

**‘Out of the Deep, Dark River’:
Rhys’s Underground Woman in *Good Morning, Midnight***

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Jean Rhys’s fame as a writer was established with the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. However, in her first four novels, Rhys created heroines who had rarely been explored from a female point of view: women without money, social status or ambition, who wander aimlessly through the streets of London and Paris. Such heroines resist being categorized as ‘outsiders’ because, like their author, they do not identify with any marginalized group. Although the Rhys’s protagonists are not rational or purposeful enough to merit the approval of many feminist literary critics, they are aware of the destructive cost of the class patriarchal system and preserve beliefs and values that run counter to an Anglo-Saxon ideology of imperialism.

Set in Paris during the Second World War, *Good Morning, Midnight* is perhaps Rhys’s starkest portrayal of female alienation. The aging, destitute protagonist, Sasha Jensen, returns to Paris after an absence of many years, determined to drink herself to death. Her first-person narrative is fashioned almost entirely out of voices, many of which cannot be traced to a speaker. I will argue that *Good Morning, Midnight* can be seen as a response to *Notes from the Underground* (1864), Dostoevsky’s ironic exhibition of a hyperconscious man in mid-nineteenth-century St. Petersburg. Like Dostoevsky, Rhys uses the topos of the underground to represent her protagonist’s deliberate retreat from a hostile society into a private, subjective

realm. However, while Dostoevsky ontologizes the Underground Man's alienation, likening it to a 'disease' of 'hyperconsciousness', Rhys locates her protagonist's alienation in the social and material circumstances of her life. Moreover, Rhys's heroine attempts to undo her estrangement from herself and others by remembering. Drawing primarily from the work of Kelly Oliver, a contemporary American feminist theorist, I will show how Rhys's representation of the underground as a fluid space of memory challenges Dostoevsky's view of the subject as split from his body, from his language and from the world of others.

Although *Good Morning, Midnight* is full of literary allusions, its most significant engagement is with *Notes from Underground*. Yet this occurs mainly on an implicit level, constituting the text's unconscious (the narration of Sasha's dreams) as well as its explicit content (the topos of the underground that it shares with Dostoevsky's novella). The only direct allusion to Dostoevsky in Rhys' fiction occurs in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*: in the context of a conversation about Dostoevsky, Julia responds to her uncle's rhetorical question, 'Why see the world through the eyes of an epileptic?' with 'But he might see things very clearly, mightn't he? At moments' (Rhys 1931, 133). While Rhys does not allow Julia to clarify what she meant to her befuddled uncle ('Why clearly? How d'you mean clearly?'), *Good Morning, Midnight* pays homage to Dostoevsky's vision in *Notes from Underground* and fleshes out its blind spots, undoing the ironic distance of the author from the narrator, the narrating subject from the narrated subject, and the reader from the text. Dostoevsky's name never reappeared in Rhys's fiction after the publication of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* in 1931. However, Rhys mentioned it during an interview with David Plante in 1979:

All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. And there are trickles like Jean Rhys. All that

matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must feed the lake (Plante 1979, 247).

Not only does this remark suggest Rhys's admiration for Dostoevsky's work and her tendency to minimize her accomplishments, it also implies a conception of literature that is not based on the bourgeois notion of property. Authors do not own their books; once they are written, they are part of the lake. Immersion in the lake feeds the literary imagination. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Rhys consciously set out to rewrite *Notes from Underground*, in the process of creating Sasha Jensen she re-appropriated narrative and thematic elements from Dostoyevsky's novella: its double-voiced discourse, its exhibition of the consciousness of an alienated individual who longs for a connection with another human being yet finds perverse pleasure in wallowing in despair, and its ending, an emotionally charged affair with a prostitute that culminates in a life-and-death struggle.

While *Notes from Underground* is framed as the journal entries of a nameless protagonist whom Dostoevsky characterizes in a footnote as 'a representative of the current generation' in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg (Dostoevsky 1864, 3), *Good Morning, Midnight* is narrated in an oral mode, evoking Rhys's Dominican background; the reader has the sense of being alone with Sasha in her hotel room, listening to her speak out loud. The simplicity of her utterances provides a striking contrast to the rhetorical density of the Underground Man's notes, while the parallel structure of clauses and the repetition of certain words and phrases mirrors the speaker's lived experience of what it means to be a down-and-out woman in Paris of the 1930s:

My life.... is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I shall never be, looking-glasses

that I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on (Rhys 1986, 46).

