as uncertain about the absolutes of political creeds as about any other absolutes. But that does not mean that they had no politics, rather that there was no contemporary formulation that took in their range of concerns, sexual, racial and (particularly for Rhys) economic exploitation. Both recognized, in Woolf's words, that 'the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected … the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servility of the other' (Carr, 57; the reference is to Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 258).

The connection between what Woolf calls the tyrannies of public and the tyrannies of the private world is often seen in gender issues and feminist theory, which thematizes the arenas in which the sociopolitical world and the individual meet. I agree with Cathleen Maslen (2009) that the issue of class and commodity is central in Rhys's works, and I also

think *Good Morning, Midnight* brings the question of poverty and identity into a strongly charged atmosphere of the fascist threat at all levels of society. The International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 serves as a monumental backdrop to the setting.

The relationship between the public and the private spheres is complex and is often portrayed by seemingly insignificant objects. The mask motif may serve as a key to the narrator's participation in the social world, which yet again is inextricably connected with her memories. Masks and mannequins seem to signal inauthenticity, and the 'sawdust heart' of the perfect mannequins bears witness to the irony at work in Sasha's narrative (16; 33; 53; 17). However, these objects and of the divide between the public and private sphere of memories bear a deeper meaning connected with the novel's theme. A characteristic feature of the novel, and of Rhys's works in general, is the significance that short and seemingly neutral sentences have for the meaning of the content later in the text. A context for the stay in Paris is given early in the text, when Sasha explains that her friend Sidonie has lent her money to go to Paris and buy new clothes with the words, 'I can't bear to see you like this' (11). Once in Paris, Sasha hesitates to go on with this 'transformation', perhaps because she is fatigued and despondent, and bothered by painful memories:

> I must go and buy a hat this afternoon, I think, and tomorrow a dress. I must get on with the transformation act. But there I sit, watching the same procession of shabby women wheeling prams, of men tightly buttoned up into black overcoats. (53)

These lines retrospectively foreshadow the death of her infant son, who died five years earlier, which is recounted later in Part One. Later in the text, during the visit to the Luxembourg Garden, she watches a father playing with a little girl (46). It is perhaps not first and foremost as the flaneur or demimonde she puts on an appearance by clothing, hats and make-up, as critics have held, but rather as part of an attempt to recover after the loss of her son. While I agree with Selboe's interpretation that the protagonist's masking by way of wearing hats and make-up is a way of 'entering a specific cultural and gendered context' (Selboe 2014, 336), I find there is evidence in the text for viewing the process of transformation in Paris in connection with the loss of her new-born baby, especially in the above lines, where Sasha keeps watching the women wheeling their prams despite her decision to go and buy a new hat and 'get on with the transformation'.

Entering the cultural and gendered context is depicted with a certain amount of opposition and resistance in Sasha's inner discourse. Accordingly, if a Foucauldian notion of society's power is read into *Good Morning, Midnight*, one might say that the text shows

signs of resisting the dominant discourse of gender through its images and symbols, and its use of opposition and questioning in Sasha's reflections. The memory of the bedraggled kitten with the terrible eyes which was abused by the male cats, and with which Sasha identifies, is one such image (*Rhys 1939*, 47; Carr, 74). She recognized in the kitten a being that had realized its fate. She sympathized with it, but then she could not bear to look at those eyes and shoos it out of the apartment, after which it was mercifully run over by a taxi. Now in Paris, she starts thinking about the small female animal, as if mirroring her state of mind in the image of the doomed kitten. 'In the glass just now my eyes were like that kitten's eyes' (48). In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the gendered vision is starkly represented by the small, abused she-cat as a battered and scared female hiding in the narrator's room. The memory of the kitten is introduced immediately before the account of the scene of the birth and the subsequent death of Sasha's son.[10] In evoking this image, Rhys brings the narrative together as a whole where the death constitutes the core event which colours everything that follows and peoples her room with memories and ghosts: 'I am empty of everything. I am empty of everything but the thin, frail trunks of the trees and the thin, frail ghosts in my room. La tristesse vaut mieux que la joie' (48). Erotic love in Rhys's novel as embedded in a gendered vision marks it out as a misogynist tendency in sexual love that is presented as inherent in society's power structure (Selboe, 342).

Like an instrument of erotic love, Sasha gives birth to her son alone in a hospital. Very little information is given about the hospital, and the midwife is only referred to as 'she'. Some commentators refer to her as the 'sage femme.' Sasha wonders about the normality of the situation, and how many women have had to do this before, thus universalizing the situation of female labour and birth. The midwife says: 'Back, back, back. … This has happened many times' (50). The universality of childbirth around the globe is perhaps the clearest example of a gendered (female) context with a discourse of its own according to time, medical traditions, and knowledge, including various cultural aspects. The practices of labour reveal a host of customs and attitudes to women, and the cultural connotations of childbirth are engrained in language and powerful discourses as a highly gendered situation. As a modernist novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* inscribes the universal female experience of giving birth into the literature of the 1930s, with a critical voice that questions the power structures at work – class, poverty, and the dominant societal discourse – in a manner that places the conditions for women at the time into

[10] Jean Rhys herself lost her infant son shortly after his birth. She said in an interview in *Mademoiselle* in 1974 that it was not meant as autobiographical, but that it was therapeutic to write it down (Carr, 111).

relief. As such, this is a feminist novel. Its critical voice thematizes feminine experiences and actively questions the conditions under which they live, which is also the case in *Voyage in the Dark*, in which the protagonist Anna Morgan undergoes an illegal abortion after being left by her older lover. The feminist narratives of *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark*, as with all of Rhys's works, build up female characters with voices of their own that are actively opposing and resisting the discourse of their times.

The critical voice in the section on childbirth is perhaps best represented by the passage on the midwife's ministrations after the birth. She will arrange it so that the narrator will be 'like what you were before. There will be no trace, no mark, nothing', which is repeated four times in the text (51–52). As she cannot breastfeed because she is too anxious about coping, the baby is taken out to be given Nestlé milk so that she can sleep. Sasha then finds herself with 'not one wrinkle, not one crease' (52).

> And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.
> And there he is, lying with a ticket round 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. … *Ibid.*

The four repetitions of the phrase 'not one line' emphasize and defamiliarize the situation and the context of the child's death, creating a void in which the discourse of childbirth is expected to be. What disrupts the discourse is the poverty and lack of security in a vulnerable situation, as well as the sense of abuse she experiences by being left by her husband; hence, the exposure of erotic love and childbirth as forging woman into an instrument of the transactions of erotic relationships is an important element of the critique embedded in the narrative. Having lost her son, the narrator finds it puzzling that she has no physical mark of having given birth to him. This fact distorts what for her is a very important and tragic event into a trifle that could easily be glossed over and forgotten. Her incredulity at this contributes to the defamiliarization and creates the effect of a critique of the ethics in the context and discourse of childbirth. In Cathleen Maslen's perspective Rhys's social critique particularly addresses what she terms a *commodity capitalism*, or a capitalism and commodity culture, a perspective which emphasizes the poverty and class division displayed in the novel (Maslen, 126). The text itself justifies such a stance, for example, in the passage on the death of her son: 'But the thought that they will crush him because we have no money – that is torture. Money, money for my son, my beautiful son. …' (50). The memory of her son continues to return to her, and it constructs her interior life and psychic wellbeing as a pivotal moment of her life, even if the text gives a very

brief account of it with very little elaboration in the text's narrative. The death gives her a sense of being inadequate, underprivileged, unworthy, and an outcast.

As I understand it, a narrative identity broadly requires two key elements of the individual: cohesion and comprehensibility. There must be a certain degree of cohesion in a personal narrative in the sense that important events are connected, that they have foreseeable consequences, and stand in a temporal and contingent relationship with one another. Thus, one event leads to another and has consequences for later events. The events shape our identity and form the story of our life. This story and its formative events must also be at least partly comprehensible in a manner that leads the subject to extract a form of meaning or sense of the various life events in the unfolding life story (Ricœur, 159-61). I have suggested that the character Sasha's narrative is a broken one, and I have emphasized the death of her son as the pivotal event that disrupts the cohesion and comprehensibility of her personal life story. Memories of giving birth and her infant son interfere in her present and people her private moments with *ghosts*. As has been shown, she experiences an interlacing of past and present in endless variations of the vital events through the inner discourses that feature so prominently in the text. The special use of a stream of consciousness that seems to be simultaneous with the dialogues effectively emphasizes the memories, fears, and voices from the past that interfere in the present. This leads me to conclude that since a subject's narrative is composed of various formulations and truths and half-truths as part of a self-representation – but also the multiple subjective perceptions of the crucial formative events – the narrator's inner discourse takes on many forms and voices, tries out various contradictory perspectives, and more often than not fails to present itself with a comprehensible and meaningful narrative. Her continual narrative activity is in the foreground of the novel and in many ways resembles how many people reflect historically where the near and distant past coexists with the present being. As Helen Carr writes: 'Sasha's own narrative is often split, creating a wholly internal dialogue within a psyche torn between contradictory emotions' (62). Helen Carr continues:

> What the text of *Good Morning, Midnight* inscribes through its interweaving of these outer and inner, past and present voices is Sasha's continual embattled attempt to make sense of her life, her struggle to resist, defy, redefine hegemonic definitions. Forging a counter-discourse, which is how Rhys' postcolonial critics describe this process, is never an easy task. The text follows Sasha's swings from defiance to defeat, from apathy to anger: she is uncertain, unsure, outraged by the so-called morality which judges her, but never confident of her power to hold it at bay. (Carr, 62)

The counter-discourse referred to which postcolonial critics see in *Good Morning, Midnight* is related to the personal sphere, but is always part of a gendered and political discourse. For example, in Homi Bhahba, Rhys constantly 'relate[s] the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence' (cited in Carr, 115). The gendered discourse which *Good Morning, Midnight* displays particularly addresses the degrading experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and death, and subsequently, for the narrator, the expectations that she put behind her the whole event and resume a normal life. The anomalies in personal encounters with the politics of social conventions are effectively foregrounded in the novel in a markedly Foucauldian manner that disputes both power and language in the inner discourse the text presents and the conventions that it questions (Carr, 108). With the repeated words 'There will be no trace, no mark, nothing' the text thematizes the degrading lightness with which the woman's labour is treated, as an *instrument* of erotic love. The novel places the essential event of the birth in the foreground and exposes the language and expectations that reveal the discourse of power that objectifies the woman in labour and in recovery – an archetypical female existential condition.

