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The Fragmented Self and Spatial Relations: Good Morning, Midnight and Mrs. Dalloway

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the fragmentation in the conception of self that arises from the conflict between individuality and society during the transitional era of modernity specifically in the works of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The ambiguities in Rhys's protagonist Sasha Jensen's and Woolf's character Peter Walsh's sense of belonging are investigated through the spaces they relate to and their social interactions. The relationship of these characters to certain social spaces and private places are examined in order to reveal how the shift into the modern era provokes a conflict between the subjective sense of self and the social self, resulting in a fragmented concept of self, as well as how this conflict is reconciled by the individuals in the novels.

Keywords

Identity
Literary Modernism
Concept of Self
Space

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Introduction

Andrej Gasiorek points out in *A History of Modernist Literature* that "literary modernism pivots around the twin crises of representation and subjectivity" and these crises reveal "a tension within modernism between opposing conceptions of self and world" (Gasiorek, 2015, p. 9). Surely, such tensions have prompted the creation of many literary works throughout history, however literary modernism captures the significance of representing the clash between the human urge to be a part of society and the inner desires that challenge the norms of that society, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of form. Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf portray this tension beautifully in the oscillation of individuals between the desire to belong and their individuality resulting from the changes that come with the entrance into the modern era. Sasha Jensen in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and Peter Walsh in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* embody the fragmentation of individuals between their individuality and society, their sense of self and social self, triggering the ambivalence in their sense of belonging to their era and society, which is represented in their relations with various social and personal spaces.

The Fragmented Self and Spatial Relations: *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Mrs. Dalloway*

Modernism's ambivalent relationship with the concept of space represented in the works of Rhys and Woolf arises from the massive changes modernity has brought about in the twentieth century. According to Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, the altered notions of space and time are the first "markers" of modernity to create the chain of change (Bauman, 2000/2006, p. 8). The swiftly developing technology leading the world to become a smaller place, the globalizing economy, "the rationalization of daily life, the growth of metropolises and the movement of people from the country to the city, and the development of 'mass' culture" build a "sense of crisis" as the world is rendered barely recognizable by these changes (Gasiorek, 2015, p. 7). Therefore, this sense of crisis related to the sense of losing track of time and space finds projection in new forms of expression through Modernist aesthetic, such as the stream of consciousness method that breaks the linear notion of time, also utilized by Woolf and Rhys in their works. As Philip Tew and Alex Murray state in the introduction to *The Modernism Handbook*, "the space of Modernism, never singular and locatable, [is] always multiple and ambivalent" (Tew & Murray, 2009, p. 5). In *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the multiplicity and ambivalence of space is underlined with the characters' relations to it. Woolf's Peter Walsh and Rhys's Sasha Jensen try to reconcile their conflicting sense of belonging due to the ambivalence between their need for inclusion into society, the obligation to wear social masks, and their own individuality that enables them to see through the masks of others through their flux between different places, countries, cities and rooms, as well as the meanings they attach to these spaces.

Good Morning, Midnight's Sasha Jensen's ambiguous relationship with space is traced by critics to Jean Rhys's Caribbean origins in that there is a "mystery surrounding [the] heroine's background" as Erica Johnson observes in "Creole Errance in *Good Morning, Midnight*" (Johnson, 2003, p. 37). Having been born in the Caribbean, moved to England at a young age, and having been involved in the circle of famous English writers like Ford Madox Ford, Jean Rhys embodies the in-betweenness of un/belonging and the fragmentation of identity both due to the dislocation of migration and the transformations arising with modernity in her novel. Therefore, Sasha's relation to spaces of private and public spheres reveal the fragmented subjectivity in these spheres and the difficulty of keeping up with the speed of the modern world for the individual, especially for the outcast.

