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Mapping the Existential Anti-heroine in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* Jean Rhys'in *Günaydın Gece Yarısı* Romanında Varoluşsal Kadın Anti-kahraman Figürünün Çözümlemesi

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Özet: Jean Rhys'in *Günaydın Gece Yarısı* (1939) romanında, kendini Sasha olarak yeniden adlandıran başkarakter Sophia Jansen, Paris sokaklarında psikolojik ve varoluşsal bir askıda kalma hali içinde dolaşan, çok katmanlı ve çelişkili bir anti-kadın kahraman olarak karşımıza çıkar. Sasha'nın çok yönlü karakterini inceleyerek, bu çalışma onun anti-kahramanlık özelliklerini öncelikle cinsiyete dayalı bir sapma olarak değil, parçalanmışlık, dayanıklılık ve varoluşsal istikrarsızlıkla tanımlanan modernist bir durum olarak ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, Sasha'nın kahraman karşıtı özelliklerinin eylemlerini, ilişkilerini ve en önemlisi hayatta kalma biçimini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Güç, erdem ya da dirayet gibi özellikleri bünyesinde barındıran geleneksel kadın kahramanların aksine, Sasha psikolojik parçalanmışlık, edilgenlik ve hayal kırıklığı ile tanımlanır. Rhys romanında, içsel monologlar ve parçalı anlatı yapısı aracılığıyla, yabancılaşma, kendine zarar verme eğilimleri ve tutarlı bir kimlikten kopuşu ile lineer anlatı akışına direnç gösteren bir başkarakter yaratmıştır. Sasha'nın umutsuzluğa sürüklenişi, bellek ve zamanla olan gergin ilişkisi, herhangi bir doğrusal gelişim sürecini istikrarsızlaştırır ve onu bunun yerine askıda kalmış bir varoluşun modernist manzarası içinde konumlandırır. Şimdiye kadar Sasha, psikolojik olarak derinlikli bir karakter ve modernist bir kadın başkahraman olarak değerlendirilmiş olsa da, bu çalışma onu, zafer, arınma veya yeniden bütünlüğe ulaşma hayatta kalışı gerçekleşen bir varoluşsal kadın anti-kahraman olarak öne çıkarmaktadır. Bu makale, anti-kahraman teorisi ve modernist öznelik anlayışlarından yararlanarak, Sasha'nın kişiliğinin temel yönleri olan alaycılık, parçalanmış kimlik, yabancılaşma, yalnızlık, edilgenlik, kendine yönelen yıkıcılık, duygusal kopukluk ve hayal kırıklığı gibi özellikleri üzerinden onun anti-kahraman kimliğini irdelemektedir. Sasha'nın acı verici, çözümsüz ve kurtarılamaz azmi, nihayetinde dönüşümün kahramanca mantığına meydan okuyarak, hayatta kalmayı, hayal

Abstract: In Jean Rhys's penultimate novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), the protagonist Sophia Jansen, who renames herself Sasha, emerges as a complex anti-heroine wandering through the streets of Paris in a state of psychological and existential suspension. Examining Sasha's multifaceted character, this study explores the contours of her anti-heroism not primarily as a gendered deviation but as a modernist condition defined by fragmentation, endurance, and ontological instability. It explores how her anti-heroic traits shape her actions, relationships, and, most significantly, her mode of survival. Unlike traditional heroes/heroines who embody strength, virtue, or resilience, Sasha represents psychological fragmentation, passivity, and disillusionment. Through interior monologues and a fractured temporal structure, Rhys has constructed a protagonist whose alienation, self-destructive impulses, and estrangement from coherent identity resist linear narrative progression. Sasha's descent into despair and fraught relationship with memory and time destabilize any linear trajectory of growth, situating her instead within a modernist landscape of suspended becoming. While Sasha has frequently been read as a psychologically complex modernist heroine, this study foregrounds her as an existential anti-heroine whose survival unfolds without triumph, catharsis, or reintegration. Drawing on anti-hero theory and modernist conceptions of subjectivity, the essay investigates Sasha's anti-heroine status by analyzing her traits like cynicism, fragmented identity, alienation, loneliness, passivity, self-destructive tendencies, emotional detachment, and disillusionment, which are fundamental aspects of her persona. Sasha's persistence – painful, unresolved, and unredeemed – ultimately challenges the heroic logic of transformation, presenting survival itself as a stark assertion of existence within a disenchanting modern world. Ultimately, the study concludes that *Good Morning, Midnight* redefines the parameters of the anti-heroine by recasting anti-heroism as a mode of

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kırıklığı dolu modern bir dünyada varoluşun keskin bir ifadesi olarak sunar. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, *Günaydın Gece Yarısı*'nın, anti-kahramanlığı zaferin yerini sebatın, çözümün yerini belirsizliğin aldığı ve hayatta kalmanın yapısal olarak çözümlenmemiş modernist bir vizyon içinde radikal ama kurtarıcı olmayan bir varoluş iddiası olarak ortaya çıkan bir şekilde, görkemden arındırılmış bir dayanma biçimi olarak yeniden kurgulayarak, kadın anti-kahramanın sınırlarını yeniden tanımladığını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın Anti-kahraman, Sasha Jansen, *Günaydın Gece Yarısı*, Jean Rhys

endurance stripped of grandeur, where persistence replaces victory, ambiguity replaces resolution, and survival itself emerges as a radical yet unredemptive assertion of existence within a modernist vision that remains structurally unresolved.

Keywords: Anti-heroine, Sasha Jansen, *Good Morning, Midnight*, Jean Rhys

Introduction

Jean Rhys's penultimate novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) is defined as "her masterpiece, mordantly funny and at times highly satirical, very stylized and brilliantly observed" (Savory, 2009, p. 66). The novel takes its title from the first line of an untitled poem by Emily Dickinson, the half of which is featured on the cover page of the novel. The story in *Good Morning, Midnight* follows the protagonist, Sophia Jansen, who restyles herself as Sasha, as, firstly, she stays in a hotel room and then walks through the streets of Paris in the 1930s, grappling with a sense of estrangement and disconnection from both her surroundings and herself. Rhys employs the stream of consciousness technique, yet in an intricate form of it, in this novel. The novel is divided into four: The first part is the longest one covering Sasha's settling into her stay in Paris and meeting a gigolo. In the second part, Sasha meets Russian artists, Delmar and Serge. The third part includes many short memories and the story of Sasha's past failed marriage to Enno. In the last part, Sasha is depicted as moving towards her devastating end, in which she "submits to a meaningless sexual encounter with the repulsive traveling salesman, the commis voyageur, who in her fantasy turns into her friend, the gigolo" (Konzett, 2002, p. 160). The novel has little plot, rendering Sasha's daily activities such as wandering, going back to her hotel room, shopping, eating, drinking and sleeping. Yet it includes Sasha's reminiscences of her past, which make up a significant portion of the story. Portrayed as a woman in her forties with no family, Sasha appears hapless, vulnerable, and destitute as she resides in a small hotel room in Paris. Having long relied on her appeal to men for survival, she now faces the daunting challenge of aging and the looming fear of a future marked by perpetual poverty and purposelessness. Aimlessly wandering the city streets, she seeks solace in bars, only to drown her sorrows in alcohol before retreating to her room, where she turns to the sedative luminal to induce sleep.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Jean Rhys constructs Sasha Jansen as an existential anti-heroine whose cynicism, psychological fragmentation, emotional passivity, and self-destructive behaviour challenge not only traditional notions of female agency but also the broader heroic logic of narrative development and redemption. Rather than tracing a trajectory of growth or reintegration, the novel presents a protagonist suspended between memory and present reality, estranged from both her surroundings and herself. Sasha's life unfolds through repetitive cycles of wandering, drinking, remembering, and retreating—gestures that signify persistence rather than progress. Aging, economically precarious, and emotionally detached, she survives not through triumph or transformation but through endurance.