In Foucault knowledge is constructed by repetition, and regulation functions by internalizing its rules. In the *Panopticon* regulation is enforced by the sheer awareness of being watched, and its clear division and identification of the other, something which will represent a self-discipling more powerful than coercion. Institutions that regulate behaviour, whether it be madness, illness, or punishment, situate regulation in the spheres of life humans undergo (Parker 273). Sexuality, too, exists by its discourse and expression in language. Hence, the discourse of the childbirth of her time and place and the institutions that regulate the societal outcome of erotic love in the 1930s subjugate Sasha's labour and the birth of her child. As Robert Dale Parker summarizes:

> Knowledge itself, then, to Foucault (such as knowledge of gender expectations), is a means of surveillance, regulation, and discipline, a discourse that produces what it purports to describe. In this model, the subject is not a person or individual, a knowing, self-understanding agent of free will. Instead, the subject is a place where discourses come together. (Parker, 273)

In Sasha's case the knowledge, or discourse, surrounding her gender, sexuality, and childbirth is profoundly questioned by her inner voice and its narrative activity. The discourses regarding her pregnancy and childbirth come together disturbingly in her subjectivity, causing her to come to a psychic halt after the death of her child. During the five subsequent years she has not been able to make sense of her life or the events that

shaped it. Her narrative may thus be regarded as a broken narrative, discontinuous and without meaning.

The character Sasha's narrative is in Ricœur's sense of the word her own personal narrative, and it exists in the intersection of her inner voice and the dominant discourse of society and language. As often in Rhys's works, the protagonist disputes how those in power use language; indeed, the language represents power itself while being its victim (Carr, 108). In my view she is actively attempting to forge a coherent and meaningful narrative while living on the margins of society as a despised, poor, unfortunate, 'unplaceable' woman. Helen Carr terms the disputing inner voices of Rhys's heroines deconstructionist: '[their] deconstruction is a necessary part of her struggle to find a narrative form through which to chart the subjectivity of those on the margins' (Carr, 106).[11] In my opinion the novel therefore shares characteristics with the postmodern novel in its questioning and reordering of elements in language and society, with the reservation that it is an anachronism to label it thus.[12] I believe Sasha mirrors herself in images of other 'unplaceables' in society, the old Jew with the banjo, the girl in the restaurant washing the dishes in a small booth, the story of the Martinican woman with whom she identifies, in mirrors that show her own eyes like the eyes of that tormented kitten:

> Looking-glasses […] are a leitmotiv in Rhys' work, perhaps for much the same reasons as they were in the paintings of the women surrealists. Her protagonists spend a good deal of time looking in mirrors, sometimes at photos, even at ghosts of themselves, descending into the unknown, searching for some understanding of their being which is other than the definitions thrust upon them (Carr, 63).

Both masks and mirrors exercise this dual function of showing Sasha's identity and giving her a sense of how other people perceive her, and how definitions are placed on her with which she is uncomfortable. Masks conceal some identity markers, while mirrors are more truthful, even if they offer an oblique view, in their representation.[13] '[…] it's in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth', says René (63). It is as if an askance glance will give you a truer vision, then, that the novel functions as a defamiliarization of the reflection in the mirror.

[11] In Derrida's sense of deconstructionism, language and systems of representation generate so much power that they serve as a self-referencing system (Parker, 273).
[12] Only in the last paragraph does the novel display to the full its affinity with the postmodern novel.
[13] Mirrors may also represent a passage or development. I reference here to Gilbert and Gubar's chapters 'The Queen's Looking-Glass', pp. 15, 43 (Lady of Shalott), and 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress', Gilbert and Gubar, 336.

The text itself gives us an intimate access to the narrator as the focalizing subject. Naturally, Sasha's narrative identity must build on the novel's narration. It is a first-person perspective, which makes the task of analysing the protagonist's particular individual narrative identity easier, and there are abundant examples of inner discourse in the text, an inner discourse that amounts to a stream of consciousness technique, as I have argued. An example of this continuous stream of consciousness is: 'While he is talking I have a strange idea that perhaps it is like that. … Now then, you, X – you must go down and be born' (55).[14] However, it is also necessary in the analysis to distinguish between the novel's narrative and the protagonist's narrative identity, even if the use of the narrative technique causes the two meanings of the narrative to blend because of its first-person perspective and inner discourse. The novel's chronology is also presented in the order that the protagonist remembers the different time frames and events. It is her consciousness and recollections that steer the narrative into the past events. In addition to the many narrative lapses into the past in the text – for example, the memories of her childhood by the ocean and Sister Marie-Augustine (77; 72) – Part Three is an analepsis, an anachronism in the story, where the more recent past in the Netherlands after World War I is recounted (Rhys 1939, 95; Bal, 11). Part Three opens by locating the memory in '… *The room at the Steens*' (95). Yet the narration of this period is undoubtably part of Sasha's memories and is presented as variations of description, inner discourse, and free indirect speech, which altogether enable an intimate access to Sasha as the focalizing subject. Analysing Sasha's character as narrative identity thus involves paying attention to her remembrance and inner discourse.

Interpretation has a twofold purpose in literary hermeneutics – first, interpretation concerns the fictitious character's continuous narrative activity in understanding the meaning of her experiences and connecting the events in a comprehensive life story. Second, the reader connects the narrated story into a whole with a beginning and an end. The reader's willingness to accept the narrative, whether it be with a suspension of disbelief or a strategy of suspicion, makes the reader complicit in bringing the text to meaningfulness (Ricœur, 159). The act of reading contributes to the narrativization of the character through the reader's identification with and engaging with the character – often referred to as mimesis. In Ricœur selfhood is closely connected with and dependent on the character's permanence in time. The voice of the protagonist, the 'I' that is narrating the story, ensures the sameness or *ipseity* of the character throughout the narrative, an

[14] Ricœur has a passage about the 'consent to involuntary birth into existence', Study 5, *OA*; see also memory and psychic continuity, p, 133.

'unsubstitutable singularity', a sameness of the character – even if there are character developments, contrasts, or schisms in that voice (Ricœur, 119). The narrativization of personal identity relies on the temporal dimension, character traits, habits, and sedimentation (121). Sedimentation implies the historical collection of regular habits and sets of acts and dispositions that a person acquires during a longer period, which for Ricœur adds a sense of permanence and the dispositional traits to a person by which she or he is recognized:

> It is the sedimentation which confers on character the sort of permanence in time that I am interpreting here as the overlapping of *ipse* by *idem*. This overlapping, however, does not abolish the difference separating the two problematics: precisely as second nature, my character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself as *idem*. Each habit formed in this way, acquired and become a lasting disposition, constitutes a *trait* – a character trait, a distinctive sign by which a person is recognized, reidentified as the same – character being nothing other than the set of these distinctive signs (Ricœur, 121).

The notion of narrative identity comes into being in the sphere of temporality, and in a *milieu,* or the setting of the narrative, where the character's acts, expressions, dreams and life plans take place (Ricœur, 124; 157).[15] I have argued that the time and setting of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the hostile Paris setting, pose a threat to the narrator and other 'unplaceables'. It is a setting that takes on the characteristics of a character, in talking back to the protagonist, denigrating her, and possibly posing an existential threat, and it is also the sphere of the temporality in which Sasha's subjectivity and narrative identity unfolds itself. This raises the narrative to an ethical level, in which literature functions as an experimental sphere of situations and encounters in which we may discern an ethical dimension that may train us, the readers, an aspect of literature which Ricœur writes about in *Oneself as Another*:

> […] it is in literary fiction the connection between action and its agent is easiest to perceive and [that] literature proves to be an immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations (Ricœur, 159).

Fiction accustoms the reader to many personal encounters with human encounters and possible reactions. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, human encounters often pose a threat. The protagonist's perception of the display of power at the World Exhibition, as well as the ambiguous end of the novel with the last encounter with the skeletal character next door will be treated in the next pages..

[15] In large parts of *Oneself as Another* Ricœur is engaged in a debate with John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, among others, and with more recent philosophers, Alisdair MacIntyre, Donald Davidson and P. F. Strawson, concerning the question 'what is personal identity?'. It would exceed the scope of this thesis to describe the debate in detail. This thesis merely gives an outline of what is of special relevance in literary hermeneutics.