While *Notes from Underground* is divided into two parts that split the Underground Man's polemic against determinism ('The Underground') from his memories of his youth ('Apropos of Wet Snow'), *Good Morning, Midnight* connects the protagonist's experience of her past with her present through songs and images of rooms and streets in Paris, London and Amsterdam. Unlike the Underground Man, Sasha exists outside of the discursive structures that constitute a link among male heirs of the Enlightenment. Hence she does not assume the role of ideologue, as Dostoevsky's protagonist does in the first half of his notes; she is not intent on proving that one plus one does not equal two or that human beings do not always act in their best interest. In her underground, streets have no name, houses step forward to crush 'the poor devil' without any money and faces are puppet-masks pulled by invisible strings. A victim of poverty and sexism, Sasha speaks back to the condescending Mr. Blank, her former British employer and a representative of an exploitative class patriarchal system, many years after his assault upon her ego. At the same time, she leaves Sasha's origins deliberately ambiguous to underscore her inability or unwillingness to be categorized. 'Will you think what you're told to think and say what you're told to say?' Sasha imagines her interlocutors asking, parodying their logic of identification. 'Are you red, white or blue – jelly, suet pudding or ersatz caviar?' (Rhys 1986, 92).

It is easy to see the influence upon Rhys' literary imagination of Dostoevsky's dystopian view of society. Just as the Underground Man satirizes Chernyshevsky's idealization of the Crystal Palace, Sasha mocks Rimbaud's utopian socialism (Rhys 1986, 105). Like the Underground Man, Sasha views human beings as cruel, egotistical and stupid, believers in the truths of clichés; in both texts, the other is the self's nemesis, particularly the Other of the Law. Sasha's memory of her encounter

with Mr. Blank functions as an analogue to the Underground Man's memory of his encounter with an arrogant policeman, with a difference: whereas the Underground Man's revenge (the deliberate collision of his body with the policeman's) is delayed by a few years, Sasha's revenge takes place on an imaginary level many years after Mr. Blank's humiliating treatment of her. She envisions herself telling her former employer:

Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple—no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. But I wish you a lot of trouble, Mr. Blank, and just to start with, your damned shop's going bust (Rhys 1986, 29).

Similarly, the conflict between Sasha's desire to be recognized by others and her desire to be left alone recalls the plight of Dostoevsky's anti-hero. Both characters attempt to control other people's images of their bodies through fashion choices: like the Underground Man, who exchanges his 'mangy' raccoon collar for one of 'splendid beaver' before he sets out to meet his rival in the form of the policeman (Rhys 1986, 37), Sasha takes three hours to choose a hat and spends an hour and a half each morning trying to 'look like everyone else' (Rhys 1986, 106). Both protagonists project their own and other people's hostility onto their surroundings: the clock in the Underground Man's room wheezes like a strangled man and exhales 'thin, nasty' and 'unexpectedly hurried' chimes (Rhys 1986, 59); the 'damned' room 'grins' at Sasha and the double-headed, four-armed man who plays the banjo, the subject of a painting given to her by a Russian artist, looks at her mockingly as he sings 'It has been' and 'It will always be' (Rhys 1986, 109). Yet Rhys defines her Underground woman against Dostoevsky's Underground Man. While he experiences his body as invisible, she experiences hers as hypervisible, as a

site of surveillance and a repository of other people's negative judgments. While other people's thoughts rarely intrude on his discourse, Sasha is besieged by a chorus of hostile, alien voices that become indistinguishable from her own voice as a speaking subject: 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' (Rhys 1986, 42) or 'Qu'est-ce que elle fout ici, la vieille?' (Rhys 1986, 53). Moreover, while Sasha's experience of poverty and victimization have had the effect of making her more conscious of the plight of the oppressed, for instance, of 'the girl who does all the dirty work and gets paid very little for it' whom she observes at a Parisian café (Rhys 1986, 105), the Underground Man's poverty does not endear him to the underdog. Indeed, given that he strikes his driver and withholds his servant's wages, we can infer that it may have had the opposite effect, intensifying his hatred of himself and others.