While Sasha has often been read through gender-cantered frameworks as a marginalized woman negotiating patriarchal structures, this study approaches her primarily as an existential anti-heroine shaped by modernist instability. By examining traits such as cynicism, fragmented identity, passivity, emotional detachment, self-destructive tendencies, alienation, loneliness, and pervasive disillusionment, this analysis seeks to unravel the structural features of her anti-heroic condition. These characteristics are not incidental weaknesses but defining elements of a subjectivity marked by ontological uncertainty and suspended becoming.

Furthermore, by analysing how these anti-heroic traits shape Sasha's actions, relationships, and worldview, the study demonstrates how her fractured consciousness resists coherence, linear progress, and

narrative closure. Memory does not offer resolution; time does not secure development; survival does not culminate in redemption. Approaching Sasha in this way reveals a protagonist whose existence unfolds within a state of unresolved persistence, where endurance replaces victory and ambiguity supplants transformation. Through this portrayal, Rhys reconfigures anti-heroism as a modernist mode of survival stripped of grandeur, positioning Sasha not as a failed heroine nor merely as a victim, but as a figure whose continued existence constitutes a stark, unredemptive assertion of being. Before examining Sasha's character in detail, it is therefore necessary to clarify the concept of the anti-hero and to outline the defining traits that will serve as the framework for this analysis. Although Sasha Jansen embodies a broader spectrum of anti-heroic qualities, this study is necessarily limited in scope. It therefore concentrates primarily on those characteristics that intersect with existential concerns—such as cynicism, alienation, ontological uncertainty, fragmentation, emotional detachment, and suspended becoming. Other dimensions of her anti-heroism, while undoubtedly significant, remain beyond the boundaries of the present discussion.

The Anti-Hero/Heroine: Definition and Distinguishing Characteristics

Simply defined “the antihero is a main character in a literary work who is not heroic” (Anderson, 2016, p. 11), “an unheroic or inadequate protagonist of a story or drama” (Birch and Hooper, 2012, p. 266). The anti-hero is a character who lacks conventional nobility of mind, and who struggles for values not deemed universally admirable. He is “a non-hero, or the antithesis of a hero of the old-fashioned kind who was capable of heroic deeds, who was dashing, strong, brave and resourceful” (Cuddon, 1998, pp. 42-43). An anti-hero lacks conventional heroic qualities and attributes such as idealism, courage, and morality, so he is not a hero in the traditional sense, rather he is someone who is not able to act courageously or heroically. He does not “conform to the pattern of the old-fashioned kind” and “is generally bound to fail” (Bozkurt, 1977, p. 94). As Rebecca Stewart (2016) observes, the figure of the anti-hero, which is seemingly paradoxical, appears widely across literature, film, and television. Though often associated with the modern era, its roots go back to works like Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), which subverts “the idea of a hero within the novel” (p. 7). She also notes that “throughout literature we encounter protagonists that are ineffectual, flawed and seemingly contain no qualities that relate to heroism” (Stewart, 2016, p. 7). Anti-heroes are the “demythologization of the respective heroic figure[s]” and reductions of the “traditional heroic qualities” (Simmons, 2008, p. x). Having “an ancient lineage”, the anti-hero is “a type who is incompetent, unlucky, tactless, clumsy, cack-handed, stupid, buffoonish” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 43). M. H. Abrams (1999) refers to this type of character as a “nonheroic protagonist” and contrasts his flaws with the virtues of a hero: “Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism” like the traditional protagonist, “the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest” (p. 11). The term anti-hero in literature encompasses a wide and often contradictory range of character types, as illustrated by Ihab Hassan (1995) by the following vivid description: “In fiction, the unnerving rubric “antihero” refers to a ragged assembly of victims: the fool, the clown, the hipster, the criminal, the poor sod, the freak, the outsider, the scapegoat, the scrubby opportunist, the rebel without a cause, and the hero in the ashcan and hero on the leash” (p. 55). Despite the fact that “most antiheroes are unlikeable or even despicable”, they are not “outright villains because the reader sympathizes with them and roots for them” (Anderson, 2016, p. 11). Brombert (1999) describes the typical traits of the anti-hero as including “lack of courage, the habit of procrastinating and of seeking refuge in sleep, fear of emotional involvement, [and] hypochondriacal behavior” (p. 66). Yet these characteristics only gain meaning because, as Brombert (1999) also states, “the antihero can exist only if the heroic model remains present in absentia, by preterition” (p. 66). In other words, an anti-hero is defined in contrast to a hero. Even if a narrative contains no traditional heroic figure, the cultural idea of heroism is still there, silently shaping how we understand the anti-hero. The anti-hero functions precisely because the reader knows what a ‘real’ hero would look like and recognizes that this character diverges from the ideal.

Although the term anti-hero is widely used in contemporary criticism as a gender-neutral designation, the female equivalent anti-heroine remains available and, in certain contexts, analytically useful. In this study, I adopt the term anti-heroine to underscore the existential and modernist dimensions of a female protagonist whose resistance lies not in conventional heroism or moral triumph but in enduring a fragmented, disillusioned, and suspended existence. At the same time, for the sake of terminological consistency and stylistic clarity, I employ the adjectival and nominal forms anti-heroic and anti-heroism, which function as gender-neutral descriptors within the broader critical framework. Understood in this way, the anti-heroine emerges as a complex and multifaceted figure whose deviation from traditional heroic

paradigms challenges dominant constructions of narrative closure, linear development, and teleologies of growth. Although anti-heroes/heroines may sometimes perform actions that are morally correct, it is not always for the right reasons, often acting primarily out of self-interest or in ways that defy conventional ethical codes. Anti-heroes/heroines can be liars, vulgar, violent, angry, incredulous, and sarcastic. An anti-hero may exhibit some or all of the following qualities: Cynicism, selfishness, self-destructive behaviour, anti-social behaviour, showing little or no remorse for their bad actions, being realistic, having unorthodox methods to do the things, and experiencing internal struggle.

Ihab Hassan, exploring the prominence and function of the anti-hero, points out that anti-heroes are the most common main characters in the modernist literature and that the anti-hero reflects the spirit of the 20th century. In his 1959 essay, "The Antihero in Modern British and American Fiction" that appears in *Rumors of Change*, Hassan (1995) notes that the anti-hero "has remained at the centre of our twentieth-century consciousness, and it has impelled the radical vision, the irony, order, and extremity of despair that have come to be associated with that century" (p. 55). As can be recalled, the 20th century – shaped profoundly by the devastation and trauma of two world wars – was a time marked by disillusionment, alienation (Brooker, 2007, p. 43), existential questioning, irony, and intense emotional struggles. It was a world which was "bitter and empty" (Bradbury, 1994, p. 85). Germane to the time, "the literature of the avant-garde expressed [...] alienation, plight, chaos, unreason, depression and a disenchantment with European culture" (Childs, 2007, p. 21). It can be argued that in the modernist fiction, writers employed anti-heroes to express how complicated, fragmented, and often dark modern life had become.

Shadi Neimneh (2013) is of the idea that in the early twentieth century, the rise of the anti-hero emerged from widespread uncertainty about long-standing moral values and from the growing sense that individuals had become insignificant within modern, rapidly changing societies. As traditional sources of meaning weakened and cultural coherence declined, people struggled to find purpose in a world that felt chaotic and uncontrollable. Unable to flourish in an increasingly mechanized and disorienting age, individuals turned inward, seeking minimal forms of survival within their own subjective experiences and artistic expression. Thus, anti-heroism becomes "a feature of modernism and its *Zeitgeist*" (Neimneh, 2013, pp. 75-76). Neimneh (2013) further explains that this cultural confusion and inward retreat paved the way for literary representations of figures marked by alienation, anxiety, and social marginality – traits that would become central to the modern anti-hero:

Existential alienation and angst made modernist writers represent social misfits, brooding men, and suffering victims of incomprehensible forces in a hostile world since man felt lost and despairing [...] Scientific and philosophical ideas associated with naturalism, and in tune with the modernist temper, made writers depict diseased, impoverished, and unprivileged characters. (p. 76)

Thus, the modern anti-hero emerges as a product of this cultural disorientation – an alienated figure shaped by uncertainty, inwardness, and the harsh realities of a rapidly changing world.