In a scene when the painter Serge is showing Sasha the West African mask he bought from Congo, Sasha thinks to herself "I know that face very well; I've seen lots like it, complete with legs and body" that have asked her "are you one of us? Will you think what you're told to think and say what you ought to say?" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 400). So, she is very much aware of how the social selves of people are mediums of conformity, of pretending to possess a sense of unity and wholeness in society. Bauman points out to the difference between the individual and citizen in the modern times, explaining that "the individual is the citizen's worst enemy" because "the 'citizen' is a person inclined to seek her or his own welfare through the well-being of the city – while the individual tends to be lukewarm, sceptical or wary about 'common cause'," which is actually a conflict in the modern society (Bauman, 2000/2006, p. 36). In this sense, Sasha is an individual rather than a citizen, who sees through the masks of the citizens. Also, describing herself as "an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray" with a "market value" of "four hundred francs a month" in the eyes of her former boss Mr. Blank, she is aware that she does not comply with the conditions that turn an individual into a citizen (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 360). This awareness is the basis upon which her sense of self is established as a defensive and solitary individual, hence her desire to be away from people whom she regards as deceptive and masked. Nevertheless, despite claiming that she "want[s] one thing and one thing only – to be left alone," Sasha constantly puts herself in places where she will inevitably have social interactions, forcing herself to put on her "tortured and tormented mask" by playing the role of a social self to fulfil a sense of belonging in different social or private spaces due to her desire for connection (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 369-370).

Sasha constantly finds distractions for herself in social spaces, whether it is buying a hat in a small hat store, having a drink at a café or having her hair dyed blond at the hairdresser's. She associates the spaces outside her current residence, the hotel in Paris currently, with human connection, which she lacks in her private life and personal space. For instance, while the hairdresser is touching her hair, although she usually takes pills to sleep, she feels like she "could go to sleep" with "his fingers touching [her] hair" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 381). Afterwards, she feels peaceful as if "possessed by something" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 382). The connection she feels with another being gives her a sense of peace that she cannot find when she is alone in her hotel room. Furthermore, when she goes "past the baker's shop at the corner of the street," the baker "comes out, with a long loaf of bread, smiles at [her] and waves gaily," she waves back (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 373). This interaction "for a moment" enables her to "escape from [her]self" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 373). Her wish to escape herself comes from not only her painful awareness of the assimilation and conformity in the social masks, but also from the reason underneath that awareness. Her personal traumas in the past have revealed to her the failure and transience of human connection in the modern city, including the loss of her baby, seeing her baby with a name tag on his ankle, her divorce with Enno, her falling out with her family, her inability to (or desire not to) keep to a steady job. Ultimately, as Emma Zimmerman underlines in her article "'Always the same stairs, always the same room': The Uncanny Architecture of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*," "marginalized by her female identity, lack of economic independence, failed sexual relations, and severed connection from her ambiguous cultural origins" (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 82), Sasha is awakened to the discrepancy between the citizen and the individual, having realized her position as an individual.

Considering that "society [has] always stood in an ambiguous relation to individual autonomy: it was, simultaneously, its enemy and its *sine qua non* condition" (Bauman,

2000/2006, p. 40), Sasha becomes both an enemy to society, an outcast due to her individuality, and an inseparable part of it. As Carla Martínez del Barrio suggests in "Gendered Urban Spaces and Strangeness in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)," Sasha "is recognized repeatedly as a stranger: in the hotel she stays in, in the cafés she goes to, in the park, in clothing stores, at restaurants" (Martínez del Barrio, 2021, p.141). So, this ambiguous relationship betweeen society and individual autonomy is mutual on Sasha's part as she also cannot separate herself from this entity that neither accepts nor removes her. As "the canvases resist" when Delmar tries to put them in frames and "curl up," not "want[ing] to go into the frames," Sasha resists the frames of society's norms (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 405). Nonetheless, Delmar "pushes and prods them so that they go in and stay in, in some sort of fashion" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 405) and Sasha also finds ways to fit into society in her own sort of fashion, out of place in an in-between state, desiring to make connections but unable to exist within masks. So, she fulfils her desire for recognition in different spaces through interacting with others, whether it is the hairdresser deeming her new hair "a success" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 382) or whether it is the looks of the workers at a bar that she perceives as demeaning (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 408). In order to get rid of the "cringing desire to explain [her] presence in the place," she asks for the location of the nearest cinema, pleading internally to be recognized that she is "like you," like others (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 409). Thus, Rhys reveals Sasha's inner struggle between a social self (trying to be) like the others and a sense of self that desires to be left alone.