In all of her novels, Rhys foregrounds the social and historical limitations on our freedom: the place of our birth, our skin color and our social class determine, whether we like it or not, the shape of our lives. Moreover, no act is truly free since unconscious forces govern our behavior. We do not own our choices any more than authors own books; our interpretations of and reactions to events are always circumscribed by our psychosocial histories. Thus, Julia explains to Mr. Horsfield that everything she has done has always been 'the only possible thing to do' (Rhys 1931, 52); Sasha articulates her belief that 'things repeat themselves over and over again' (Rhys 1986, 66). In contrast, the Underground Man argues against a school of determinism that reduces man to 'a stop in an organ pipe' (Rhys 1986, 19). He emphasizes that man enjoys going against his own interest just to prove that he possesses free will, and contrasts him with the ant, which is programmed to begin and end with the hill.

Rhys' revision of Dostoevsky's underground anticipates the alternate phenomenology of vision elaborated by Kelly Oliver. In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Oliver argues against a recognition-based politics that relies on a notion of vision as either 'alienating or bridging' and of space as 'an empty abyss' (Oliver 2001, 12). According to the recognition-based theories of Hegel, Sartre, Lacan, Kristeva and Butler, to see is to confront the difference of the other from the self as threatening distance; the eye/'I' traverses the empty space between a subject and an object. Conversely, to be seen is to be turned into an object for another subject. Oliver proposes that we replace the paradigm of recognition with that of witnessing, which requires that we remain open and responsive to the other's subjectivity. Oliver identifies two forms of witnessing: 'eyewitness testimony based on first-hand knowledge' and 'bearing witness to something beyond recognition' which cannot be seen with one's eyes (Oliver 2001, 16). While the former connotes legal responsibility, the latter connotes religious faith: we bear witness when we listen to someone else's story with an open mind, accepting a version of the truth that cannot be assimilated to our own, when we testify to our own experience of trauma, sharing what we could not see when the other destroyed our inner witness.

As in her earlier work, *Subjectivity without Subjects* (1997), Oliver suggests that it is our notion of vision, and not vision per se, which is responsible for our alienation. She emphasizes that our eyes appear to be solid mirrors reflecting upon the world, but they are actually 'porous' and 'fluid', connected to tissues of bodies, elements and language (Oliver 2001, 191). The space between the seer and the seen is impregnated by elements that circulate through air and light. Hence vision can be seen as a form of touching, a movement through 'the tissues of bodies, the tissues of elements and the tissues of language' rather than as a 'reflection' 'on the smooth, hard resistance surface of a mirror' (Oliver 2001, 221). By loving, by bearing witness

to the other's subjectivity, we move beyond the subject-object boundaries of recognition to an awareness of our fundamental interconnectedness.

I want to rely on Oliver's paradigm of witnessing to show how Rhys revises the role of memory in Dostoevsky's narrative, lending it a positive function. Remembering is a painful but necessary act of agency for Sasha, for it enables her to bear witness to what she was unable to see when she was placed in the position of an object for another subject, as in the encounter with Mr. Blank. Sasha's room/womb is a bulwark against forgetting, or a temporary refuge from the irreversible loss of vision that results from aging, a degeneration of the body's tissues and organs that flattens events such as the death of one's baby and a trip to the hairdresser on the same plane of '[t]his happened, that happened'. After recalling an anecdote related to her by a stranger whose friend's wife attempted suicide, Sasha reflects that

It's not that these things happen or even that one survives them, but what makes life strange is that they are forgotten. Even the one moment that you thought was your eternity fades out and is forgotten and dies. This is what makes life so droll—the way you forget, and every day is a new day, and there's hope for everybody, hooray... (Rhys 1986, 141-2).