Sasha Jansen as an Existential Anti-Heroine

As stated earlier, the anti-heroine in this study is not defined merely as a female character who defies conventional morality or heroic virtue, but as a modernist figure marked by fragmentation, estrangement, and ontological instability. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jansen emerges as such an existential anti-heroine—one whose subjectivity is fractured, whose motivations are often opaque even to herself, and whose persistence unfolds without teleological development or redemptive closure. Her cynicism, passivity, alienation, emotional detachment, self-destructive impulses, and profound disillusionment do not function simply as deviations from traditional models of feminine heroism; rather, they constitute the very texture of her being within a disenchanting modern world.

This study therefore approaches Sasha not as a failed heroine nor as a gendered inversion of heroic convention, but as a consciousness suspended in a state of becoming without arrival. Her contradictions, vulnerabilities, and moments of endurance are inseparable from the fractured temporality and interior monologue through which her narrative is constructed. By examining her defining traits – fragmented identity, loneliness, passivity, estrangement from memory and time, and a painful yet persistent will to survive – this analysis foregrounds how her anti-heroism resists the logic of transformation, catharsis, or reintegration.

In this framework, the anti-heroine is not a diminished heroine but a figure who exposes the instability of coherent identity itself. Each characteristic explored in the following sections will thus be considered not as an isolated flaw or moral deviation, but as an existential condition shaped by modernist dislocation. Ultimately, Sasha's persistence – unresolved and unredeemed – redefines survival as a stark assertion of existence rather than a triumphant overcoming, situating her firmly within the modernist landscape of suspended becoming.

The Cynical Outlook and Voice

Cynicism refers to a deep distrust of people's motives, social institutions, or ideals. A cynic is defined as "a fault-finding captious critic, especially one who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest" (*Merriam-Webster*). Within the framework of this study, cynicism is not merely a personality trait but an existential stance shaped by disillusionment, fragmentation, and estrangement. Cynical characters tend to believe that people are driven by self-interest, that morality is relative or even meaningless, that justice is often a façade, and that the world is corrupt and hypocritical. The cynicism of an anti-hero often reflects a deep inner conflict and a response to a world that seems unjust or absurd. It doesn't necessarily make them evil – rather, it makes them relatable, because they struggle with the same doubts and flaws real people do. Cynicism fits the anti-hero because many anti-heroes have been traumatized, betrayed, or disillusioned, leading them to reject idealism. Their cynicism may mask vulnerability or pain, giving them emotional complexity. Cynicism helps them in their self-preservation.

Sasha's cynicism in *Good Morning, Midnight* is a defining aspect of her anti-heroine identity. Her worldview is marked by bitterness, distrust, and a sense of ironic detachment from both herself and the world around her. Sasha's cynicism can be exemplified through several key scenes in the novel, which reveal her bitter outlook and emotional detachment. For instance, Sasha's cynical view of hope and happiness is vividly illustrated in her words, which also reveal her critical vision of society: "Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliché. Everything is born out of a cliché, rests on a cliché, survives by a cliché. And they believe in the clichés – there is no hope" (Rhys, 1980, p. 36). In this expression, Sasha shows how bitter and hopeless she feels about the world around her. She articulates a profound disillusionment with the structures that give others a sense of meaning. She means that people's lives, dreams, and emotions all seem fake and repeated, without real meaning. They have no real value. Sasha has a loss of faith in the meaningfulness of life. To her, society runs on empty phrases and habits instead of true feelings or honesty. The repetition of the word "cliché" makes her frustration stronger and shows how trapped she feels in a world that keeps repeating the same lies about happiness and success. When she ends with "there is no hope," it sums up her despair and her belief that nothing genuine can survive in such a shallow world. Through Sasha, Rhys shows the loneliness and emptiness that result from failing to conform to society's false ideals.

In existential terms, this moment reveals Sasha's anti-heroic lucidity. Unlike conventional heroines who might cling to comforting ideals, she refuses to participate in the sustaining fictions of social life. Her cynicism thus becomes more than bitterness – it is a form of consciousness stripped of illusion. Yet this clarity offers no liberation. Instead, it deepens her isolation, positioning her as an existential anti-heroine who recognizes the emptiness of collective narratives but finds no alternative source of meaning. Her insight does not lead to transformation or revolt; it results in endurance within disillusionment. Through Sasha, Rhys portrays a subject who survives not by believing in hope, but by enduring its absence.

Sasha's cynicism about human motives can be found in her insight on people's kindness. She distrusts even seemingly good actions, interpreting kindness not as genuine care but as an insincere attempt to avoid confrontation or discomfort. This attitude is also evident in her mockery of the store mannequin, whose polite and beautiful appearance becomes a lens through which she satirizes human civility, exposing it as often performative rather than sincere. She says: "Kind, kind and gentle is she – and that's another damned lie" (Rhys, 1980, p. 21). Through this type of worldview, she reduces moral or emotional warmth to self-interest or insincerity.

Sasha behaves cynically towards even herself while revealing her ideas about herself and self-image. She remarks that her hat "shouts 'Anglaise'", her dress "extinguishes" her, and the "damned old fur coat" is "the last idiocy, the last incongruity" (Rhys, 1980, p. 14). She mocks her own appearance and the façade she must adopt; her cynicism shows in the sharp disdain for societal expectations and her own complicity. She further reduces herself to "a mad old Englishwoman, wandering around Montparnasse" (Rhys, 1980,

p. 36). This ironic detachment also shapes how she interprets her circumstances; staring at herself in the mirror, she asks, "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" (ellipsis in original) (Rhys, 1980, p. 10). Even her modest inheritance becomes part of this darkly comic narrative: "Two-pound-ten every Tuesday and a room of the Gray's Inn Road. Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in – what more did I want?" (Rhys, 1980, p. 37). Her relentless self-mockery becomes a way of narrating her own marginality, allowing her to confront despair without fully succumbing to it. Yet, by mocking herself with cynical irony, Sasha is not a victim; she transforms her suffering into active commentary, asserting control over her narrative as an anti-heroine.

As Cathleen Maslen (2009) observes, Sasha's voice "combines ennui with moral outrage, sardonic commentary with abject self-reproach," forming an almost hyperbolic expression of melancholic sensibility (p. 125). Her desperate plea, "Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try" (Rhys, 1980, p. 88) captures her simultaneous yearning for conformity and awareness of its futility. Yet, as Maslen (2009) notes, "for all this self-abasement, it is clear that Sasha's voice is not really ashamed," for she compulsively stages her own failings and "worthlessness" to her audience (p. 125). This self-conscious display reflects not only despair but also a distinctly cynical stance: Sasha transforms her humiliation into a form of control, using irony and exaggeration to expose the emptiness of the social ideals she mimics. Her cynicism thus becomes a mode of resistance – an assertion of agency through irony and detachment – that reinforces her position as a complex, self-aware anti-heroine navigating the contradictions of her fragmented, existential existence and remaining suspended in a state of becoming that resists coherence or closure.

Sasha is also cynical about society's role and its treatment of people like her – a bitter acceptance that life is rigged, and a sarcastic comment on happiness. Young Sasha's unspoken thoughts toward her boss, Mr. Blank, reveal her deeply cynical perspective on society and the artificial values it upholds. She says: "Well, let's argue this out, Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I'm an inefficient member of the Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray" (Rhys, 1980, p. 25). As Elaine Savory (2004) observes "her humour is sometimes direct, brilliant social satire, attacking the wealthy, pompous and authoritarian Mr Blank" (p. 123) and this scene demonstrates how Sasha's irony operates not merely as personal defence but as a pointed critique of social authority.

Sasha's cynical observations of life are evident in her belief that human existence is largely futile, and that moments of peace or indifference are fleeting and constantly disrupted by suffering: Her statement captures this perspective:

People talk about the happy life, but that's the happy life when you don't care any longer if you live or die. You only get there after a long time and many misfortunes. And do you think you are left there?