Maren Linett emphasizes in "'New Words, New Everything': Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys" that "with their polyvocal, nonlinear narration," novels like *Good Morning Midnight* "exemplify modernist fragmentation while intimating a deeper sense of pain and loss than most accounts of such fragmentation acknowledge" (Linett, 2005, p. 437). Apart from the nonlinear narration that goes back and forth between past and present and among different spaces, Sasha's relation to these spaces also underline her own fragmentation between individuality and society, especially her relation to her hotel room. Sasha frequently feels that she has "no pride, no name, no face, no country" and she does not "belong anywhere" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 370). Sometimes she feels that the hotel room "welcomes [her] back" and she says "here I belong and here I'll stay" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 367), but sometimes she feels that the room is fooling and mocking her, "spring[ing] out at [her], laughing, triumphant" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 454). Clearly, Sasha's conflicting relationship with her hotel room is a projection of her disturbed sense of belonging that has arisen from her fragmented self between society and individuality.

Hotel rooms connect Sasha to her past and the present simultaneously, as it is sensed from the very first sentence of the novel when the room asks her "quite like the old times […] Yes? No?" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 347). After putting the painting by Serge in her room, she feels that "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" (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 411). As Zimmerman underlines, "the hotel exists as an in-between space" including "the confusion of the private and public spheres" (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 79), and in this case, also including the past and the present for Sasha. This confusion of spheres not only signals to the changes in modernity that have caused the borders between spheres to become blurred, but it also points out to the fragmentation between the sense of self and social self caused by them, to the ambiguity between melting into society and maintaining individuality. Always an ambiguous relationship in modernist literature, the past and present's intermingling brings out the underlying reason for the

fragmentation in Sasha: the trauma of her own personal history and the inability to match the past and present in the modern era.

Peter Walsh in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* also carries a similar ambivalent relationship with his sense of un/belonging caused by his fluctuation between society and individuality, which is revealed in how he relates to different places. First of all, similar to Sasha's mixed origins, Peter Walsh comes from a "respectable Anglo-Indian family" and he has conflicting feelings about both countries (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 47). He has sentiments "about […] disliking India, and empire, and army" although sometimes there are "moments when civilization, even of this sort, seem[s] dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; girls in their security" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 47). These conflicting sentiments about disliking but being proud of England from time to time reveals Peter's ambivalent relationship with the notions of nationality, society and belonging.

As Sasha is rendered an "individual" rather than a "citizen" for many reasons including her economic and social status, Peter also falls into the same category for similar reasons, which widens the gap between the society that surrounds him and his sense of self. Similar to Sasha, Peter recognizes the social masks that people wear, such as Clarissa's role of the "perfect hostess" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 53). He knows how she plays her role, which can be seen when she "stiffen[s] a little" to "stand at the top of her stairs" at her party (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 15). In contrast with the rest of the characters in the novel, he is "careless of all these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing-rods, spruce old men wearing white slips beneath their waistcoats" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 46). He does not care for proprieties, the necessities to be considered a part of society. Also, he does not have a job as he reveals when he is comparing himself to Hugh Whitbread that "he, who [is] two years older than Hugh," is cadging "for a job" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 63). This already puts him below and out of the society he interacts with. Thus, according to the other characters, "his whole life [has] been a failure" like Sasha's (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 7). He is also aware of how he is categorized as a "failure […] in the Dalloways' sense" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 37). He is aware of the necessities of becoming a citizen and that he does not fit the recipe, which further disrupts his sense of belonging.

Peter defines himself based on his ability to move between places. Thanks to his voyages, the earth is "an island to him" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 44). He is an "adventurer," a "traveller" to himself (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 45/ 49). He not only criticizes Clarissa for her "social instinct" that causes her to act differently than she is (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 53), but he also looks down on her because of her immobility, juxtaposing his definition as a traveller with hers as a perfect immobile hostess. Peter thinks to himself when he sees Clarissa in the same room as five years ago that "this has been going on all the time […] week after week; Clarissa's life" has been in the same rooms while he has been on his "journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 37). According to Paul Tolliver Brown's article "The Spatiotemporal Topography of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*: Capturing Britain's Transition to a Relative Modernity," "Woolf's central characters are caught in a historical transition that is moving apace more rapidly than they are" (Brown, 2015, p. 25). Thus, Peter's movement between places and seeing life as "sailing" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 103) become a part of his subjectivity, which justifies his failures for him, makes him feel better about himself and creates an excuse for his ambiguous sense of belonging, even making this ambiguity a part of his identity.