The loss of the ability to remember the experience of loss is more traumatic than the loss itself, Sasha suggests. The fact that the reader is positioned at a third remove from the narration of the event underscores that this tragic absence of affect is inevitable when memories are not lived through the body, when chains of discourse separate the narrator from the narrated. However, when it is connected to the body, the work of memory can undo the alienation of the self from the self and from the other. Thus Sasha 'pulls the past over [her] head like a blanket' in order to recuperate her inner vision as a space that transcends the walls of her hotel room to encompass all the rooms she ever lived in, all the streets she ever walked. Saying 'good morning'

to 'midnight' is not so much a resignation to despair (a way of saying 'good night' to 'morning') as it is a willed surrender to unconscious processes that elaborate traumatic events in images. Memory serves no such purpose in *Notes from Underground*; indeed, Dostoevsky's protagonist seems to recall his youth in 'Apropos of Wet Snow' in order to elaborate his thesis in 'Underground' that hyper-consciousness is both the source and symptom of alienation, 'a genuine, full-fledged disease' (Dostoevsky 1989, 3).

In order to illustrate how Rhys transforms the Underground Man's recognition-based subjectivity into the dynamics of witnessing in *Good Morning, Midnight*, it is worth contrasting specific scenes in both texts. *Notes from Underground* begins with the narrator's/'author's' laments about his physical and psychological health: the Underground Man describes himself in pathological terms, using adjectives like 'sick', 'spiteful' and 'unpleasant' (ibid.). Since he exposes the amoral basis of determinism later in his notes, we can infer that his self-exhibition was deliberately ironic, that he was parodying a man who relishes his sickness because it absolves him of the necessity of taking responsibility for his actions. Then, in a curious reversal, consciousness becomes the disease for which there is no cure: too much self-reflection leads to a Hamlet-like paralysis and to the dissolution of the subject's identity as he realizes that he is neither 'spiteful nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect' (Dostoevsky 1989, 4). His use of the disease metaphor to describe the individual who is afflicted with an acute consciousness undermines his anti-deterministic stance. For, according to the logic of this metaphor, both the disease of the hyperconscious man and the health of the man of action are functions of their respective natures. The Underground Man's discourse is full of such loopholes; it easily lends itself to a deconstructive approach.

Instead of ironically exhibiting her character/narrator's thoughts to the reader, Rhys begins her novel with two dynamic scenes of witnessing. First, the room bears witness to Sasha's experience of the past as inhabiting the present through its rhetorical question, 'Quite like old times?' Sasha then recalls a humiliating incident from the night before, which took place at a restaurant, the same setting as the pivotal scene of humiliation in the Underground Man's notes. A woman at the next table hums 'Gloomy Sunday', a song that Sasha likes, and, after being stood a few drinks by the woman's American friend and without an apparent motive, she bursts into tears. 'It was something I remembered', she tells the confused couple (Rhys 1986, 10). The woman adopts a defensive posture and makes it clear to Sasha that she has violated the rules of public decorum: 'Sometimes I'm just as unhappy as you are. But that's not to say that I let everybody see it' (ibid.). Ashamed, Sasha goes down into the lavabo, a descent that alludes to the topos of the underground. An interior monologue that reflects Sasha's psychic struggle follows:

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 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.... Never mind, here I am, sane and dry, with my place to hide in. What more do I want? (ibid.).

This mirroring scene recalls a very different one in 'Apropos of Wet Snow'. Having recognized the 'tall, strong, well-built figure' of his younger visitor, Liza, the Underground Man inadvertently looks at himself in a mirror as he approaches her. His recollection of his confrontation with his image is described in the same pathological terms as the opening statements of 'Underground':

My overwrought face appeared extremely repulsive; it was pale, spiteful and mean; and my hair was disheveled. 'It doesn't matter: I'm glad', I thought. 'In fact, I'm even delighted that I'll seem so repulsive to her; that pleases me...' (Dostoevsky 1989, 59).