3.4 The Star of Peace, place, *topos* and memory

The World Exhibition figures at the start and end of the novel, thus encircling the text at its borders. I will revisit this briefly before moving on to the end of the novel and its peak of ideological significance, which places the entire text in perspective. As previously mentioned, Sasha recounts a dream in which she is trapped in the underground station trying to find the way out. There is a sign that says: 'This way to the exhibition', but she has no intention of going there. The crowd seems to drive her towards it. She is then stopped by the man who says he is her father, although she does not recognize him. He is wounded and bleeding from a headwound, and shouts 'murder!' Researchers of the psychoanalytic strand of thought tend to interpret the bleeding head in this dream as a transfer of meaning from the daughter to the father and interpret the father's wound as her own injury from sexual abuse by the father (Simpson, 91; 105). However, my concern is to show a different reading of the dream, in which the question of who the father figure is may be answered by drawing attention to the combination of the World Exhibition and the father figure. The combination leads me to conclude that the two are in a significant relationship. Perhaps the father figure stands for her culture – the Western culture of Europe that she knows, the homely, safe, and familiar place of her ancestors – a culture that is wounded and bleeding. She senses the unrest and the ideological divisions that are building up before the outbreak of war, present in human encounters in Paris, the metropolis that encompasses representatives of all corners of the world. The bleeding home culture in the image of the father figure creates an uncanny effect through its distortion of the familiar and well known. The effect is that the imminent war and its brutality are already foreshadowed in the opening pages merely by the narrator's sensitivity to the animosity that is simmering in the city at the time of her visit. As I have already commented, Britain was also experiencing division because of the unexpected support for the fascist movement, and her own family's cruelty, as reflected in the novel, can be read as testifying to the rigid fascist ideals in parts of English society, as well as in Germany, Spain, and Italy. The fascist movement is part of the character of the European mentality and history of colonialism. In terms of Ricœur's narrative identity, the social injustice portrayed in the text – and the interweaving of Sasha's narrative with those of the Jews, the Russians, the stateless, and the Martinican woman – accumulate sufficient

momentum towards the end to constitute a narrative identity of European society, sharply represented by the culmination in the ideological symbols of the World Exhibition.

Towards the end of the novel Sasha returns to the Exhibition with René. They enter through the Trocadéro entrance.[16] The impression of coldness that the monument gives her in the scene is repeated six times. It is as if the monument gives her a sense of lucidity and calm – a revelation, almost:

> Cold, empty, beautiful – this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted. 'What's that light up there?' He says, 'That's the Star of Peace. Don't you recognize it?' He stares back at it. 'How mesquin! It's vulgar, that Star of Peace.' 'The building is very fine.' I say, in a schoolmistress's voice. We stand on the promenade above the fountains, looking down on them. This is what I wanted – the cold fountains, the cold, rainbow lights on the water. … (137)

The scarcity of visitors leaves the narrator with an impression of a vacancy and a formal abstraction of the ideological symbolic monuments and the Star of Peace (Britzolakis 466). In this dark novel Sasha's despondency and paranoia is set against the political situation and creates a sense of impending disaster (Carr 78). The revelation in front of the Star of Peace is the result of a heightened awareness or what Fanon called a 'terrified consciousness,' the consciousness of the oppressed and the outcast, whose subjectivity has been maimed by the oppressors, who represent the social machinery, by the projection of their fear of the abject and the internalization of terror (Carr 53; 75). Reading the scene at the promenade, Helen Carr sees a 'moment of peace, almost hope, at the Trocadéro' (79). Contrary to Helen Carr's reading, I would emphasize the moment as a cold realization of the terror at work in the ideological movements of the Soviet Union and Germany. The emptiness of the Star of Peace shines through with its futile light on a Europe threatened by oppressive ideologies. Sasha sees the monuments with the icy cold clarity of a person who is suddenly awakened to reality and at once comprehends the powers at work in European politics. As such, the display gives her a vision of the nationalist monuments as abstractions of ideologies represented in symbolic form.

Before entering the World Exhibition René has referred to the Russians Delmar and Serge as 'Jews and poor whites' – thus, the text again thematizes the fluctuating nationalities in Paris at the time, Derrida's 'undecidables' or Baumann's 'inbetween identities' (Carr 52). In *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys is describing the oppressive reality of European politics on the eve of World War II, 'its anti-Semitism, its racism, its class-

[16] Linda Camarasana remarks that by entering through the Trocadéro entrance, the view of the Star of Peace would not be as it is described in this scene in *Good Morning, Midnight.* 'The monument to peace would have been behind them' (Camarasana, 51).

machinery, its nationalistic posturing' (Carr 53), by interweaving the stories of the flotsam of society and their social misfortune. The narrative identity of the continent thus comes into sharp relief as a story of colonialization, exploitation, and oppression, as a counter-narrative to the Nazi ideology's narrative of German culture. Ricœur is careful to point out the danger that is embedded in attempting to establish a definite national character:

> The fact that the character must be set back within the movement of narration is attested to by numerous vain debates on identity, in particular when they concern the identity of a historical community. When Fernand Braudel treats *L'Identité de la France*, he attempts, of course, to point out lasting, even permanent, distinctive traits by which we recognize France as a quasicharacter. But separated from history and geography, something the great historian is careful not to do, these traits are solidified and lend themselves to exploitation by the most harmful ideologies of 'national identity.' (122–123)

It is precisely the 'undecidables' and the 'inbetween identities' that would benefit from a restoration of their narrative identity – an elaboration of their stories and their suffering; hence, the ethical dimension of Ricœur's theory – furthermore, an explication of the significance of European history and narrative identity as a counter-narrative – would assist in that restoration.

For Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology what is intelligible to us is represented by our use of *language* in describing our lived experience. The meaning of language is not altogether straightforward – our language and the words we use are polysemic and contain various shades of significance – hence, interpretation is necessary. The modern novel, and especially the stream of consciousness novel, is an example that I believe challenges the identity of the character – the fixed pole of reference to which he ascribes the label 'ipse identity' – the psychic consciousness of the self which remains the same over time. The extreme pole of variations in the character's voice reaches a point at which the character in a story ceases to have a definite character but is open-ended and opaque (Ricœur 148). The loss of the character's identity (for example, in Musil's *The Man without Qualities*) destabilizes the narrative and plot – introduces uncertainty and a 'crisis of the closure of the narrative' (Ricœur 149). Moreover, as a destabilized identity, the character becomes a threat to the cohesion of the literary narrative and '[t]he nonidentifiable becomes the unnamable' – a vague and evasive non-entity (Ricœur 149). The 'undecidables' and 'inbetween identities' resemble Ricœur's 'unnamable' in literary fiction, provided we allow for a transfer from social reality to literary fiction.

The crisis of the closure of the narrative mentioned above may function as a key to understanding the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight*, which has long been debated. At the end of the narrative Réne, the 'gigolo', forces himself on Sasha physically and reveals

a brutal side. Sasha talks her way out of the situation by offering him money. He goes to the dresser and seems to take the money before he leaves her. But she cries and wishes that he will come back, *willing* him to return. The neighbour with the mean eyes and the cringing, skeletal body hears her through the wall, or through the door left ajar – the man she has previously pushed out of her door. 'He looks like a priest, the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion' (*Rhys, 1939,* p. 31) – and it is he who enters the room, not René. With the thought, 'I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being in the eyes for the last time,' she accepts him into her bed and embraces him with the words 'yes, yes, yes' (159). Some scholars read the ending as Sasha's embracing of death (Simpson, 99), others read an intertextual reference to James Joyce's Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*, or an ironic commentary on her inconsistency (Kegan Gardiner, 248), as well as an ultimate betrayal by 'her body's almost inexpressible need for comfort' (Kennedy, in Rhys, 1939, viii). Whether a surrender to self-hatred or at last an achievement of human compassion, there is a marked ambivalence in the ending. The novel ends with an unresolved question. In my reading the character breaks down in a dissolution of the self in the novel's last paragraph. The intertextual references take precedence, and Sasha, the protagonist, is too erratic and inconsistent to meet our understanding or expectations; subsequently, she breaks down as a character in the phrase 'yes, yes, yes' – an allusion to James Joyce's Penelope chapter in *Ulysses*. *Good Morning, Midnight* may therefore be regarded as a postmodern work in its allusions to literary works, that is its intertextuality, and its play on fictional, likewise constructed, characters. In *Ulysses* Joyce portrays woman as a mythic, natural unity (Gardiner 248); and here, in the final pages of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the character Sasha rejects this mythical natural woman, suggesting a rational thinking woman who understands the ideological forces at work in Paris and in Europe at the time and displays idiosyncrasies in her psychic realization of this, before she dissolves as a coherent narrative character (much as in *The Man without Qualities*.)

Good Morning, Midnight displays a narrative subjectivity that portrays a conscious, embodied self with a past and a history and social context. Through the interlacing of past and present in memory and the text's consistent style of inner discourse the narrator forms a narrative subjectivity and a 'story of her life.' Sasha's inner debate with herself in many voices functions as a counter-discourse to the social power relations through its language and norms.

As I have shown, the role of the setting in Paris is important. In Paris, Sasha encounters various characters from uncertain nationalities, such as René, who says he is

from Morocco and has left the Foreign Legion. Sasha thinks he might be from Spain (137). Or the Russian painter Serge and his friend Delmar, and the Martinican woman Serge tells her about, who led a caged life in London as a non-being in a flat she could not leave. In the novel unplaceable, undeterminable individuals wandering the continent come together in Paris, where they continue to live in a vacuum outside the boundaries of society. The language of the 'abject' or indeterminable, unplaceable individuals of the period, such as migrants, Creoles, the colonized, and Jews, represents a speaking back by dissolving society's language of power through a transgressive language.

I have discussed some examples from the novel *Good Morning, Midnight* that show connections between language, memory, and identity, which enables the protagonist's unique narrative subjectivity, and I have analysed how the novel emphasizes the relationship between political conditions and identity, and particularly how place conditions identity in the narrative, where the setting, Paris, figures as a dissolving *topos*. Based on my reading of the last scenes in *Good Morning, Midnight* – the Star of Peace and the dissolution of the character on the novel's last page – I have attempted to show that the novel not only displays modernist features but also the characteristics normally associated with the postmodern novel.