Furthermore, Peter cares less for manners and more for humanly features as we understand from his impression of Hugh Whitbread, whom he observes to have "no heart, no brain, nothing but the manners and breeding of an English gentleman" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 6). So, social and financial status mean little to him, revealing the elements that have enabled him to build his sense of self. He questions the concepts that establish the notion of failure and regards people like Hugh or Clarissa to be the ones who are failing in living life, once more justifying his individuality (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 37). Even though "the repeated metaphor" of being an adventurer might be interpreted by some to be "underscor[ing] Peter's role," and to be supporting that "he does not contemplate the depths but rather journeys on the surface" as Johanna X. K. Garvey interprets in "Difference and Continuity: The Voices of *Mrs. Dalloway*" (Garvey, 1991, p. 68), Peter's depiction of himself as being an adventurer actually serves a deeper purpose of building his sense of self. When Peter defines himself as an "adventurer" or "traveller," he also defines the basis of his individuality and gives his presence and outcastness a meaning, like when Sasha asks the waiter for the location of the cinema to prove her presence at the bar (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 409). Peter emphasizes that he is the one who can "sail" through life, unafraid to feel and move.

Like Sasha's proneness for loneliness, Peter also emphasizes that "at the age of fifty-three, one scarcely need[s] people," as opposed to Clarissa, who "need[s] people, always people" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 67). This explains his ability to move from place to place without anything to bind him to one single place, person or nationality. However, regardless of how much he believes he does not need people, his desire to belong surfaces from time to time, pushing him to wear his mask and take up his social self. For instance, right after claiming that "one doesn't want people after fifty," he remembers his jealousy over Daisy "meeting with Major Orde," her husband she is trying to divorce (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 68). It appears that even though he considers himself inclined towards loneliness, ultimately he needs somewhere or someone to belong to. This is also clear in his love relations that follow one after the other, with Clarissa, with the lady he got married to on the ship to India, with Daisy.

Therefore, just as Sasha finds connection in social spaces to reconcile her individuality and social self in a sense of belonging, Peter does the same in London. For instance, at a restaurant where he is eating dinner alone, he meets a couple. Upon this interaction, Peter "feel[s] very well pleased with himself, for the Morrises liked him" because he talked about "Bartlett pears" (Woolf, 1925/2009, pp. 135-136). Even though he claims to desire loneliness and disregard social proprieties, he feels pleased with himself for creating this connection. Moreover, despite judging Clarissa for her perfect hostess role, he chooses to go to her party at their house. The Dalloways' house represents everything Peter cannot keep up with and include himself in. "The lighted house, where the door [stands] open, where the motor cars [are] standing," represents the newness, the extravaganza, the glory of modern society that regards Peter as a failure (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 140). Still, he makes himself participate because "the brain must wake now" from its individuality for a temporary period in a social engagement (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 140).

One of the most significant moments that quench his sense of belonging is when he sees a young woman in Trafalgar Square and begins to follow her through the streets of London (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 45). As he is following her, he feels "connected" to her and the city, even "the random uproar of the traffic" whispers "his name, not Peter, but his private name […] 'you', she" says (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 45). This adventure creates a brief connection and

"escapade" for him, "made up, as one makes up the better part of life" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 46). It makes him feel like a part of the city, recognized and interpellated. This escapade is required because he needs a connection to the city, to somebody, in order to feel like he belongs. Like Sasha, he can neither completely belong, nor be excluded from society altogether. He somehow fits into the frames in his own fashion.

The hotel room has a different meaning for Peter than it has for Sasha. While for her, the room is filled with meanings, for Peter, the hotel room is "barren" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 131). The hotel becomes once more "a potent site for exploring questions of home, belonging, identity," this time as a blank slate (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 79). Peter cannot associate any sense of belonging with the hotel room, he sees it as a transient space where "even the flies […] had settled on other people's noses" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 131). Being such an impersonal space, far from any associations, Peter's hotel room is juxtaposed against London, the city of connections and liveliness, refusing to let the evening go (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 137). These connections become the driving force that gets Peter out of that "impersonal" hotel room topped with Clarissa's letter as impersonal as the room itself (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 132). As Peter "trip[s] through London, towards Westminster, observing," he sees places filled with experiences and connections (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 139). "Through the uncurtained window, the window left open," he sees "parties sitting over tables, young people slowly circling, conversations between men and women" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 138). Faced with the utter emptiness of the hotel room, followed by the small interaction with the Morrises to remind him the desire for connection in him, the streets of London, the party at Clarissa's call him for a little sense of belonging, of communicating and connecting.