Whereas the Underground Man identifies with the hostile face that he sees as if through someone else's eyes, Sasha experiences the discrepancy between her visible and her invisible body as an irreconcilable tension between different voices. She both imagines what other people see, a 'sane' woman whose hair has been 'shampooed and set', and testifies to the 'something' that 'always remains' beyond recognition, resurfacing as tears that flow 'out of the deep, dark river' of her eyes. Hence Rhys turns Dostoevsky's solid masculine imaginary into a fluid feminine one that bears witness to the process of witnessing. Consciousness is not a matter of static identifications that dissolve in a void, but rather, a doubling between inner and outer worlds. Moreover, whereas the Underground Man's oft-quoted question is merely rhetorical ['Can a man possessing consciousness ever fully respect himself? (Dostoevsky 1989, 11)], Sasha's self-directed questions ('What do I have to cry about?' and 'What more do I want?') become sources of self-inquiry and precipitate her plunge into underground rivers of memory.

Vision in *Good Morning, Midnight* is thus an inter-subjective as well as an intrapsychic phenomenon. Whereas the Underground Man is walled off from humanity by virtue of his egotism, Sasha is connected to numerous female others whose status is marginal. These others constitute what Jessica Benjamin has referred to as 'like subjects'. In her introduction of *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995), Benjamin writes:

When we recognize the outside other as a separate and equivalent center of

subjectivity, she is a 'like subject'. When, on the other hand, we identify with the other as inner representation, taking the other as an ideal of who we might become, we also set up a relation of 'like subjects' (Benjamin 1995, 7).

In one of the novel's many flashbacks, Sasha witnesses an exchange between an old Englishwoman and her daughter in a dress-shop. The former, 'a sturdy old lady with gay bold eyes', takes off her hat, revealing 'a white, bald skull with a fringe of gray hair'. She then tries on 'a hair-band, a Spanish comb, and a flower', much to the chagrin of her daughter, who tries to usher her mother out of the store (Rhys 1986, 22). Sasha stares coldly back at the daughter whose eyes meet hers in the long glass situated between two windows; her sympathy is clearly with the mother. When the daughter rebukes her mother as they are leaving the shop, Sasha experiences anger on the old woman's behalf:

I can see her face reflected in a mirror, her eyes still undaunted but something about her mouth and chin collapsing...Oh, but why not buy her a wig, several decent dresses, as much champagne as she can drink, all the things she likes to eat and oughtn't to, a gigolo if she wants one? One last flare-up, and she'll be dead in six months at the outset. That's all you're waiting for, isn't it? But no, you must have the slow death, the bloodless killing that leaves no stain on your conscience... (Rhys 1986, 23).

Here Sasha witnesses the tension between a mother's subjectivity and her subject-position, between her determination to remain undaunted in the face of her daughter's hissed admonishments and her vulnerability as an aged woman, which reveals itself in the collapse of her mouth and chin. The old Englishwoman functions as a 'like subject' in both senses of the term, as 'a separate but equivalent center of subjectivity' and as a representation of an ideal self: Sasha longs to be like her, proud and imperturbable as 'a Roman emperor' (Rhys 1986, 22) in the face of her grim interlocuter.

Benjamin's notion of 'like subjects' challenges the heterosexist Freudian assumption that ideal love and identificatory love are mutually exclusive. During an 'overinclusive phase of development', male and female subjects alike recuperate their pre-Oedipal desires for and identifications with both parents. Thus, Sasha desires the men and women with whom she identifies: Enno, the moneyless vagabond whom she marries; Lise, a friend whose name recalls that of the Underground Man's object of desire; an anonymous girl whom she sees in a bordel, whom Sasha confesses having loved in a conversation with Rene (although she disavows the erotic basis of her love for women, responding, 'Certainly not' to Rene's inquiry about whether she 'likes girls'). Rhys' portrayal of a homoerotic female friendship is unprecedented in the history of her fiction; its closest approximation occurs at the end of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, when Julia sees 'a slim woman with full, soft breasts' behind the counter of a café and thinks 'If I could talk to her, if I could go up to her and tell her all about myself and why I am unhappy, everything would be different afterwards' (Rhys, 1990, 184). However, Julia makes no attempt to break out of her self-imposed isolation.