Never.

As soon as you have reached this heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell. When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you. (Rhys, 1980, pp. 75-76)

This expression reveals her bleak and nihilistic view of life, portraying existence as a cycle of fleeting relief and inevitable suffering. For Sasha, there is no grand meaning, purpose, or possibility of redemption; there is only an ongoing process of endurance of hardship and disappointment. This outlook embodies a deeply cynical rejection of any notion of progress or fulfilment, highlighting the despair and estrangement that permeates her existence.

Sasha sees the city and its architecture as threatening. Her view is cynical, illustrating how societal structures oppress rather than shelter her. She describes how walking at night feels "with the dark houses over you, like monsters [...] If you have money and friends, houses are just houses" but if you are poor and "without any friends [...] they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush" (Rhys, 1980, p. 28). In one of the novel's most striking moments, Sasha even addresses the city directly: "Paris [...] 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" (Rhys, 1980, p. 15). This passage encapsulates Sasha's profound cynicism toward the world that has both seduced and wounded her. Her shifting tone – from

tenderness to insult – reveals her disillusionment with the illusions of love, beauty, and belonging. Paris, personified as both lover and enemy, becomes a symbol of the society that has rejected her. Yet Sasha’s bitter defiance – her claim that neither “you” nor “they” could kill her – suggests that her cynicism is also a form of survival. It is through this ironic detachment that she endures the alienation and despair surrounding her life. Here Sasha’s cynicism is not mere negativity; it is a complex blend of pain, self-protection, and awareness. She mocks the illusions of beauty and affection, recognizes society’s cruelty, and claims a hollow, ironic victory over it. So, her cynicism here functions as a shield against despair – she can’t believe in love or belonging anymore, but she can still talk back to the world with bitter wit. In this sense, her defiant irony embodies the core of her existential anti-heroism: she neither transcends nor reconciles with the hostile world she inhabits, but persists within it through conscious detachment and unheroic endurance.

Savory (2004) observes that “the mocking, ironic first-person narrative voice of the protagonist, Sasha Jenson” produces an “almost unbearable tension between humour and tragedy,” revealing how her cynicism functions not merely as social critique but also as evidence of profound inner turmoil. This blend of wit and suffering – what Savory (2004) calls a “juxtaposition of humour and pain” – is central to *Good Morning, Midnight* (p. 119), and it highlights Sasha’s cynicism as a crucial anti-heroic trait, shaping the novel’s bleak yet darkly comic tone.

Sasha’s cynicism is marked by a profound distrust of others’ motives, viewing social gestures, norms, and life itself with suspicion. Her outlook reflects a pervasive hopelessness toward love, recovery, and the possibility of genuine connection. She frequently employs irony and sarcasm as mechanisms of self-defense, shielding herself from emotional pain. Yet this cynicism also reveals a deeply defiant resilience: beneath it lies a profound emotional detachment, often expressed through wit or blunt honesty, which encapsulates the complexity of her anti-heroine identity and her suspended, existential mode of being. In existential terms, her cynicism reflects a consciousness acutely aware of the instability of meaning and the fragility of human connection. Rather than seeking transcendence or consolation, she confronts a world stripped of reassuring certainties, persisting within ambiguity and estrangement without the promise of resolution.

The Fragmented Identity

One of the primary qualities of an anti-hero is a fragmented identity – a sense of inner conflict, disconnection from the self, and a lack of stable purpose or moral clarity, which sets them apart from traditional heroic figures. As Neimneh (2013) notes, the “fragmentation of identity of such heroes is symptomatic of modern cultural fragmentation” (p. 88), highlighting how the anti-hero’s turmoil reflects the broader disintegration of meaning in the modern world. Instead of clarity or growth, the anti-hero often exhibits instability and emotional paralysis. This psychological fragmentation prevents them from embarking on or completing a journey of self-discovery. Sasha Jansen exemplifies this through her unstable sense of self, her shifting moods, and her inability to reconcile past and present. She often questions her own existence, distances herself from her reflection, and oscillates between self-pity and self-contempt. All of them reveal her deeply fractured inner world.

Sasha is always conscious of how she appears – her nationality, her clothes, her age, her status – yet she cannot fully “be” any of these in a satisfying way. For example, she recounts how, after agreeing to hand over her passport later, the official casts a disapproving look at her hat, and she herself notices how ridiculous her old fur coat looks piled on top of the rest of her outfit (Rhys, 1980, pp. 13-14). Here Sasha feels distressed by her own outfit, as though external signs continually out her as foreign, awkward, and aging. There is always, in her consciousness, the sense that she does not fit – whether in Paris, among expatriates, or in cafés she used to frequent. She hopes to erase the sense of difference through small transformations such as dyeing her hair, buying new hats, and altering her appearance. Sasha’s sense of inner fragmentation is particularly evident in the following moment of self-reflection:

I stayed there, staring at myself in the glass. What do I want to cry about? ... 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. (ellipsis in original) (Rhys, 1980, p. 10)

In this passage, Sasha’s reflection in the glass symbolizes her fractured sense of self. It is evident that though she has been “saved” and physically restored – an assertion she makes with clear irony – her

internal trauma persists, suggesting that external appearances cannot erase the emotional wounds of her past. The repetition of “there always remains something” emphasizes the psychological fragmentation that defines her character. Sasha’s inability to fully articulate what she wants to cry about further reflects her disconnection from a coherent self; this is an indication of the depth of her inner turmoil. This restlessness, stemming from never fully becoming, signifies an unstable self: Sasha is always partly in the past, always haunted, always marginalized. Such fragmentation is central to the anti-hero; they are not a heroic subject who coheres into one stable identity, but rather someone whose very sense of self is fissured and vulnerable. In existential terms, this fractured selfhood reflects not merely psychological instability but an ontological crisis: Sasha does not possess a stable core from which meaning can emerge. Her identity is not developing but dispersing, resisting the coherence traditionally associated with heroic subjectivity.

In addition to her psychological fragmentation, Sasha’s status as an anti-heroine is reinforced by her disjointed thought patterns, abrupt shifts in memory, and unreliable narration. Her fragmented psyche is mirrored in the structure of the narrative itself, which frequently shifts between past and present, memory and reality. These narrative disruptions reflect her inner turmoil and emotional dislocation, emphasizing her alienation and deep-rooted trauma. Throughout the novel, Sasha’s internal world is depicted as fractured and unstable, aligning with her overall sense of disconnection from both herself and the world around her. Her narrative voice moves fluidly between present moments and intrusive memories, creating a stream-of-consciousness structure that resists linear progression or self-coherence. This narrative fragmentation reflects not a journey toward self-discovery, as seen in traditional heroines, but rather a chronic state of emotional paralysis and disorientation. Sasha does not move forward in her story; instead, she circles back to moments of loss and humiliation, caught in a cycle of memory and despair. Her inability to construct a stable sense of self or reality positions her outside of the development expected from protagonists. In this way, her psychological fragmentation becomes a hallmark of her anti-heroism: she survives not through clarity or transformation, but through a tenuous grasp on identity, shaped by isolation, grief, and unresolved pain. Her voice is not redemptive; rather, it is the voice of someone whose estrangement has become her way of existing in the world.

If fragmentation destabilizes Sasha’s internal world, her attempts at conformity further expose the impossibility of stabilizing identity within external social frameworks. Sasha’s situation is marked by her persistent efforts at conformity and her longing to be seen as “respectable,” yet her acute awareness that she cannot truly embody this identity ultimately reveals the erosion of that ideal and deepens her sense of alienation. Sasha’s insistence that she is “a respectable woman” and her repeated effort to conform – “Faites comme les autres” (Rhys, 1980, p. 88) reveal her ongoing struggle to construct a stable identity within societal norms. However, the statement “I know I don’t succeed, but look how hard I try” (Rhys, 1980, p. 88) underscores the futility of this effort. Despite her desire to fit in and present herself as conventional, Sasha remains alienated and self-aware of her inability to fully embody the role she aspires to. This moment captures the tragic irony of her character: she craves belonging and recognition, yet repeatedly finds herself falling short. Ultimately this highlights the fragmentation and instability at the core of her identity.