Chapter 4

Narrative Identity in *Voyage in the Dark*

Voyage in the Dark is among the four novels that have often been read as autobiographical versions of the author's sensitive, passive, and incapable obsession with herself – 'the Rhys woman'. Only in recent times, with new attention being paid to postcolonial authors, has the novel been regarded as an important voice in modernist writing from the historical period (Johnson 49). In *Voyage in the Dark*'s first lines there is already tension – a sense of an abrupt change, and of division. Anna Morgan is a young girl who has been sent from her home in the West Indies to an English school for girls in the dramatic arts, and she is now trying to cope as a chorus girl in a travelling show. This is how she describes her first impressions of coming to England:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything that I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside you were different. (7)

Imperial Britain and the colonial past are only part of Anna's experience of the journey to England. The postcolonial historical setting of the fall of the British Empire is present to a greater extent in *Voyage in the Dark* than in any of her novels, except *Wide Sargasso Sea*, with which it shares some characteristics of the Caribbean context. The English landscape is placed in a new perspective: the natural space versus the urban spaces of England are brought into play and described in striking contrasts in sentient details such as smells and visions of the enclosed spaces of the English countryside and the open landscapes of the West Indies. However, the social conventions of class, gender, and race are of equal importance in the novel. Especially at its end, when the exchanges of erotic favours result in an illegal abortion and Anna's near death, the gender perspective comes into play as something that accentuates the young woman's fragile state – disowned by her family, separated from familiar West Indian smells and plant life, the Obeah woman of her childhood, Francine, and her natural environment and lifeworld – in England at the time of great change in Europe.

I aim to argue that in this novel Rhys foregrounds the young white Creole as an opposition between the imperial 'mother' country and the history of the West Indies as British and French colonies. More specifically, I argue that the character, Anna, and her narrative identity are discontinuous in time because of this opposition. The narrativization

of her personal history is portrayed in *Voyage in the Dark* as vivid memories in the first-person perspective, which means that her narrative voice will receive attention. As in *Good Morning, Midnight,* the voice of Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* is marked by an inner discourse, and it is also noticeable as direct dialogue to a greater extent than in the former. The voice is presented in a clear and unmistakably modernist language of resistance to English society and its norms that often challenges the established rules (for example, in its opposition to convention, whether walking the streets at night or receiving visitors in a bedsitter). It embodies resistance to English customs, society, conventions, and landscape, or an emotional topography, which I will discuss in this chapter alongside the subversive voices from her West Indian background in her conflicting inner discourse, some of it in the form of masks at a masquerade.

The Caribbean perspective is present in *Voyage in the Dark* to an extent only hinted at in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which is why I again dwell on the setting as *topos* in the analysis of the novel. The setting is not only a cold and grey England obsessed with intricate class rules; it also involves the protagonist Anna's West Indian background. As a white Creole after the emancipation of the plantation slaves, Anna Morgan clearly represents an in-between identity in the English society of the period as the complex decline of the British Empire during the 1950s approached. On its publication in 1934 the novel was not recognized as the work of a modernist colonial writer's voice that it was. The English setting and memories of the West Indian landscape are important elements of the novel, in my reading, and I will discuss the setting's role in the protagonist's narrative identity. I aim to elucidate the Caribbean experience and the transition to England as a pivotal change that interrupts Anna's narrative identity. By contrasting the two topographies through dialogue and inner discourse, Rhys effectively defamiliarizes English society and challenges the established rules of the colonial power, for example, by using the metaphor of a mask. However, as the child of fifth-generation plantation owners, not only is the narrator not accepted in English society because of her origin in the colonies, she also represents the colonial oppressors and is scorned by West Indians. She is therefore placed in an impossible situation that is very difficult to resolve (45). As a young woman in an urban setting, she is also easily exploited by older men who provide a little financial help (insufficient to allow an escape from dependency). This 'mastery' of the young woman may parallel the imperialist idea of mastery of the land. Once the land is colonized and mastered, like the feminine, it becomes the *other* against which England can define itself as a nation (Johnson 51). The narrativization of the protagonist's identity as a young white Creole woman of the landowner class in the colonized 'other' world is thus a

diagnosis of British political expansion. It also reflects modernist colonial writing. I will pay particular attention to the narrative identity of the protagonist Anna Morgan in this chapter, drawing on Ricœur's hermeneutical theory and V.S. Naipaul's coining of the phrase 'a break in a life' in relation to the Creole migrant.

4.1 A hermeneutical interpretation of a discontinuity in time.

Narrative identity in *Voyage in the Dark* is closely connected with time and the historical period. The protagonist Anna's sense of selfhood is disturbed by the contrast she experiences between her West Indian upbringing and the English landscape and urban topography ('the streets all look the same'). It is difficult, and not unproblematic, to separate the protagonist's narrative identity from the setting and *topos* in *Voyage in the Dark*. An obvious reason is that the protagonist's identity is inextricably linked with her past in the West Indies, and her memories circle around the home plantation. However, I will attempt to make it clear in the following pages that Anna's narrative identity is built on a personal history in the West Indies. I will then return to the question of the Caribbean setting and colonial *topos* in the next section.

In Ricœur, a memory that a person holds unquestionably belong to that person and nobody else (133). A self's thinking and memories must be linked to that individual thinker, or personal identity is dissolved, and the cogito is brought back to a Nietzschean void as a linguistic habit or a construct. There are memory traces in everyone, and the extent to which these memories play an active role in our lives positively defines our own mental life. A sense of selfhood and self-consciousness depends on a set of personal memories and a mnemonic continuity if there is to be a psychic continuity of a self (ibid.). These all form a narrative identity of the character and a stable formula of identity. The indeterminacy of identity in a character in science fiction literature with a transfer of the content of the mind, memories, and knowledge, for example, only serves to display the unreal quality of the character in question in a distant future, which holds its fascination. The reality of the protagonist Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, or the mimetic qualities of the reader's understanding her life story and sympathy with her, depends on the connection between her identity as a self and her memories, background, and emotional responses to her memories, which are all components that help build a credible fictional character with permanence. The variations in which the memories are placed in a narrative of literary fiction is made possible by the narrative, and the narrativization cuts into the poles of selfhood by employing memories that are, to a varying degree, important,

painful, or defining for that character (148). The imaginative variations of a literary character's memories and, ultimately, identity depend on the test of narration in creating a narrative identity of a literary character. If I were to attempt to translate this into the fictional character of Anna, the memories, and her attitude towards them are ways of coping with the past and forming a personal identity based on her history as a white Creole of the landowner class.

The discontinuity of the protagonist's narrative identity occurs when she is sent to England at a very young age to receive an English education. She has previously attended a Catholic girl's school in her hometown in Dominica and lived at Constance Estate, the former plantation which kept slaves, and later at "Morgan's Rest" (52). Her narrative in *Voyage in the Dark* is often retrospective, going back over her memories from Constance Estate and her family there, and to dialogues with Hester, her stepmother from her father's second marriage. The mother is described as absentminded and frustrated. Anna tried to befriend the servants and workers on the farm. She always wanted to be black: 'Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad' (27). But they rejected her friendship. The complex standing as the daughter of the oppressor had the effect of estranging the young girl from her local environment and the estate that she loved. Colonization thus had its price, costing Anna the friendships that she might otherwise have enjoyed as a girl. The internalization of colonialism has the effect of restricting the unfolding of a young child's social being in her own home. Thus, an outcast at home and abroad in the Empire, she tries existence in England for a time, going from town to town as member of a crew of chorus girls in a show. It is helpful to quote the narrator's defining memories of the estate of her family plantation at length here at the start of my discussion:

> 'I'm the fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side.' 'Are you really?' he said, still a bit as if he were laughing at me. 'I wish you could see Constance Estate,' I said. 'That's the old estate – my mother's family place. It's very beautiful. I wish you could see it.' 'I wish I could,' he said. 'I'm sure it's beautiful.' 'Yes,' I said. 'On the other hand, if England is beautiful, it's not beautiful. It's some other world. It all depends, doesn't it?'
>
> Thinking of the walls of the Old Estate house, still standing, with moss on them. That was the garden. One ruined room for roses, one for orchids, one for tree ferns. And the honeysuckle all along the steep flight of steps that led down to the room where the overseer kept his books.
>
> 'I saw an old slave-list at Constance once,' I said. 'It was hand-written on that paper that rolls up. Parchment, d'you call it? It was in columns – the names and the ages and what they did and then General Remarks.' … Mailotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. The sins of the fathers Hester said are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation – don't talk such nonsense to the child Father said – a myth don't get tangled up in myths he said to me …
>
> 'All those names written down,' I said. 'It's funny, I've never forgotten it'. (Rhys, 1934, p. 45)

The contrast between England and the West Indian island is emphasized here to the degree that they are opposites; if England is 'beautiful', the West Indian island is not. The memory of the estate is pervasive in the text in its vivid imagery life in its various forms and stands in stark opposition to imagery applied to the 'deadness' of the English urban landscape. At home it is wild and a little sad, breathing, vital with colours, and green. She repeats, in her conversation with Walter, that 'I'm a real West Indian,' I kept saying. 'I'm the fifth generation on my mother's side.' 'I know, my sweet,' Walter said. 'You told me that before' (47). The phrase 'All those names' refers to the ledger that registered all those who worked as slaves on the plantation before Anna was born. Yet she remembers them, and that they continued to work for very low wages on the estate after their emancipation. She never forgot their names, and how they were numbered in the slave-list. There seems to be an intersection in Anna's narrative, and a crux in world history when the old world of slavery and the social constellations based on the system of exploitation fell, and a more equal social order gradually emerged, albeit slow in the making. In our time, when the postcolonial perspective has come to the fore in literature, it is pertinent to focus on the Creole experience that is in-between these changes. The protagonist Anna's narrative contains the difficult phase between the old and the new order, when identity is undecidable, status is uncertain, boundaries are fluid, and guilt and shame are distributed in the political society of imperialist Europe.

The protagonist's voice carries the narrative identity in the novel. In the above quotation the use of 'I' in the text indicates a strong sense of the first-person perspective or focalization. 'I am', 'I saw', and 'I've never forgotten' are markers of Anna's voice and identity, as a pole of narrative identity to which the memories of the estate in the West Indies belong. Anna's subjectivity is closely connected with the Caribbean landscape and its smells, colours, and irregular boundaries as opposed to the enclosed, walled English landscape in patches like 'pocket-handkerchiefs' (17). Her account of her time in London represents a perception that works as the antithesis of (a version of) the English society, in which resonates the open and colourful landscape of Dominica. Her voice is direct, fearful, earnest, and unpretentious. Her character is fortified by the resonance in the past that she recalls in many places in the first part of *Voyage in the Dark*. Her vivid memories and dialogues about the family estate in the West Indies provide a narrative framework for the novel and secures her identity as a narrative subject.