Following Luce Irigaray, both Benjamin and Oliver have argued that wonder, a delight in the other's alterity that cannot be assimilated to the self, is the precondition for love. Sasha's relationship with Lise is marked by wonder: 'Everything about Lise surprises me—her gentleness, her extreme sentimentality, so different from what I had been led to expect in a French girl', Sasha reflects' (Rhys 1986, 133). At the same time, Sasha sees herself in Lise, who 'has nobody', 'doesn't think anybody likes her', struggles with jobs, and 'is afraid of her mother', who 'used to beat her as a child' (Rhys 1986, 133-4). The dialogue between Lise and Sasha gives way to a tearful embrace that resonates with Oliver's phenomenology of sight as fluid and vision as touching: 'Sitting in front of the flame blue, arms around each

other's waist, crying. No, life is too sad... My tears fall on her thick hair, which always smells so nice' (Rhys 1986, 134). Indeed, Sasha envisions woman's love as ineffable and corporeal: although she thinks that it is impossible to say why one loves people ('You might as well say you know where lightening is going to strike' [Rhys 1986, 160]), she knows that it is expressed in physical terms, as a touching that dismantles subject-object boundaries: '...I wanted to put my arms around her, kiss her eyes and comfort her', she thinks of the girl who works in a bordel, 'and if that's not love, what is?' (Rhys 1986, 161).

Through Sasha's memories of loving bonds with others, Rhys envisions an alternative to the view that self-other relationships are rooted in alienation. Her brief description of the non-hierarchical, loving relationship between Lise and Sasha serves as an ironic commentary on the Underground Man's sadistic treatment of Liza. Lise/Liza function as symbols of Christian virtue in both texts: their struggles with poverty and sexism do not destroy their kindness, generosity and compassion, qualities that are in demand in a world that pits weak against strong, the haves against the have-nots. Yet the Underground Man is incapable of bearing witness to Liza's suffering; he interrogates her rather than listens to her story, moralizes instead of putting his arms around her. Imprisoned in his egotism, he can only feign pity for her plight while attempting to dominate her through his re-appropriation of the bourgeois myth of the prostitute as a fallen woman in need of rescue by a moral man. Woman is the underground of the Underground Man, a space extending beyond the limits of his knowledge that he is afraid to explore. This space is represented in 'Underground' as a third alternative to the Crystal Palace, the aesthetic embodiment of Chernyshevsky's 'eternally indestructible' utilitarian ethics, and to the prison of hyperconsciousness: 'it isn't really the underground that is better, but something

different, altogether different, something that I long for, but will never be able to find!’ (Dostoevsky 1989, 26).

Rhys’ revision, then, aligns itself with Dostoevsky’s satirical view of the Underground Man while creating something ‘altogether different’, something utterly unlike Dostoevsky’s ironic exhibition of a labyrinthine consciousness. Imitating the circular structure of Rhys’ novel, I will return to the beginning of *Good Morning, Midnight* in order to read its nightmare imagery more closely. The image of the Exhibition frames the novel in the same way the image of the burning house at Coulibri frames *Wide Sargasso Sea*, positioning the protagonist in an ambiguous space between reality and dream. The dream is narrated as follows:

I am in a passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don’t want the way to the Exhibition--- I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This Way to the Exhibition... I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me, I say, ‘I want the way out’. But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking, ‘Just like me—always wanting to be different from other people’. The steel finger points along a long stone passage. This Way—This Way--- This Way to the Exhibition... (Rhys 1986, 13).

Carole Angier reads Rhys’ allusion to exhibitions in *Good Morning, Midnight* through the lens of Rhys’ biography, as ‘a punning image of the central truth of the book: that in it Sasha, constantly and against her will, makes an exhibition of herself; and that with it Jean, half against her will, makes an exhibition of Sasha’ (Angier 1991, 381). Without discounting this explanation, I would to draw attention to the intertextual function of Rhys’ trope and to its historical references. Since the Crystal Palace was built in London for the Great Exhibition of 1851, Rhys relates her