Savory’s observations illuminate the instability of Sasha’s selfhood, particularly in moments when her behaviour becomes erratic or emotionally excessive. When drinking, Sasha appears “unreasonable, self-pitying, aggressive and yet peculiarly aware of how she looks and acts to others” (Savory, 2009, p. 70). This is an awareness that reveals her divided inner world. Savory (2004) notes that “Sasha acknowledges two selves at this point: the one who is crying and who managed that brief moment of happiness, and the sardonic one who ‘isn’t me’ [...] and who now dominates: this self is the one who generates the most hollow laughter” (p. 131). This shifting between her different selves shows that Sasha’s humour works both as social criticism and as a way for her to cope with her inner disorder. Her multiple selves are not only signs of emotional strain but also a key narrative device that highlights the constant tension between her private despair and the ironic attitude she adopts to survive in the world.

Sasha’s acute awareness of her appearance, nationality, age, and social status underscores her persistent struggle to locate a stable identity. Her own words reflect this tension: “it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail” (Rhys, 1980, p. 37), suggesting that beneath the outward appearance she presents, she feels profoundly alienated from herself. Sasha is drawn as highly conscious of her appearance and her social status throughout the novel. Two instances suffice here: She remarks, “there are hollows under my eyes.” (Rhys, 1980, p. 48), and later

declares, “I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don’t belong anywhere” (Rhys, 1980, p. 38).

In all of the above scenes, Sasha’s self-awareness of her appearance, age, and rootlessness or social displacement, along with her desperate attempts to fit in, illuminates her inability to inhabit a coherent identity within the constraining roles prescribed by society. In these moments, Sasha’s self-awareness moves beyond self-consciousness and social anxiety; they expose a deeper ontological insecurity. Her repeated emphasis on having “no name” and “no country” signals not only displacement but a crisis of being, a sense of existing without anchorage in stable categories of identity. Her desperate attempts to fit into prescribed roles only intensify her fragmentation, as she cannot fully inhabit any coherent version of herself. In existential terms, Sasha embodies a subject suspended between masks, unable to reconcile inner consciousness with external definition. This instability situates her within the framework of existential anti-heroism: she does not assert a unified self nor achieve self-realization, but persists in a state of fractured becoming, estranged from both society and her own reflection.

The Emotional Detachment

As an aging woman in a society that devalues her, Sasha is disconnected from friends, family, and her very sense of past. This isolation is not just physical or social; it is also existential. Sasha frequently retreats into internal monologues, avoiding meaningful connections. The emotional detachment is vividly expressed when she admits, “I am empty of everything. I am empty of everything but [...] the thin, frail ghosts in my room” (Rhys, 1980, p. 48) – a line that underscores her isolation and her perception of herself as unreal, haunted by absence rather than presence. Sasha’s emotional detachment is vividly expressed through her innermost feelings when she encounters two Russian men at the Boulevard St. Michel. Though she longs to express her emotions – or even cry out – she suppresses them, keeping them tightly hidden within herself: “Yes, I am sad, sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken, sad as a woman who is growing old. Sad, sad, sad” (Rhys, 1980, p. 39). This intense inner sadness, trapped and unspoken, highlights the profound gap between her rich emotional life and her outwardly detached conduct. Likewise, Sasha’s following words reveal a deep sense of alienation and emotional disintegration as well as a profound inner fracture:

I watch my face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller. Never mind. ‘While we live, let us live,’ say the bottles of wine. When we give, let us give. Besides, it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily? (Rhys, 1980, pp. 37-38)

Sasha’s dissociation from her physical self and turning to wine, fantasy, and dark humour can be interpreted as her coping mechanisms. Her ironic invocation of wine bottles urging her to live underscores a desperate attempt not to alleviate but to numb her pain through escapism. Beneath her detached tone lies a profound sadness. Sasha is portrayed as a woman trying to survive by detaching from the self that suffers. She is deeply upset and emotionally shattered. This detachment is not mere emotional withdrawal but an existential strategy: by dividing herself from the suffering subject, Sasha sustains a precarious mode of survival that resists both collapse and transformation.

Sasha’s emotional detachment deepens her sense of estrangement and loneliness, isolating her from meaningful connections and leaving her trapped in a fragmented, solitary existence. This sense of being cast aside is further emphasized in her bleak acceptance of social inequality and suffering:

We can’t all be happy, we can’t all be rich, we can’t all be lucky – and it would be so much less fun if we were [...] There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours. Some must cry so that the others may be able to laugh the more heartily. Sacrifices are necessary. (Rhys, 1980, p. 26)

Sasha’s words reflect a deep sense of alienation, as she sees herself not as part of the “bright colours” but as part of the necessary “dark background”, as someone whose suffering is necessary for others’ happiness. This metaphor reinforces her marginal status and emotional detachment from the world around her. Rather than resisting or questioning this imbalance, she rationalizes it with a tone of resigned despair, accepting unhappiness as inevitable and even justified. This resignation reinforces her emotional isolation. Her inability to imagine a world where everyone could be happy reveals a profound internalization of powerlessness and a lack of hope, a feeling she articulates when she says: “But when I think ‘tomorrow’ there is a gap in my head, a blank – as if I were falling through emptiness. Tomorrow never comes” (Rhys,

1980, p. 133). Sasha feels hopeless, like nothing will ever change. She says: "You are walking along the road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past – or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same" (Rhys, 1980, p. 144). Sasha's emotional detachment, and her internalization of powerlessness and hopelessness are hallmarks of her existential despair and the anti-heroic condition. The sudden shift into the second-person narrator further intensifies this condition: although the "you" ostensibly addresses the reader, the voice that speaks is unmistakably Sasha's. This shift in narrative mode collapses the boundary between character and audience, creating the sensation that the reader is being pulled into Sasha's own dissociated consciousness. The second person thus becomes a stylistic marker of her fractured self-perception, externalizing her despair while simultaneously revealing how fully she has withdrawn from a stable sense of "I."

This passage reflecting Sasha's resigned acceptance of suffering and her role as part of the "dark background" against which others' lives appear brighter (Rhys, 1980, p. 26), suggests that unlike a conventional heroine who might strive to change her circumstances, Sasha expresses a quiet fatalism. She embraces her unhappiness as something natural, or even necessary, rather than something to resist. This outlook reveals key anti-heroic qualities: emotional detachment, passivity, and lack of idealism. Rather than challenging the social order or seeking fulfilment, Sasha internalizes her marginalization, reinforcing her position as an outsider in society.

Sasha's emotional detachment is deeply rooted in the accumulation of loss, trauma, and failed connections that have shaped her life. As Savory (2009) notes, the novel depicts a life "sinking deeper and deeper into bitterness, self-destructiveness and the embrace of nothingness", where even fleeting chances of affection slip away due to the emotional damage Sasha carries (p. 76). Sasha's encounter with René, a man who initially seems to prey on solitary older women, presents one such lost opportunity. On the night she meets him, Sasha has made an effort to care for herself – newly done hair, a new hat, and a rare visit to an expensive bar. Despite René's seemingly genuine and protective interest, Sasha's history of emotional detachment prevents her from accepting his affection. The emotional wounds from her past, i.e. losing her family, her husband Enno, and her baby, have left her too damaged to trust or form meaningful connections. While brief glimpses of her former capacity for love emerge – such as when she recalls feeling affection for Enno in a moment of anxiety, or when she rages at God over the loss of her child (Rhys, 1980, pp. 129, 140) – they are only fragments of a self that has long since receded. By the novel's end, Sasha's emotional detachment is complete, as she rejects or is unable to grasp the possibility of care offered by René. Thus, her isolation and internal disconnection are highlighted, emphasizing her anti-heroic nature as a fragmented, self-aware consciousness suspended in a state of becoming, emblematic of the modernist existential anti-heroine this study seeks to map.