As I previously stated, the protagonist Anna's narrative identity is marked by a discontinuity in time in her narrative. The narrative identity is discontinuous when it breaks with the flow of memories and experiences, and in Anna's sense of dislocation

from the past. The discontinuity occurs when she is sent to England and subsequently loses her (national) identity and personal history. Caribbean critics were the first to acknowledge how profound Rhys's critique was, not only of the colonial experience, but also of gender and power relations (Carr 17; 23). The Caribbean background figures as a backdrop from which the underprivileged and isolated often come into the light. Three of her first four novels and many of her short stories were set in England or continental Europe and are equipped with protagonists with only memories of the Caribbean. However, elements in her texts evoke impressions of a Caribbean experience of dislocation and loss (for example, the Martinican woman and the playing of West Indian music in *Good Morning, Midnight*), which some critics saw as significant. One such critic was V. S. Naipaul, who wrote extensively about the Caribbean question as an issue concerning identity, or a sense of lack and dislocation, which he found was a prevalent theme in all Rhys's works (54). Naipaul wrote that the journey from being an expatriate Briton in the colonies, from 'nothing', to the civilized England, represented a gap that accounted for the 'break in a life' (Naipaul 54). In my reading, what Naipaul represents as 'a break in a life' is comparable to the sense of interruption and discontinuity in Anna's narrative identity which the voyage to England provokes. The title of *Voyage in the Dark* is itself comparable to her later title, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in 1966*,* in which the passage across the Sargasso Sea from the West Indies to England has the function of a synecdoche of the greater, impossible gap between the two worlds for the Creole character Antoinette. Both titles denote a long (sea) journey – the wide, slow passage across the Sargasso Sea in the one, and the voyage into darkness and obscurity in the other – across a great divide which both characters encounter as existentially threatening. Adapting to the world of organized English society is not the only challenge for the two characters. There is also a sense of loss and of mourning, of deracination, and the deprivation of a part of the *self* as defined by the immersion in a culture and a landscape that I read as a discontinuity in the narrative identity of the character of Anna (and Antoinette). The similarities between *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are thus above all in their common theme – the effect of dislocation from a familiar environment and culture on the sense of selfhood – even if the form and content of the two novels are quite different. The discontinuity of narrative identity and the 'break in a life' are pervasive in both novels.

Landscape in *Voyage in the Dark* is not merely a background: the role of natural scenery with an aesthetic quality. Rather, the landscape has an important function in conveying states of mind and yearning. It represents the embodied, situated existence in the environment – the world of lived experience. Memories of her childhood family home

in the West Indies are often sensations of colours, smells, sounds, light, and vegetation, and seem to bring out the contrast with the English landscape almost grotesquely. In England the protagonist Anna sees 'the walled-in garden' and 'grey-yellow light' (9). All the towns and streets are 'perpetually the same' (8). The imagery of this controlled space corresponds to the protagonist's sense of entrapment in her limited situation. She tries to convey to the character Walter, her lover, how beautiful the West Indian island and Constance Estate was, but he is not interested: 'The tropics would be altogether too lush for me, I think' (46). The opposition between the two outlooks is clear. The breech in communication, and the difficulties involved in not being heard or understood, to be able to impart what is central from her childhood memories, marks the story with a hopeless, prostrate mood. Walter's dry remark, 'Everybody thinks the place where he was born is lovely', only belittles her sense of belonging to a different landscape (47). It is as if Walter is saying that the West Indies do not count; it is a 'no place' (cf. Naipaul's phrase 'from nothingness'.) The protagonist Anna is prepared to talk back and challenges him. She contradicts him and introduces another discourse, a discourse of the critical English expatriate who has returned to England and sees the greyness and the orderliness as limitations, shockingly ugly, and not civil (48). After this conversation they make love. Anna makes do with champagne and whisky. In the union of the two characters, is represented the white Creole and the Englishman, the two different outlooks joined together for a short time, while the contrasts between the powerful and the dependent are made clear. The ambivalence of the encounter is not altogether resolved, as will become evident in the following citation evoking religion and death. She is reminded of a conversation with Sister Beatrice at the Catholic girl's school about the 'Four Last Things' – 'Death, Judgement, Hell and Heaven,' and the nun's instructions:

> 'Children, every night before you go to sleep you should lie straight down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut and say: "One day I shall be dead. One day I shall lie like this with my eyes closed and I shall be dead."' (48)

This, now, is 'the Little Death' (ibid.). She thinks of the slave-list she saw: '*Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte, aged 18 … But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this*' (ibid.). The ambivalent feelings towards her background are apparent in this passage. She is again reminded of her West Indian landscape and Francine, her household tenant, the redness of the hibiscus 'and its gold tongue hung out', and the sound of the rain (49). The memory of the landscape is sometimes sad in the afternoon when the sun has set, but it differs from the sunsets in cold places. The memories interfere incessantly with

the protagonist's perceptions of her present life in England, and they shape the nature of her dialogues with Walter and others whom she meets there. It seems that it is the otherness of the West Indian landscape and life there that causes her to oscillate between memories of events that have made an impression on her in her Dominican homeplace, where she often felt she was 'bad,' and her existence in a new country to which she feels she should belong or at least be easier to adapt to. I see the significance of the imagery of landscape as a sign of her discontinuous narrative identity and the 'break in a life'.

Memories function in *Voyage in the Dark* to hold the protagonist's narrative identity together as a coherent whole. She actively engages with her narrative, although she is not always successful in communicating it to others. The voice of the protagonist actively engages with her narrative past as a white Creole from a plantation, Constance Estate, after the emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies. Later her father remarried and bought a new place which he called Morgan's Rest (47). The protagonist's voice is always imbued with the memories of the Constance Estate and the Catholic girl's school she attended. The text brings forth the significant memories that shape her present existence and identity. For example, since her father died, her stepmother Hester has been reluctant to take more responsibility for her (54). We can infer from this account that the protagonist has come to England at a very young age and has been left to her own devices prematurely. Her voice is that of a young woman who lacks a mother, a family, and a country. She is portrayed as suffering from the loss of the maternal in a Kristevan sense – a loss that leaves her dependent and abject. The protagonist is subject to severe impediments to the continuity of her existential narrative selfhood. However, she does not accept the abjection without resistance but continues to question what she encounters. The subversion is portrayed as an oppositional voice to the family members Uncle Ramsey and Uncle Bo (53) or to Hester's refusal to help her and the dislike she showed to the life on Constance Estate. Furthermore, what the stepmother says is delegated to the nonsensical or irrational. The central conflict is to be found in the stepmother's characterization of Constance Estate with the words 'and you growing up more like a nigger every day' (54). The protagonist's inner voice says, 'I had been expecting something so different that what she was saying didn't seem to make any sense' (54). The incomprehensible truth about her family's disownment is difficult to take in, much resembling the words in *Good Morning, Midnight*, 'why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' Her narrative identity is thus shaken by the upheaval of what she thought of as family ties on the Constance Estate. Memories of childhood and its conflicting themes are thus foregrounded as an essential part of her narrative identity.

4.2 Topos in *Voyage in the Dark*

The voice in *Voyage in the Dark* is marked by the directness and openness of the questioning inner discourse. It is questioning to the extent that it represents a counter-discourse to the established conventions and language. The power relations embedded in the culturally infused language comes to the fore as a young girl's reflections on the society she has entered at a stage when her existence and future are uncertain. The voice of the inner discourse seems forceful, vibrant, and unwavering. In Foucault, a discourse is a language imbued with the socio-cultural power relations at work in that culture. A questioning or problematizing voice is therefore an example of a counter-discourse that challenges that cultures uses of the language, such as in *Good Morning, Midnight* when the protagonist emphasises and defamiliarizes her experiences of the birth of her son. In *Voyage in the Dark*, the space that surrounds the protagonist is merged with places in her remembered past home landscape. The topos of Anna's identity is in the West Indian landscape, I argue. She actively challenges the colonial, imperialist gaze that denounces the landscape of the colonies as 'tropic, too lush/hot' and as a mastered territory in parallel to the inhabitants who were enslaved. It is her questioning voice that alerts us to this perspective. Her embodied lifeworld in the landscape of the West Indies constitutes her existence and stands forth in opposition to the imperialist gaze that denigrates the landscape. Anna's voice arises out of this opposition – the British imperialist and colonialist perspective and the authenticity of the unique landscape and culture of the West Indies. Hers is a perspective, ambivalent as it is, of alienation from the home she thought were a part of the English culture as it was presented to be, and her voice bears witness to this ambivalence and incredulity when she arrives in England and is not heard, nor respected.

The novel's setting is England and London. The protagonist's meanderings in the rainy English streets and cold rooms constitute most of the text's narrative, such as her varying bedsitters, Walter's apartment, cafés, and pensions. Her world is peopled with Maudie, a friend from the chorus where she performs at the start of the narrative, Walter and his friend Vincent, and Hester, her stepmother who is at this stage unwilling to take any more responsibility for her. The protagonist is thus a girl who is on her own at a very young age, she is cold and often gets ill in the English climate, and she experiences also emotional coldness in the sense that her lack of emotion and vigour is portrayed as physical coldness (21, 25, 31). The narrative often centers on perception and sensation.