Both novels end with a compensated sense of belonging through connecting with another person, even if temporarily and scarcely. Sasha faces her own protective mask and accepts a chance of connection that she has refused many times before. After refusing to connect with and talk to René based on her assumption that he wants her money, Sasha remains insistent on her distrust until the very last part when René leaves her hotel room without taking the money because he is hurt over her assumption about him, which makes her face herself. Upon facing her protective mask she wears to keep people away from her, she feels regretful about her refusal of a connection on a sentimental and physical level with René. Her epiphany brings another chance for her to compensate the lost connection and she accepts it by wrapping her arms around her neighbour, the man in the pyjamas that she has been curious about all along, who comes to the room because he hears the sounds of her argument with René (Rhys, 1939/1985, p. 462). This final connection takes place at her hotel room, the symbol of her inner conflicts and fragmented self, shedding a light on another chance to reconcile the ambiguity in her sense of belonging.

Peter, on the other hand, reconciles his individuality with his social self by finally accepting that "he prefer[s] human beings" to "cabbages" (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 163), putting his criticisms of "the snobbery of the English" aside, even if for the time being (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 146). His sense of belonging is reconciled with one more connection to Clarissa that "fills [him] with extraordinary excitement" and makes his soul feel alive once more (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 165). This final connection also takes place at a place that symbolizes Peter's fragmented self between his social self and his individuality. It takes place at the party at the Dalloways' house, which is a symbol of what Peter cannot live up to, a symbol of masks, but also a symbol of connection and coming together in the shape of Clarissa's party because

bringing people together is the meaning of life for her (Woolf, 1925/2009, p. 103). So, "the comforting feeling of belonging – the reassuring impression of being part of a community" weighs heavier at this party for Peter (Bauman, 2000/2006, p. 99), where he also finds another outcast as himself, Sally Setton. Although it cannot be "a togetherness of sheer likeness" (Bauman, 2000/2006, p. 100) for Sasha or for Peter, which is how Bauman depicts the feeling of unattainable ideal communal togetherness, their physical and emotional connection to these people momentarily rupture the barrier between their individuality and the society, their past and present, and their social selves and sense of self.

Conclusion

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," an essay on the literature of modernity, Woolf invites the reader to "tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure" and not to "expect just at present a complete and satisfactory presentment" as modernity has arrived in need of new forms of expressions and modernism bears the fragments of time, space, identity and society that it requires (Woolf, 1924/2000, p. 757). In this sense, Virginia Woolf herself and Jean Rhys portray and reveal the fragmentary, the failure and the obscure in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. They question the notion of belonging in the modern era by revealing the ambiguous relationship between the individual and society through the individual's relation to different spaces.

The fragmentary selves that emerge a result of Sasha and Peter's conception of their selves and their reluctance to be a 'citizen' are negotiated through these different spaces and their interactions with others. This negotiation demonstrates "a tension within modernism between opposing conceptions of self and world," namely the conceptions about whether the self belongs in the world or if the self wishes to detach from the world (Gasiorek, 2015, p. 9). This tension lies at the root of both Sasha and Peter's struggles within and outside society. They oscillate between their desire to be recognized by and to belong to society, and to remain as individuals on the margin, unattached from the conflicts and responsibilities of the modern era and the connections it entails.

To conclude, Woolf and Rhys's two characters, along with their struggles and reconciliations, reveal a pattern in the modern outcast, who is trying to remain a relevant subject "in a world whose cultural, economic, political and social coordinates [are] being altered almost beyond recognition" (Gasiorek, 2015, p. 8). The private and public spheres of the city, which is one of the ultimate symbols of modernism and its transformative effects, brings about both the challenges Sasha and Peter face, as well as their ways of coping with these inner and outer challenges. In the end, they finally find a common ground with their individuality and 'citizenship' through temporary connections that spark an individual sense of belonging for them, even if it is not a communal one.

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