The Alienation and Loneliness

In his article exploring society's alienating conditions and their impact on the anti-hero, Richard K. Barksdale (1966) cites the "disintegrating influence" of society as the primary cause of the fictional character's sense of alienation, and states that the anti-hero's dissociation from other human beings is accompanied by "disillusionment, disaffection, and anxiety tinged with helplessness" (p. 4). Barksdale's description closely mirrors Sasha's experience. Sasha lives on the margins in every sense: she is geographically displaced in Paris, socially disconnected, and emotionally alienated. Her isolation is central to her identity; her loneliness, alienation, and emotional withdrawal define who she is. Sasha does not just happen to be isolated. Rather than building a life for her, she seems to have been pushed into one that revolves around being alone, misunderstood, and disconnected.

Jean Rhys's protagonists are defined as "isolated females" who "are trapped in their own futility" (Jackson, 1986, p. 91). This characterization certainly applies to Sasha. Sasha is profoundly isolated – emotionally, socially, and geographically. She wanders through Paris in a fragmented mental state, alienated from the people around her.

Sasha exemplifies the emotional paralysis and resignation that Jean Rhys's protagonists are often defined by. Rather than taking action to improve her circumstances, she drifts passively through the streets of Paris, revisiting spaces tied to her past traumas and losses. Her behaviour reflects a profound psychological stasis – she is stuck in cycles of memory, regret, and self-loathing, unable or unwilling to break free. This paralysis is closely tied to her resignation; she no longer expects joy, connection, or change,

but instead accepts her suffering as inevitable. At one point, Sasha reflects on her exhaustion and near-collapse:

I can see myself in the mirror. I look thin – too thin – and dirty and haggard, with that expression that you get in your eyes when you are very tired and everything is like a dream and you are starting to know what things are like underneath what people say they are.

I hadn't bargained for this. I didn't think it would be like this – shabby clothes, worn-out shoes, circles under your eyes, your hair getting straight and lanky, the way people look at you. ... I didn't think it would be like this. (ellipsis in original) (Rhys, 1980, p. 62)

This captures her numb endurance and emotional surrender, making it clear that her will to live persists only through a kind of resigned drift rather than hope.

Sasha's identity becomes spectral, as she describes herself as a "ghost" and a "thing," further emphasizing her detachment from life and from herself. In this way, Sasha is a clear embodiment of the "isolated female" not through dramatic tragedy, but through a quiet, relentless descent into emotional inertia. In a scene previously quoted, where Sasha sits alone in her room and when she reflects on a profound sense of emptiness, perceiving herself stripped of identity, connection, and purpose, she articulates the depth of her alienation, both from the external world and from her own sense of self. The moment reveals Sasha's ontological desolation – emotional, psychological, and even spiritual. The statement can also be interpreted as an expression of existential exhaustion because she is in a state where all sustaining illusions such as love, stability and hope have disintegrated and she is surrounded by only the ghostly remnants of her own life. In this way, Sasha not only confronts the void around her but also internalizes this existential despair, allowing it to structure the terms through which she understands and defines her own existence.

The Passivity, Self-destructiveness, and the Lack of Redemption

Another defining quality of Sasha's anti-heroic nature lies in her passivity, her self-destructive impulses, and the absence of a conventional redemptive arc. Unlike conventional heroes who actively resist challenges, an anti-hero often responds with passivity, succumbing to his circumstances. Sasha exemplifies passivity; she feels powerless to change her circumstances. She drifts rather than acts. The previously quoted passage, which reflects Sasha's resigned acceptance of suffering and her role as part of the "dark background" against which others' lives appear brighter, gives us the idea that unlike a conventional heroine who might strive to change her circumstances, Sasha expresses a quiet fatalism, embracing her unhappiness as something natural or even necessary. This outlook reveals key anti-heroic qualities: passivity, lack of idealism, (and emotional detachment – which is stated earlier). Molly Hite (1989) renders a fact about Rhys's female main characters: "She is often characterized as "passive" or "masochistic" because her actions do not substantially change her lot, as if she did not have the efficacy to be a protagonist" (p. 24). This reflects Sasha's experience as she drifts through life without resisting or changing her situation. Sasha does not take action to improve her circumstances, which makes her passive. Rather than challenging the social order or seeking fulfilment, she internalizes her marginalization, reinforcing her position as an outsider in society. In existential terms, this internalization signals not simply social defeat but ontological paralysis: Sasha inhabits a world in which action no longer promises transformation, and agency itself appears emptied of consequence. Her passivity thus reflects a consciousness suspended between awareness and incapacity, a defining condition of the existential anti-heroine.

Although Sasha believes in the importance of having a plan and seemingly applies one in her daily life in Paris – deciding where to eat, where to drink, and when to watch a movie – her insistence that "the thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance – no gaps" (Rhys, 1980, p. 15) ultimately exposes her inability to control her life, revealing both her vulnerability and the inevitability of her failure. Yet despite these carefully constructed routines, Sasha's structures repeatedly fail, revealing the fragility of her control and the persistence of forces – both internal and external – that undermine her efforts. Small interactions bruise her, reminders of her child unsettle her, and René's presence triggers fear rather than comfort, causing her to collapse. Crucially, there is no triumphant reversal. This absence of reversal is central to her existential anti-heroism: time does not move her toward redemption but circles back upon repetition, denying her the narrative progression traditionally associated with heroism. Her survival is not one of moral victory or victorious recovery, but rather endurance amid despair: she continues onwards, often wounded and always haunted. This refusal or inability to conform to the redemptive drama – of rising above, reforming fully, or achieving closure – places Sasha squarely in the anti-heroine camp. Her life is

not about triumph but about endurance, though brokenly. This absence of reversal is central to her existential anti-heroism: time does not move her toward redemption but circles back upon repetition, denying her the narrative progression traditionally associated with heroism.

Sasha's attempts to regain control through, for example, alcohol, brief encounters, or recalling better times only reinforce her sense of failure. Rather than confronting her past directly or striving for transformation, Sasha tends to retreat into drink, isolation, or sorrow, often letting events happen to her rather than shaping them. For instance, she admits: "I have an irresistible longing for a long, strong drink to make me forget that once again I have given damnable human beings the right to pity me and laugh at me" (Rhys, 1980, p. 94). In her expression, it is not difficult to see her self-destructiveness and shame, how she uses alcohol as a coping mechanism, and how she feels judged and humiliated. This self-destructive pattern persists as she ages: "Now Sasha is getting older, needing better clothes, more comfortable shoes, taking longer to dress to face the world, but still damaging herself with strong drink" (Savory, 2009, p. 72). Even as time passes and her physical needs change, her reliance on alcohol and her emotional vulnerability remain unchanged, reinforcing the tragic consistency of her self-destructiveness.

Sasha's self-destructive tendencies – marked by aimlessness, substance abuse, and emotional withdrawal – align her with the qualities of a modern anti-hero, someone who resists traditional ideals of resilience or redemption. Unlike the traditional heroine whose suffering leads to moral clarity or social reintegration, Sasha's suffering produces only further fragmentation. Her fragmentation does not culminate in self-discovery or renewal; instead, it exposes a subject who persists without resolution, inhabiting a state of suspended becoming. In this way, Sasha embodies the existential anti-heroine not through rebellion or dramatic defiance, but through a muted, unresolved continuation of existence in the absence of redemption.