protagonist to Dostoevsky's through the narration of Sasha's dream. Like the Underground Man, Sasha wants the way out of this Western nightmare of utilitarianism; unlike him, she finds the way out by remembering through her body. Sasha's past is embodied in the second and third parts of the novel as a fluid space of memory. In the fourth part, Sasha and Rene visit the World Exhibition of Paris in 1937, slipping through the Trocadero entrance at night. This Exhibition displayed the pavilions of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, two major rivals, as well as the Spanish pavilion that housed Picasso's revolutionary *Guernica*. Sasha's observations are recorded in such a minimalist fashion that they are stripped of historical context, reflecting her sense of dislocation. The fact that she finds the fountains and the lights shimmering on the water 'cold' and 'beautiful' foreshadows the novel's denouement, for it is in this final section of the novel that she will lose her subjectivity and become a ghost, the counterpart of Dostoevsky's Underground Man.

In her dream, which takes place underground, in a tube station, Sasha never arrives at the Crystal Place. Instead, she is confronted by a man who claims to be her father:

Now a little man, bearded, with a snub nose, dressed in a long white night-shirt, is talking to me. 'I am your father', he says. 'Remember that I am your father'. But blood is streaming from a wound in his forehead. 'Murder', he shouts. 'Murder, murder'. Helplessly I watch the blood streaming. At least the 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 la ronde', he sings (Rhys 1986, 13).

As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, women writers' anxiety about violating the standards of a patriarchal literary establishment finds its way into the symbolic content of their novels (Gilbert and

Gubar 1979, 45-93). Given that Rhys' letters expressed profound misgivings about her revision of Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece, it is possible that she felt the same uneasiness about her revision of *Notes from Underground*. Thus her apprehension about tampering with Dostoevsky's work is transposed into Sasha's dream of murdering a father figure who, like the historical Dostoevsky, whose own father was murdered by serfs, was 'snub-nosed' and 'bearded'. Shortly after the narration of this dream, the commis, Sasha's ghostly male double, appears for the first time in Rhys' narrative. This mute, sardonic figure is the Underground Man transfigured, symbolically murdered and resurrected from the pages of Dostoevsky's text as 'the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion' (Rhys 1986, 35); like Dostoevsky's protagonist, he wears a white dressing-gown, a detail that becomes laden with significance by the final page of the novel, when Sasha thinks: 'Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one? That's very important'.

The intertextuality with Dostoevsky's novel is most apparent in the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight*. In both texts, a climactic, life-and-death struggle with a prostitute both affirms and negates the protagonist's desire to live, to belong fully to the world. René is a gigolo, a fellow outlaw and a mirror of Sasha's youthful, naïve self; like Dostoevsky's Liza, he represents a potential connection with humanity. However, whereas Liza functions as a symbol of a selfless love that the Underground Man is not capable of, René is morally ambiguous. Truth and lies are mixed up in his accounts of his life. Sasha's perception of the gigolo is in a constant state of flux: he is at once a sympathetic figure who has experienced his share of wounds and a macho opportunist who boasts about his sexual conquests. The Underground Man's relationship with Liza is less open to competing interpretations. After pretending to care about her salvation, he confesses his ulterior motives: 'I'd been humiliated, and I

wanted to humiliate someone else; I'd been treated like a rag, and I wanted to exert some power' (Dostoevsky 1989, 38).

Torn between desire and mistrust, Sasha rejects René's offer to spend the night together, only to find herself exhilarated when he appears in the landing of her hotel a few moments later: 'Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing—love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I had lost' (Rhys 1986, 177). A struggle in bed follows, likened by Sasha to 'a game played in the snow for a worthless prize' (Rhys 1986, 181). After René's smug confession that it was 'easy' for him to see that Sasha wanted him to follow her to her room and his vindictive characterization of her as an 'idiotic woman' who enjoys 'playing a comedy', Sasha avenges herself for her humiliation by belittling his suffering, thus undoing her role in René's eyes as a witness. 'You and your wounds—don't you see how funny they are?' she tells him. 'You did make me laugh. Other people's wounds, how funny they are! I shall laugh every time I think of you' (Rhys 1986, 184).