The lack of colour in England compared to the West Indies is brought together with a lack of life and vitality (38). However, the landscape of the West Indies as topos in *Voyage in the Dark*, the place from which the discourse emanates, is predominantly portrayed through memories of her childhood home. As in *Good Morning, Midnight*, memories in *Voyage in the Dark* figure in the forefront of the narrative as an ongoing inner commentary that bring back the protagonist Anna's (near) past at Constance Estate and the town where her family lived for four years and where she went to a catholic girl's school. The thought of home gives her a melancholy feeling, walking in London on a quiet Sunday where there is a still deadness in the absence of people in the streets (36). The melancholy feeling brings her back to her childhood landscape and Sundays in church in tight, slightly too small woollen garments. 'The groom Joseph cleaning the shoes with blackening and spit' (36). Her memories are always sensuous and centred on bodily impressions of warmth/coldness, light/dark, various qualities of light, smells, damp, as well as clarity/obscurity of water. An example may help to show the presence of sensation in the protagonist's memories:

> And the sky close to earth. Hard, blue and close to the earth. The mangotree was so big that all the garden was in its shadow and the ground under it always looked dark and damp. The stable-yard was by the side of the garden, white paved and hot, smelling of horses and manure. And then next to the stables was a bathroom. And the bathroom too was always dark and damp. It had no windows, but the door used to be hooked a little bit open. The light was always dim, greenish. There were cobwebs on the roof. (37)

Sensuous details in the passage evoke the damp and worn physical surroundings in the hot climate. During Litany she only takes in the sensuous details of her surroundings, the warmth, the taste of the pitch-pine pew in front, which she bites into, fanning herself, and the grace for local benefactors gave her 'a peaceful and melancholy feeling' at how the world was in order, with its eternal division of the poor and the rich (ibid.). Thus, the protagonist's physical sensation of the subjectivized life-world is brought to the forefront of the narrative.

The protagonist's memories are presented in-between the ongoing narrative in the London setting as something that she is constantly reminded of. In Ricœur, memories form a basic part of a character's narrative identity as a 'mnemonic continuity that belongs to me' (Ricœur 133). For Ricœur, sameness of identity is important when considering narrative identity, and mnemonic continuity, that is memories that unquestionably belongs to the self, is witness of the sameness of character over time and change. Self-consciousness seem to depend on a particular personal experience and a connection

between past and present experiences that cannot be reduced to any impersonal source, such as 'somebody thinks.' A psychic unity cannot be replicated in someone else, but is stable to one and the same character, or ego. One might consider the opposite – the invention of puzzling cases with the help of science fiction, of uncertain identities and 'where the indecidability of the question of identity is attested to' only begs the question of the viability of such questioning (Ricœur 133-134).[17] The way *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* build up characters with a close connection between the past and present experiences through memories enhances the sense of embodied and situated personal characters with a past and a psyche; that is sameness of character and a stable narrative identity that we may believe in. The embodiment and sensuous experiences contribute to a mimetic identification or engagement with the characters through their sensations and actions, in an Aristotelian sense. The role of sensation is thus central to our reading(s) of the protagonist of *Voyage in the Dark* Anna's narrative and places it firmly in the divide between the formative West Indian setting of her childhood and the intimidating London setting of the novel's present. The temporal plane in *Voyage in the Dark* is more consistently the present of Anna's narrative in England and London compared to *Good Morning, Midnight*, where the narrative planes overlap in an elliptical narrative. In the former, some memories of Francine and her catholic girl's school come more into focus and may be considered analepses in the narrative's chronology because of their substantial content and duration.

In *Voyage in the Dark*, we find again the words 'yes, yes, yes' which ended the *Good Morning, Midnight* in such an enigmatic way (Rhys 1934: 31). I have argued that in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's character breaks down or is dissolved in the phrase with its allusions and opposition to Joyce's character Molly in *Ulysses* and its characterization of woman as a mythical female unity.[18] The effect is not nearly the same in *Voyage in the Dark* when the protagonist embraces Walter and accepts him as her lover. The setting is erotic yet again in this previous work of 1934 and holds the promise of a relationship that Anna depends on and feels comfortable with. "He puts a hand on my knee and I thought, 'Yes … yes … yes. …' Sometimes it's like that – everything drops away except the one moment" (31). That is before he spoils everything by mentioning to her that she is a virgin, as far as he can gather, and she gets cold. Here, the phrase is more directly

[17] An example of such a science fiction story might be *Johnny Mnemonic* (film 1995 Director Robert Longo). The film depicts how a man can transport data implanted in his brain at the expense of his own personal memories which ultimately threatens his identity as a human being.
[18] Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* ends with a repetition of the word 'yes' several times (Hermione Lee, "Introduction," V. Woolf, 1992, xl).

embedded in Anna's perceptions of the situation's mood and the affection that she is seeking and that is quickly disappointed. I would like to consider this passage in the narrative in connection with a similar passage in the novel, only in reverse, as a 'No. … No. … No. …' which is repeated twice in memories connected with her first menstruation later in the text:

> Francine was there, washing up. Her eyes were red with the smoke and watering. Her face was quite wet. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and looked sideways at me. Then she said something in patois and went on washing up. But I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white. Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get – old and sad and everything. I kept thinking, 'No. …No. … No. …' And I knew that day that I'd started to grow old and nothing could stop it. (62)

The protagonist's narrative identity works itself here through the reminiscing on puberty and coming of age – and a certain sense of abjection, decay, and ageing. Anna's father is getting older, too, she realizes. He grew coffee and nutmeg on the hot slopes of the barren hill; but it was 'good land,' contrary to what Hester said it was. Her father teaches her to see whether the trees were male or female, with the words: 'I'm getting old […] my eyes aren't as good as they used to be.' I always felt so miserable when he said that (ibid.). This passage has connotations to age, sexuality and coming of age for Anna, and the sense of time eluding her. Apart from its depiction of her childhood and puberty, and subsequently her father's death, the narrative also displays how Anna is sensitive, prone to sadness, melancholy, and headaches, which in England comes to expression as the 'flu' or 'pleurisy,' an inflammation of the lungs' membrane which she suffered from in Newcastle on a tour with the ensemble of chorus girls (31). In the same passage of her memory from Morgan's Rest, the estate her father settled in after Constance Estate, her frail state as a young soon-to-be orphan is depicted in a phrase that foreshadows her fragile and dependent state alone in England:

> I felt I was more alone than anybody had ever been in the world before and I kept thinking, 'No. … No. … No. …' just like that. Then a cloud came in front of my eyes and seemed to blot out half of what I ought to have been able to see. It was always like that when I was going to have a headache. (63)

After this incident she was ill for several months with fevers. The contrasting phrases 'yes, yes, yes' and 'No. No. No.' in *Voyage in the Dark* are markedly different in the openness of the 'yes' and the full stop and abruptness of the 'no.' The 'yes' in Anna's encounter with Walter may be seen in light of the 'No' in her dwindling relationships of her childhood and adolescence. Walter is sympathetic and understanding, and he sees her vulnerability. Regardless of that, he breaks off with her after a while, when she has come to depend on his care, financially as well as emotionally. The sound of a piano gives her a sickly-sweet nostalgic pain when she is reminded again of the break-up, mixed with vague

memories from her childhood (92). Memories are linked with memories at intervals in the text and contribute to forming a coherent self with a stable psychic unity, as this example shows early in the text:

> Somebody was playing the piano in one of the houses we passed – a tinkling sound like water running. I began to walk very slowly because I wanted to listen. But it got farther and farther away and then I couldn't hear it any more. 'Gone forever,' I thought. There was a tight feeling in my throat as if I wanted to cry. (10)

Again, the sensations bring on memories and affect her state of mind. In the cinema, she hears the piano, and thinks of the break-up, 'Never again, never, nor ever, never. Through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea' (92-93). The repetition is a fragmentation of thoughts, rendered in a stream-of-consciousness manner as a flow of thoughts continuous with the ongoings around her with the use of forceful images of natural elements such as air, light, water – elements that function as tropes of drowning and suffocation, being cold, dead. The short affirmation in the 'yes, yes, yes,' and the abrupt negation in 'No. … No. … No. …' may be read as characteristics of the fragmented, continuous stream of the narrator's self-consciousness.

These fragments of thoughts may seem disconnected and fleeting at times. However, a certain self-dispossession is natural to authentic selfhood, as Ricœur argues (138). In the above quote, 'through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea …' the phrase is presented without any explanation, although it is given in connection with her nostalgic reaction to the sound of the piano. It gives connotations to a shadowy, dark underworld – a death by drowning, perhaps. A context is given a little earlier in the text, where Anna tries to remember a song. "And drift, drift/Legions away from despair" (90). Here she reasons, "It can't be 'legions'. 'Oceans', perhaps [sic]. 'Oceans away from despair.' But it is the sea, I thought. The Caribbean Sea" (91). The images of the sea and water are prominent in *Voyage in the Dark,* however, not as clearly connected with the Caribbean Sea as in this instance, where the Caribbean connection is explicitly thematized and the fate of the indigenous Carib population is recounted. In the same paragraph, Anna continues: "But, they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair. …' (ibid.). The text has, in that respect, a clear Caribbean thematic to a greater extent than *Good Morning, Midnight*, and thematizes the divide between her childhood's Caribbean island and the transition to England. Anna's memories and reflections from the West Indies function as a framework within which all her experiences and perceptions take place, and from which she tries to make sense of her personal story and identity. Her complex relationship with the Caribbean population as a white Creole and landowner-

class, as well as her undecidable position in England, are perhaps portrayed most effectively through her fragmented thoughts and memories. Her associations with different qualities of water are markedly present in the text and evoke a sense of the complex background which her Caribbean childhood, and as an expatriate white Creole, entail. She tries to replicate the sensation of a waterfall in her room at Mrs Dawes' in Camden Town (77). The pool at Morgan's Rest with its strong-scenting flowers that open at night is vividly remembered. The water was muddy, green-brown at the shallow end (77-78). "I was always dreaming about this pool and seeing the green-brown water in my dream" (ibid). Her deracinated existence and ambivalent sense of self come to expression through these memories and images. The contrast to England, its climate, and its social conventions, form a deep-seated insecurity about her identity, her homelessness and displacement. The protagonist's narrative identity is thus brought forward by letting her mind roam freely into the depths of childhood recollections of the landscape at Constance Estate, and perceptions of her surroundings formed at an impressionable age.