Sasha's Flawed Nature

An anti-hero is typically portrayed as a flawed, imperfect, and morally ambiguous character who may exhibit traits such as self-doubt, impulsiveness, or a willingness to engage in morally questionable actions. These qualities align with Neimneh's (2013) observation that modern anti-heroes "are lacking in largeness, grace, power, and social success" (p. 77). Sasha's flawed nature is consistently demonstrated throughout the story's progression. She is depicted as alienated, unhappy, incompetent and always in need of money. Sasha's flawed nature is not just a vague characteristic but is vividly expressed through her passivity, self-destructive tendencies, emotional detachment, and pervasive cynicism, all of which collectively define her complex and troubled identity. Sasha's flawed nature, however, exceeds the boundaries of ordinary moral or psychological imperfection. Her deficiencies are not merely personal shortcomings but manifestations of a deeper existential condition marked by dislocation, contingency, and ontological insecurity. In this sense, her passivity does not simply signal weakness; it reflects a subject suspended between action and paralysis, unable to anchor herself within stable meanings or coherent narratives of selfhood. In the following excerpts, Sasha's flaws are evident:

In one of her recollections, Sasha recalls being asked by the manager to deliver a letter to the company's accountant, but she becomes disoriented and unable to locate his office, and she says:

on the ground floor are the workrooms and offices and dozens of small rooms, passages that don't lead anywhere, steps going up and steps going down [...] The workrooms. No, I can't ask here. All the girls will stare at me. I shall seem such a fool [...] it becomes a nightmare. I walk up stairs, past doors, along passages – all different, all exactly alike. There is something very urgent that I must do [...] all the doors are shut.

This can't go on. Shall I throw the damned thing away and forget all about it? (Rhys, 1980, pp. 22-23)

This recollection highlights how even a simple task becomes overwhelming for Sasha, revealing her profound insecurity and fatalism. The maze-like building – with its identical doors, pointless passages, and stairs leading nowhere – may be claimed to mirror her psychological confusion and sense of having no clear path forward. As Barksdale (1966) observes, the anti-hero is often propelled by events rather than directing them, drifting through life without a clear aim; therefore, he is "a real loser" (p. 9). Sasha exemplifies this condition. Her fear of being judged by the other people and her certainty that she will seem like a fool show how easily self-consciousness paralyzes her while the growing urgency turning to nightmare reflects her belief that she is destined to fail. When she considers throwing the letter away, Sasha's instinct for avoidance exposes her passive, self-defeating mindset. Rather than push through this paralysis, she contemplates abandoning the task entirely. It is a thought that exposes her instinct for retreat

and resignation. This reaction reflects what Barksdale (1966) describes as the anti-hero's involvement in a "pointless quest", in which the goal is never clearly identified and certainly never reached; so, the anti-hero can make "no assertions and has no victories" (p. 9). Sasha's impulse illustrates her fatalistic mindset: she believes that her efforts are pointless, that failure is inevitable, and that avoidance is the only viable form of self-protection. The moment thus becomes a compact illustration of her anti-heroic flaw – her tendency to withdraw rather than confront even modest challenges. The labyrinthine space does not merely externalize her confusion; it dramatizes an existential disorientation in which direction, purpose, and coherence dissolve. Sasha's inability to locate the office becomes symbolic of a broader inability to locate herself within a stable framework of identity or progress.

Sasha's sense of despair and hopelessness drives her to seek refuge in alcohol, further illustrating her inability to confront her problems: "I've had enough of these streets that sweat a cold, yellow slime, of hostile people, of crying myself to sleep every night. I've had enough of thinking, enough of remembering. Now whisky, rum, gin, sherry, vermouth, wine..." (Rhys, 1980, p. 37). Sasha's retreat into alcohol and her desire to escape from her thoughts not only signify her avoidance of redemption and personal growth but also reflect her flawed nature marked by self-destructiveness and emotional escapism. Her turn toward alcohol is therefore not simply escapism but an attempt to silence an overactive, self-conscious awareness that offers no resolution. Rather than confront an absurd or indifferent world, she temporarily suspends consciousness itself, choosing numbness over confrontation – a gesture that underscores her existential anti-heroism as endurance through self-erasure rather than resistance.

A key scene that vividly reveals Sasha's flawed, anti-heroic nature occurs during her encounter with the young gigolo, René in a Paris bar (Rhys, 1980, pp. 60-67). Sitting alone, already fragile and overwhelmed by loneliness and anxiety, Sasha immediately recognizes the emptiness of the man's interest, yet instead of rejecting him or asserting any boundaries, she welcomes the situation while simultaneously despising it. Despite her precarious finances, she buys him drinks and allows the interaction to unfold listening to his superficial compliments. Even though she can sense his intentions and recognizes the falseness of his charm, she allows herself to be drawn into a dynamic that she knows is exploitative. Thus, her behavior demonstrates a form of self-sabotaging passivity. Instead of protecting herself, she slips into a familiar emotional posture by telling herself that nothing matters enough to resist. She thinks: "what harm can he do to me? He is out for money and I haven't got any. I am invulnerable (Rhys, 1980, p. 64). The whole scene encapsulates how Sasha's agency is inverted: she acts, but always in ways that harm rather than save her. Rather than taking the protective, traditionally heroic path of asserting boundaries or walking away, she drifts deliberately toward emotional harm. In this way, the scene illustrates how Sasha's awareness and her resignation coexist, shaping her into an anti-heroine whose greatest struggle is with the choices she cannot bring herself to make. Her claim of being "invulnerable" reveals a paradox central to her existential anti-heroism: she recognizes exploitation yet relinquishes the will to prevent it. Awareness does not lead to liberation but to a hollow detachment, where resignation replaces choice and lucidity intensifies isolation.

Theodore Ziolkowski (2004) describes the modern anti-hero as a figure "virtually incapacitated by their intelligence and critical thinking," resulting in a kind of "voluntary exile," whether in a remote geographical location or the "spiritual underground of their own lonely room" (p. 142). Sasha's emotional paralysis and her habitual withdrawal into her room mirror this pattern, suggesting that she fits the model of the anti-heroine because of her inward exile. This inward exile is not merely physical withdrawal but a form of existential retreat, in which Sasha occupies what might be termed a suspended interiority – present in the world yet unable to participate meaningfully in it.

In sum, Sasha Jansen's character is defined by a deeply flawed nature, marked by passivity, self-destructiveness, cynicism, and emotional detachment. Yet these traits signify more than psychological weakness; they articulate an existential anti-heroism grounded in paralysis, inward exile, and suspended becoming. Her fears and mistrust isolate her from meaningful connection, while her retreat into alcohol and avoidance of change foreclose the possibility of redemption or narrative closure. Together, these traits draw a portrait of a complex anti-heroine trapped in a cycle of despair and stagnation. Rather than progressing toward transformation, Sasha persists within fragmentation, embodying a mode of being in which survival replaces triumph and endurance substitutes for transcendence.

The Resilience and Vulnerability

Despite their flaws and imperfections, anti-heroes often display resilience, strength, and vulnerability in the face of adversity. They try to overcome challenging situations and setbacks. They often face internal battles that showcase a blend of determination and profound emotional complexity. They can be depicted via their personal struggles with a mixture of tenacity and emotional depth. In this regard, Sasha is no different. Her decision to change her name, believing it could alter her fate, exemplifies this contradictory mixture of strength and fragility. As Sylvie Maurel (1998) notes, Sasha's renaming "is a Promethean way of giving birth to herself, of creating her destiny" (p. 54) – a powerful act of self-recreation that reflects her desire to seize control of her life. Yet she cannot change her life. In other words, despite this bold attempt, she ultimately remains unable to escape the circumstances that bind her. The renaming thus becomes emblematic of her existential anti-heroism: an attempt at self-determination that exposes the limits of agency in a world resistant to renewal.

Sasha's vulnerability is especially evident when the physical space she is in combats and overpowers her emotional state. Sasha's weakness manifests in her susceptibility to being overwhelmed by the physical space around her. This indicates her fragility or lack of emotional resilience. Sasha's emotional fragility is revealed in how easily she is overwhelmed by her surroundings, particularly confined spaces like hotel rooms. The novel's opening "with a paratactic description of Sasha's hotel room in the present tense [...] emphasizes that the simple physical presence of the room combats and overpowers her emotions [...] the objective world is antagonistic to the efforts of her fragile consciousness" (Voicu, 2014, p. 162). This indicates her fragility or lack of emotional resilience. The fact that the room exerts such a strong influence on her emotions underscores Sasha's struggle to maintain control over her inner feelings, potentially highlighting her fragility in the face of external pressures. In this context, the room's ability to combat and overpower Sasha's emotions suggests that she may be particularly sensitive to her environment and easily be affected by external stimuli. The dominance of external space over her inner life reinforces her vulnerability and deepens her portrayal as an anti-heroine marked by psychological fragility. It also reflects an existential condition in which the self struggles to maintain coherence against an indifferent or hostile environment. Her vulnerability, therefore, is not only emotional but ontological: she inhabits a world that resists her attempts at stability.