This recalls the Underground Man's 'confession' to Liza that he had been laughing at her the whole time he had been pretending to feel compassion. However, Sasha's sadism is as feigned as the Underground Man's is deliberate. When she instructs René to take the thousand-franc note in her dressing case, she thinks: 'Don't listen, that's not me speaking. Don't listen. Nothing to do with me—I swear it...' (Rhys 1986, 183). Sasha's rejection of René complicates Oliver's notion that it is our vision of vision alone that engenders alienation. Oliver does not address how a subject whose capacity for witnessing has been repeatedly violated could open herself to the possibility of love; because of this, she risks reifying witnessing into a metaphysical ideal. In both Dostoevsky's and Rhys's texts, heterosexual love is portrayed as a struggle for recognition that follows the terms of the master-slave dialectic. When Liza flings herself into the Underground Man's arms after his sordid

confession, the master momentarily exchanges places with the slave: she becomes the heroine and he becomes ‘a crushed and humiliated creature’ (Dostoevsky 1989, 85). Hence he sleeps with her and attempts to reassert his power over her by thrusting a five-ruble note into her hand. In contrast, Sasha lies on her bed with her arms over her eyes, not wanting to know whether or not René will take the thousand-pound note. Neither Liza nor René accept this humiliating gesture. Both the Underground Man and Sasha bitterly regret their ignoble actions and long for the return of their departed lovers. Yet no sooner does the Underground Man leave his hovel in pursuit of Liza than he stops to second-guess himself: if he begs for her forgiveness, he reasons, he will grow to hate her. He winds up using the Christian ideal of purification through suffering as a justification for his own sadism. Rhys writes a more ambiguous ending for her heroine, one which foregrounds both the tragic consequence of Sasha’s refusal of love and the possibility of redemption through an acknowledgement of the other’s alterity.

While Sasha lies in bed, she imagines that René has changed his mind and is walking back towards her hotel. She hears someone open her door and thinks of René, but she knows that her visitor is the commis before she opens her eyes. The denouement of *Good Morning, Midnight* involves a surrender to the traveling salesman, Rhys’s revision of the Underground Man. He is the only character in the novel that Sasha treats like an object: in an earlier scene, she puts her hand on his chest and pushes him backwards, thinking of his resemblance to ‘a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn’t quite exist’ (Rhys 1986, 35). If he inspires only fear and revulsion in Sasha, it is because Rhys needed to define Sasha’s vision against the Underground Man’s in order to be able to write her story at all. And in fleshing out the voice(s) of her underground woman, Rhys found it necessary to silence the Underground Man’s discourse (the only word he utters in the novel is ‘Nothing’) and

to exchange his torn, filthy robe for an immaculate white one, removing traces of blood from the scene of what she has imagined qua Sasha's nightmare as a literary patricide. However, by making Sasha mock René's wounds, Rhys connects Sasha's fate with the Underground Man's.

Looking into the eyes of the commis, Sasha 'despises another poor devil of a human being for the last time;' then she puts her arm around him and pulls him down on to the bed, saying: 'Yes—yes—yes...' (Rhys 1986, 190). Critics have read this 'yes' in one of two ways: as a life-affirming pronouncement that is analogous to Molly Bloom's 'yes' in Joyce's *Ulysses*, or as a surrender to an abyss of indifference that is the antithesis of love and hate. Rather than choose between these mutually exclusive interpretations, I propose that what Rhys depicts in this final scene is a reversal of a recognition-based vision. Instead of identifying with the commis or abjecting him from her consciousness as 'something that doesn't quite exist', Sasha now accepts his alterity, restoring his humanity. In so doing, she restores her inner witness, becoming the narrator of the book that we read.

Hence *Good Morning, Midnight* not only disengages itself from the modernist tradition, as Judith Kegan Gardner has argued (1983, 234), but it also anticipates feminist critiques of the discursively bound, split subject of postmodernism. By turning the Underground Man's rhetorical underground into an embodied, intersubjective space of memory, Rhys writes beyond a notion of vision as empty space, suggesting that our differences can be the basis of a more profound connection with each other. Her representation of marginalized female subjectivity undoes dualisms of mind and body and of subject and object that continue to inform Continental philosophy. Far from a 'trickle' in the 'lake' of great literature, then, Rhys's penultimate novel can be considered a river in its own right, one whose currents have stirred up the lake's depths.

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