The discontinuity in time arises when the narrator travelled to England to get an education and start life on her own in the Motherland. As an expatriate she has always identified with the British – once there, she experiences the divide between her identity as a white Creole from the colonies and the British identity she is expected to assimilate into. Here, the narrator's inner discourse forms an opposition to these social expectations. It is not merely the physical contrast in climate, light, or the lack of sun that divides to two worlds for Anna. It is also the hate and contempt she perceives in people's eyes, to an extent that she prefers being paid by her older, caring lover rather than face the darkness of the streets – a greater threat than social convention that expects to regulate her behaviour with men (49). Moreover, the sense of displacement has followed Anna from her childhood, since she was of the class that, both before and after the emancipation of the slaves, the native population distanced themselves from. Anna's wish to be black, is explicitly stated in Anna's narrative within the dichotomy of the warm, fragrant West Indian landscape and the cold, enclosed English landscape: "Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" (27). It is, however, her origin and her life story that is at odds with the English conception of a British identity, in that her narrative identity with a background from the colonies is not accepted. Anna is referred to as 'hottentott' by some in the chorus (12), Hester, her stepmother, says "[…] and you growing up more like a nigger every day" (54). Her relationship with Francine, the 'help' who was more like a mother to her, was also marked by the opposition between the position of the hired, native, former slave Caribbean population on the one hand, and white, landowner-class on the

other (27; 62). In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette desperately wanted to be friends with the local girl at the Estate. Anna's narrative identity as a white Creole from the West Indies cannot be reconciled with the English society and is difficult to communicate. It is, with Naipaul, a break in a life, and as such, destabilizes Anna's narrative identity and sense of selfhood.

Ricœur's comment that literature as a vast laboratory in which we encounter various narratives and characters, and vary their conditions, is a valuable reminder (115). We, the readers, need stories of all kinds and from all corners of the world to get familiar with narratives of peoples who have an entirely different set of experiences than our own In the narratives, we encounter characters and their existential conditions, and learn to appreciate their various perspectives. In learning to appreciate other cultures and the characters embedded in oppressive political conditions, we require some insight into their personal history as that which has formed their identity, and to be able to empathise and believe in those characters. For Ricœur, identity is understood as sameness, and the same identity over time is the *idem* part of a character's selfhood. Furthermore, in the temporally continuous life story identity as selfhood is *ipseity*, the single one psychic self through changes; in other words, the embodied psychic self that perceives and remembers (114; 116; 117). The protagonist Anna's narrative suffers a break in the transition to England, I have argued, and the connectedness of her life is severed in the sense that she is marginalised and displaced. Connectedness in a life is thus essential to the character's coherence as a character (115). Ricœur explains how an uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time is essential to a character's narrative identity and selfhood (117), and in this framework, Anna's selfhood is challenged by the great transition between the two cultures, and the lack of communication, language customs, the condescending discourse, and lack of communication. Naipaul's and Ricœur's visions of narrative identity thus align at this juncture in the literary analysis.

The textual style is heightened into a clearer stream-of-consciousness style toward the end of the novel when the story's tension rises, and the narration is intensified. The protagonist discovers that she is pregnant and goes through an illegal abortion. In the haze of feverish pain her inner discourse becomes more confused and erratic, mixing local Obeah beliefs and Caribbean traditional rituals into her dreams and nightmares. Here, the interweaving of West Indian culture into Anna's fantasies is apparent in her inner discourse which at this point becomes delirious. She remembers the local talk of the vampires, or 'Obeah zombis soucriants,' who came at night to suck blood from people and live-stock, and she remembers the masquerade. In these passages, the intensified voice

signals Anna's critical condition with what we may assume is a serious infection after the amateurish abortion procedure. In the following quote the voice rambles in the feverish nausea where the voices in the room blend with a memory from her childhood. A painting of a dog with a white mask appearing in the delirious confusion seems to speak to her:

> *A pretty useful mask that white one watch it and the slobbering tongue of an idiot will stick out – a mask Father said with an idiot behind it I believe the whole damned business is like that – Hester said Gerald the child's listening – oh no she isn't Father said she's looking out of the window and quite right too – it ought to be stopped somebody said it's not a decent and respectable way to go on it ought to be stopped – Aunt Jane said I don't see why they should stop the Masquerade they've always had their three days Masquerade ever since I can remember why should they want to stop it some people want to stop everything.* (156)

The three-day masquerade or carnival was a long-standing tradition in the Caribbean and was an occasion for resistance, and, sometimes, revolt among the slaves, and thus had a subversive function. The text here features a dream-logic, fragmentation of thoughts and associations, and dialogue, in a stream-of-consciousness technique.

The mastery of the colonies, the landscape, and the mastery of woman have much in common, according to Kerry Johnson. The enclosure of the landscape in *Voyage in the Dark* may be comparable to the controlling of woman and woman's reproductive ability, such as I have discussed regarding *Good Morning, Midnight*. Anna's sexuality is likewise thematised in the novel as something that she resists having somebody else control. More specifically, in my reading, she resists the inevitable consequences to the behaviour that she had very little opportunity to influence, as a young woman without means in the great metropolis. The significant place from which she reflects, the topos of the text, is more markedly the West Indies than the London setting, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, the dreamlike nature of the text is thus a surprisingly rich historical backdrop which takes prominence in the protagonists confused reflections in time planes not shown in the narrative's present. The insistent nature of the memories of the West Indies bears witness to how profoundly it affects her psychologically. The colonial background and the divided society there as landowners (and slaveowners, historically), represent the other world which comprises her personal history. The larger historical developments in the colony have been shown to be deeply rooted in her mind as a Creole girl of the West Indies, thus transferring the socio-political to the personal and psychological sphere.

Voyage in the Dark was published in a revised version after the editor's protest at its serious ending where the protagonist Anna dies.[19] The revision poses a problem to us

[19] Available in Howell, 1990 and in Hemond Brown, 1985.

readers, because, as one would expect, a novel exists in several versions before the final edited version is accepted for publishing. This might be due to the editor's influence and preferences but also to the author's revisions and considerations made during the finishing phases of writing the novel. The final version has been approved by the author and the editor – to which proportion is unknown to us. In the original ending, the masquerade is put into clearer relief as an authentic act of defiance that the protagonist understands as such: "But I knew why they were laughing they were laughing at the idea that anybody black would want to be white" (Rhys 1990, 386). The parody epitomizes the complex intercultural relationship based on oppression, slavery, and colonialization due to Anna's conflicted situation as landowner class and representative of the oppressors. Cathleen Maslen reads the Masquerade chapter of *Voyage in the Dark* in Part Four as insufficient and lacking in political import after the revision:

> Anna's characterisation as a besieged and alienated white Creole is preserved in the published version, but in the absence of Rhys's commentary as to the significance of the black Masquerade, the revised version implies a straightforwardly 'sympathetic' identity, rather than a haunted or guilty one. That is, the black revellers, once their performance is deprived of its subversive logic, are easily read in the surviving text as incomprehensible, menacing and insurmountably Other. (Maslen, 175)

Masks have a subversive function when seen in their proper context of the masquerade. In the historical context of the British Empire, masks serve as resistance and opposition. Masks figure as a trope in both *Good Morning, Midnight* and in *Voyage in the Dark*. In the former, masks are represented as artefacts and guises, for instance the painter Serge who has some African masks, "Straight from the Kongo. …I made them" (76). The masks here denote a construction of the exotic and otherness. In *Voyage in the Dark*, on the other hand, the masks are worn by the Caribs who historically were oppressed and confined but who used their myths and the masquerade as an opposition to the ruling class and slaveowners. Here it takes on a different and more significant role as a ritual displaying the sentiments of the oppressed in a show of vitality based on the original African myths and rituals, such as the masquerade and the Obeah belief, which represented the Caribs' own cultural sphere. The original ending which includes Anna's commentary may thus show the subversive content of the ritual to a greater extent than the revised version.

5 Discussion and conclusion.

The narrative identity of the character is presented in the novels in various but distinctive ways through the character's memory, through the presence of inner discourse, with a strong focalization, and by the shifting temporal planes of the texts from present to past, where the past continuously infringes on the present. A historical and temporal imagination characterizes the protagonists who are both clearly defined by their past and struggle with alienation and displacement from that past. Time and the temporality of existence are prominent characteristics of both texts. In a letter, Jean Rhys wrote about *Voyage in the Dark*:

> I don't know if I got away with it. I don't know. It's written almost entirely in words of one syllable. Like a kitten mewing perhaps. The big idea. … [S]omething to do with time being an illusion. … [T]he past exists — side by side with the present, not behind it. … What was — is. I tried to do it by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid — the present dreamlike (downward career of girl) — starting of course piano and ending fortissimo. (Letters, 24; cited in Gregg, 115)

The past in the West Indies as vivid corresponds to what we might read as the portrayal of sensuous, bodily perception of the landscape that is thus presented as more tangible than the more fluid and dreamlike present, and as constituting a more solid narrative identity. The past in the West Indies is also the topos of the novel as the place or position from which the protagonist speaks, remembers, and feels. As an emotive, bodily memory and imagination, the past is *felt* rather than reasoned, and represents the protagonist Anna Morgan's defining, inner narrative identity. In the text, there is an active mimetic identification with the reader operating by the sensuous and emotive perception and memories portrayed. In England, she is almost like an observer to her own existence, and she rejects the confined English streets and gardens as standing in contrast to the colourful West Indian landscape – a contrast she could never fit together. In that sense, reading the West Indies as topos of the novel might be useful in unlocking the significance of the journey to England. As a young Creole girl, the protagonist is at a loss to make sense of her significant temporal markers such as place, landscape, and myth and ritual. Thus, the continuity of her narrative identity suffers and the displacement in England serves as a break in her selfhood and a questioning of her own memories, which seem alternately real and a dream. The break in her narrative identity results in a split subjectivity, here in Rhys' own words:

> The girl is *divided*. Two people really. Or at any rate one foot on sea and one on land girl. … Her dream must be so vivid that you are left in doubt as to which is dream and which is reality (And

who knows?) In the end her dream takes her entirely so perhaps *that* is reality." (Letters, 241; cited in Gregg, 131)

Simultaneously, there is a strong sense of loss of the maternal in the text, and of loss of family, as well as belonging, that gives the protagonist a fear of being in danger. In Kristeva's understanding, the abjection may lead the exile or the stray to ask "*Where* am I?" instead of "*Who* am I?" (Kristeva, 1982:71). The past, or the abject, is thus a land of oblivion that is always remembered and carried along (ibid.). The loss of the maternal is a constant struggle to forge an identity apart from parents and the homely, and can, in Kristeva, lead to a forfeited existence. In *Voyage in the Dark* there are signs, as previously mentioned, that the lack of family support and security comes to expression as Anna's deep insecurity and helplessness that lead to her dependency on men, both emotionally and financially. The abjection she feels at her first menstruation and the realization that she is ageing, as well as her father's ageing, is brought – fortissimo – to a climax in her abortion and subsequent complications at the end of the novel when she is near complete disintegration, all the while remembering the landscape where the orange tree grows.

The protagonist of *Voyage in the Dark* speaks back to society by her questioning of the coldness of the English customs, both physical and mental. A sense of subversion can be read in her seemingly naïve openness to the dominant colonial discourse of social mores and conventions at the time when the British Empire was still at its strongest. Her dependency might be interpreted as a parallel to the colonial states' dependency and subordination to the British Empire. Images of domination and control of the young woman indicate that the correlation with the larger colonial perspective might be read in the text, as it challenges the discursive 'texts' of class, origin, and the colonial. The dominant discourse regulating sexuality might thus be considered a patriarchal control of the woman as well as the colonised land (Foucault, 1975; Johnson, 2003). As I have argued, the protagonist's responses, which express a desire to communicate and a disbelief at not being heard as a native of Dominica, point to her exclusion and oppressed state. Her death, or near death, is like an escape or a rebellion from those circumstances that placed her in an impossible situation. The inner discourse in this part portrays a confused mind drifting in and out of dreams. I suggest reading the image of death in the feverish dream about the masquerade in the last pages of *Voyage in the Dark* as a subversive voice on the protagonist's part, at being excluded from the dominant discourse of the English society because she is from the colonies. When providing a critique of the domination and exclusion of the Creole, the protagonist Anna is voicing the negative identity of the Other

and displays the consequences for the Other of not being able to take part in an equal dialogue.

Deracination can be read into the topos of the text (the West Indies) as the point from which the protagonist is entering into the setting in London, with a "foreign" perspective from the colonies. As mentioned earlier, Naipaul has coined the phrase *the break in a life,* referring to the people who experience a loss of belonging or nation with the uprooting that the colonial subject's migration to the metropolis entails. His influential postcolonial essay on Rhys "Without a Dog's Chance" (1972) asserts that her writing is firmly entrenched in the colonialist discourse of the West Indies. In *Voyage in the Dark* the deracination and the break in life occur not only when the home country is left behind, but more so when the subject's memories of the native country are placed into question and, effectively, nulled. In French, the term *dépaysé*, roughly corresponding to *deracinated*, may be used to describe a person who is left with no country or landscape and which denotes a psychological condition rather than the socio-political state of being stateless. For Naipaul, it represents a clear divide in a person's life, whereas for Ricœur it refers to a discontinuity of narrative identity. For our divided protagonist Anna, it represents a loss of language, where words loose there meaning (49; 54), or communication is impossible, 'you can never tell about things' (46). Her memories or imagination cannot be communicated. These lines might indicate that she is not altogether a reliable narrator (Gregg, 116). However, as the originator of her own subjective experiences and perspective she expresses the differences in the power represented by hers and by other characters' voices in the narrative of the novel. The result of deracination, shown in absences and silences embedded in the protagonist's voice and perceived reality, is her death, ultimately (in the original version in Howells, 1990). Therefore, her narrative is inscribed in discourses of gender, origin, class, and the dominant colonial power.

The West Indian landscape as memory and topos is a theme in *Voyage in the Dark* to a much greater extent than in *Good Morning, Midnight*. While the colonial background is central in *Voyage in the Dark,* it is underplayed as a theme in the later text, despite its recurrent motif in the scenes in Paris through the art, music, and the encounters with the exile. The protagonist Sasha Jansen is portrayed as a middle-aged melancholic woman who is lost in remembrance of her past stay in Paris. Filth and dirt are prominent ingredients of her environment – a theme that points to class and poverty but also to the part of herself that she rejects and tries to depart from – abjection. The loss of the maternal – family, home, nation – destabilises an independent identity. I have argued that her inner discourse is immersed in memories of her dead infant son and that his death constitutes a

crisis in her narrative identity. I have examined the protagonist as a subject who speaks back as she encounters various characters in Paris – mainly through her inner discourse – always opposing the systems of society, the condescension and humiliation she faces as a middle-aged woman of low societal status. Her narrative is built up around various stays in Europe, mainly the Netherlands and Paris, and the birth and death of her infant son there. The memories of that time are vividly present in her thinking, and they are made present in the story in chapters that recount the events in the past – "Now I am not thinking of the past at all. I am well in the present. […] 'Capoulade – half past ten. …'" (84). The reminder about the present is timely, as she very often drifts off into the past.

Very little is conveyed about her childhood, except a few incidents concerning her family in England and a brief passage about an evocative memory of Dominica brought on by Caribbean music (77). Thus, the topos of the narrative is more clearly the Paris setting, where streets and hotel rooms speak back at her with condemning voices. Thus, the setting acts as a character in itself in the narrative, as I have argued. The significance of the setting is markedly shown in the protagonist's unease with her own existence being destabilized or excluded in the city. In the chapter on the novel, I have attempted to make a case for considering the alienation of the protagonist and the need for nationality, legitimacy, and a 'right to be there' as a metaphor for the migration and exile of people in Europe at the time before the outbreak of World War II, particularly in Paris which was a centre of transit for many migrants – an important part of the protagonist's narrative identity. The novel thematizes encounters with the outsider, the underprivileged, the in-between individuals of unknown origin, and migrants, such as the Martinican woman and the painting with the motive of a street artist resembling the 1933 painting *Hurdy-gurdy man (Left-handed banjo player)* by Rothko (Rothko, 1998). The protagonist's humiliation in social encounters might be symbolic of the discrimination and the uncertain situation of many individuals in transit in Paris in the late 1930s. Poverty also plays a role, as well as the rise of the working-class awareness during the 1920s in France and England. In Russia it had already led to a brutal revolution. Therefore, reading *Good Morning, Midnight* as a story of a melancholic and defeated middle-aged woman is somewhat limited. The 'Rhys woman' can communicate socio-political conditions of the time of the 1930s and the larger context of otherness and objectivation in terms of nationality, origin, and class in the Paris setting. The text is submerged in a sea of otherness and humiliation in its imagery and wording, which testifies to its radical questioning of its time by the topos – the place from which to speak as the in-between exile or refugee in Paris in 1939.

A further argument for reading the novel as political is the display in the final pages. The protagonists of *Good Morning, Midnight* finds herself at the World Exhibition in Paris with the display of the national monuments of Nazi Germany and Soviet Union. Between those two monuments shines the cold, sharp light of the *Star of Peace*, the European nations' attempt at peace in a time of great political and ideological conflict and danger. The protagonists' reaction to the *Star of Peace* is a silent resignation, perhaps, and a perception of the coldness of the place. In my reading, she is *not* put at ease by the beacon of peace between the two monstrous symbolic representations of political power.

Focusing on the concept narrative identity, in Ricœur's sense, places an emphasis on important events that has shaped the character with the perspective, imagination, and memories that formed her perception of her environment and time. The objection could be raised that narrative identity is common to all and that it is evidently true that all human beings are shaped by their history. In literature, however, paying special attention to the character's narrative identity may open for interpretations that exceed interpretations of psychological factors inherent in the novel's present perspective, and thus avoid replicating the early criticism's labelling of the 'Rhys woman' as depressed and inadequate. The examination of the protagonist Sasha Jansen's narrative identity in the novel may reveal where the defining strata of her socio-political background and personal history intersect with contemporary political reality.

In this thesis, I have examined how *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* create connections between place, memory, and identity that shape the protagonists' unique narrative subjectivity. I have shown how the novels emphasize the close connection between political conditions and identity, and how place conditions identity in the narrative. With a focus on the topoi of the protagonist's perspective, this study has shown that time, place, and socio-political conditions are connected to the protagonists' narrative identity and selfhood. The protagonists of both novels are marked by the time in history when the colonial era was in the process of ending. The novels show the uncertain identity of the Creole at a time when the West Indian plantation owner class fell after the emancipation, and both texts produce unique voices created by memory, dream, the cityscapes of London and Paris, and the West Indian topos of *Voyage in the Dark.* Being raised as landowner-class girls, the protagonists experience the lack of means in the metropole and become themselves in-between individuals in a culture that acknowledged money and status above all. The experiences of gender and power relations are revealed in the novels, not without opposition on the part of the protagonists. Most importantly, hermeneutic theory of the narrative identity allows for a greater focus on the

novels' depiction of memory as the narrators' temporal dimensions as an interlacing of past and present. My thesis has attempted to show the relevance of this perspective in unlocking the historical and temporal character of the characters' perceptions and reflections, and its possibilities for discovering the historical situatedness of the characters in the narrative of the texts.

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