Sasha's anti-heroism is deeply intertwined with her contemplation of suicide, revealing a complex inner struggle between despair and resilience. She says: "After the first week I made up my mind to kill myself – the usual whiff of chloroform. Next, week, next, month, or next year I'll kill myself" (Rhys, 1980, p. 72). Unlike traditional heroes driven by clear ideals or moral certainties, Sasha's impulses arise from disillusionment and exhaustion. Yet the postponement embedded in her statement is telling: suicide is repeatedly deferred. This deferral suggests not resolution but continuation – a reluctant persistence that defines her existential anti-heroism. She does not conquer despair, but neither does she fully surrender to it. Instead, she remains suspended between annihilation and survival, embodying a mode of being in which resilience is stripped of triumph and vulnerability coexists with a muted, unresolved endurance.

Survival without Triumph

Sasha proves herself an anti-heroine through her survival without triumph. She endures – not as a hero, not in triumph, but simply because she must. There is no redemption waiting for her, no final moment of victory in which her suffering becomes meaningful. In her life, there is only the slow, relentless passage of time; and she has a quiet strength to keep going when nothing gets better. Sasha refuses redemption. Rather than overcome her alienation or achieve closure, she endures uncertainty, defeat, and ambiguous identity. Sasha's endurance without true redemption or victory is observed in the following scene when she says: "it's when I am quite sane like this, when I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane, that I realize how lucky I am" (Rhys, 1980, p. 10). But unfortunately, "there always remains something" (Rhys, 1980, p. 10), suggesting there is still something inside her that refuses to be fully healed or left behind. Her survival, shadowed by what remains unresolvable, confirms her position as an existential anti-heroine who persists without restoration.

Sasha's survival is not triumphant; it is an act of defiance simply to continue. The following quote illustrates how Sasha continues despite her bleak reality: "You imagine the carefully-pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is truth. That is just what it isn't. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it's in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth" (Rhys, 1980, p. 63). This passage reflects Sasha's awareness that the comforting appearances people take for truth are, in fact, false. In other words,

she recognizes that society's reassuring illusions are lies. The 'truth' she sees is strange, harsh, and alienating. This insightful moment shows Sasha's anti-heroic lucidity: she refuses the comforting illusions others rely on. Toward the end of the novel, the statement "You haven't left me one rag of illusion to clothe myself in" (Rhys, 1980, p. 145) reflects Sasha's stark self-awareness and survival stripped of any triumph or glorification. It reveals her recognition of the illusions she once held and how they have been stripped away, leaving her exposed to harsh reality. In this way, Sasha embodies the anti-heroic quality of enduring life's hardships without victory or heroic redemption.

In the end, Sasha's survival does not culminate in elevation or reintegration. She remains burdened by shame, aging, loneliness, and the relentless passage of time. Yet her continued existence – unadorned, unredeemed, unresolved – becomes its own muted assertion of being. She does not rise; she persists. In this persistence lies the essence of her existential anti-heroism: survival without transcendence, endurance without triumph, and a refusal to disappear even when meaning itself seems to falter.

Conclusion

If we recall some well-known protagonists of the English novel, such as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Pamela, Tom Jones, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Pip in *Great Expectations*, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Jane Eyre, we find that they are generally depicted as capable figures who navigate challenges through determination, moral growth, or resourcefulness. Their narratives typically conclude with some forms of personal advancement, such as emotional fulfilment, social stability, or economic security. Sasha Jansen, the main character in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight*, however, stands in stark contrast to these figures, for she is portrayed as an anti-hero whose story offers no comparable triumph, lacking the moral, social, or economic advancement that traditional protagonists of the English novel typically achieve.

Building on this contrast, the present study explores Sasha Jansen not as a conventional heroine or merely as a victim, but as an anti-heroine. By focusing on the traits and actions that align her with the anti-hero, the study provides a different perspective and showcases the complexity of her character. The study first defines the anti-hero and outlines its key traits, providing a framework for analyzing Sasha Jansen. It then examines her character in depth, exploring traits such as cynicism, fragmented identity, emotional detachment, alienation, passivity, self-destructiveness, disillusionment, and survival without triumph.

This study has situated Sasha Jansen within the broader tradition of modernist anti-heroism, demonstrating that *Good Morning, Midnight* constructs a protagonist defined not by rebellion, moral growth, or transformation, but by endurance without transcendence. In contrast to traditional narratives of development and reintegration, Sasha's story resists triumph, resolution, and redemption. She stands not as a conventional heroine nor merely as a victim, but as an existential anti-heroine whose suspended becoming reflects the ontological instability at the heart of literary modernism.

Through the lens of anti-hero theory and modernist conceptions of subjectivity, the study has shown that Sasha represents disillusionment without catharsis and survival without triumph. Her self-destructive impulses, moral ambiguity, and absence of narrative redemption disrupt conventional heroic teleology. Unlike the classical hero who overcomes adversity or even the romantic anti-hero who asserts defiant individuality, Sasha endures within a state of suspended collapse. Her fragmented and repetitive consciousness resists coherence, progress, and narrative closure.

By moving beyond exclusively gender-centered interpretations, the analysis repositions Sasha as an existential anti-hero whose cynicism, fragmented identity, emotional detachment, alienation, loneliness, passivity, and self-destructive tendencies constitute not incidental weaknesses but defining structural features of her anti-heroic condition. Her fractured consciousness—shaped by repetition, temporal dislocation, and interior monologue—resists coherence and linear progress, thereby destabilizing any teleology of growth. Sasha's cynicism functions both as defense and critique, revealing distrust toward intimacy and resistance to imposed social roles, yet without transforming that resistance into heroic defiance. Her fragmented identity and emotional detachment foreground a subjectivity marked by instability rather than development. Alienated geographically and psychologically, she inhabits loneliness as a defining existential condition rather than a temporary state to be overcome. Her self-destructive impulses and refusal – or inability – to pursue redemption disrupt conventional heroic paradigms and suspend her in a state of unresolved collapse.

Her self-destructive impulses and emotional detachment further underscore her status as an existential anti-heroine. Rather than striving toward transcendence or self-realization, Sasha remains confined within cycles of repetition and self-negation, embodying a mode of being defined less by choice than by endurance. Her cynicism, too, emerges not as superficial bitterness but as a defensive response to a world perceived as indifferent and unstable.

Unlike the classical hero who overcomes adversity, or even the romantic anti-hero who asserts defiant individuality, Sasha persists without transcendence. Her survival unfolds painfully, ambiguously, and without reintegration. She does not improve, reconcile, or achieve clarity; she endures. In this endurance lies the radical dimension of her anti-heroism: survival itself becomes a stark assertion of existence within a disenchanted modern world. Sasha Jansen stands, therefore, as a modernist anti-heroine whose psychological nuance, moral ambiguity, and emotional complexity challenge the conventions of character and narrative structure. The novel asserts that survival – painful, unheroic, and unredemptive – is itself a meaningful form of resistance. In revealing Sasha's fragmented inner world and her ongoing negotiation with despair, *Good Morning, Midnight* redefines the parameters of the anti-heroine and offers a powerful exploration of the human capacity to endure without triumph.

Ultimately, the study argues that Rhys redefines anti-heroism as a mode of endurance stripped of grandeur, where persistence replaces victory and ambiguity replaces resolution. In doing so, *Good Morning, Midnight* presents survival not as redemption or transformation, but as a structurally unresolved condition—an austere modernist affirmation of existence without promise of meaning. While the present analysis approaches Sasha through an existential lens, her anti-heroism also invites a productive feminist re-evaluation. Future studies may therefore examine how Sasha's anti-heroine qualities intersect with gendered structures of power and marginalization.

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