

The Unbearable Darkness of Loneliness

A Biocultural Approach to Loneliness in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning Midnight*

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TERHO, PAULIINA *The Unbearable Darkness of Loneliness: A Biocultural Approach to Loneliness and Death in Jean Rhys' Good Morning, Midnight*

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The fear of loneliness has been said to be the strongest motivational drive in humans and after air, water, food and sleep, the desire to avoid loneliness, is the next most 'insistent and immediate necessity' (Miljusovic 2012, xxx). Loneliness has an adaptive function and throughout the evolutionary history of our species it has played an important role in the survival of both individual members as well as the entire species. After prolonged exposure or even in close proximity with others but without the necessary close connection, loneliness can turn maladaptive with severe negative consequences to health and well-being.

Examining loneliness in literature through a multidisciplinary biocultural approach, integrating research findings from multiple fields, can provide otherwise unachievable knowledge about the behavior and feelings of a literary character.

In this thesis I examine the loneliness experienced by the protagonist in Jean Rhys' 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight*. By utilizing research findings from such fields as neurology, evolutionary psychology and pharmacology I demonstrate how the effects of loneliness are evident in the portrayal of the behavior of the novel's protagonist and argue that loneliness is the underlying cause of the protagonist's demise.

Although often viewed as simply an older version of Rhys' female protagonists, I argue that Sasha Jensen differs from them significantly. She is not financially dependent on men and does not exploit her sexuality for financial gain or security as the other protagonists do. Also, the national identity of the protagonist is not essential to the novel's plot as it is in Rhys' other novels.

In addition, I illustrate how the theme of death is present throughout the novel and how it provides clues to validate the interpretation of the novel's ambiguous ending as Sasha's death.

Keywords: Jean Rhys, loneliness, biocultural approach, multidisciplinary literary research, *Good Morning, Midnight*

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Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

1. Introduction

The fear of loneliness has been said to be the strongest motivational drive in humans and after air, water, food and sleep, the desire to avoid loneliness, is the next most “insistent and immediate necessity” (Miljusovic 2012, xxx). The 2010’s have brought loneliness into the spotlight. Researchers, healthcare professionals and policymakers alike have informed us of the serious consequences prolonged loneliness can have on our health and well-being. We are said to be dealing with a loneliness epidemic and scientists and government officials are trying to find cures for this health hazard that is costing money and threatening the well-being of many. Loneliness and in particular its avoidance has played a vital role in the survival of our species. In my thesis, I will approach loneliness, its symptoms and consequences from a biocultural point of view. With a biocultural approach, incorporating scientific research findings in the analysis of a work of literature, I will analyze Jean Rhys’s 1939 novel *Good Morning Midnight*, (henceforth *Midnight*) focusing on the novel’s protagonist Sasha Jensen. With the help of scientific studies conducted on loneliness, I will shed light and deepen the understanding of her emotions, thoughts and actions of in such a way that would otherwise be unachievable.

Rhys’s work has mainly been analyzed in three different contexts: as Creole literature, as women’s literature and as Modernist literature. These can all be applied to Rhys’s novels, but Rhys’s unique work does hold possibilities for a greater variety of analytical interpretations. Savory (2009, x) writes that although these readings may be insightful, they fail to “do justice to the texts themselves” and a greater variety of multifaceted readings would help fill this void (Savory 2009, x). A biocultural reference point, which is by definition multifaceted, as it draws from several different disciplines, will help answer some of the questions raised by Sasha’s seemingly irrational and illogical behavior and deepen the understanding of her character and her motives. Most of the analyses of this novel see loneliness as a mere symptom or consequence of circumstances in the protagonist’s life. I will argue that loneliness, with the insight offered by a biocultural approach, can in fact be viewed as the ultimate underlying cause behind Sasha Jensen’s downfall and the isolation caused by loneliness is key to the events occurring in the novel.

I will demonstrate how the symptoms and consequences of loneliness, more precisely chronic loneliness, seen in various contemporary scientific studies, are present in Sasha’s inner dialogue and actions. I will illustrate how findings from contemporary scientific research of the emotions experienced by chronically lonely people are present in Rhys’s text from 1939. In addition, I will discuss how *Midnight* is different from Rhys’ other

novels and although often seen as just another representation of “The Rhys Woman”, Sasha Jensen and her story are different and separate from the stories of the female protagonists in Rhys’ other novels. In addition, I will focus on the imagery of death present throughout the novel, beginning with the title. The ambiguous ending has been interpreted in various ways, ranging from seeing it as a new beginning, a rescuing of Sasha’s soul, to emotional as well as physical death. I will provide evidence to validate my view, that the ending signifies the end of Sasha’s long journey. The process during which her isolation from others became ever more severe and eventually led her to her decision to end her life began long ago. I regard the death as Sasha’s objective for the trip to Paris. I will expose how clues of this are given to the reader throughout the novel. In the same way, as Rhys builds Sasha’s character and the plot of the novel, from small particles that eventually become a whole, she can be seen to guide the reader’s journey along with Sasha’s to the final destination – Sasha’s death.

I will start by introducing Jean Rhys and her narrative style and its importance in the construction of the novel. I will then present the novel and Sasha Jensen’s story and how its ambiguous ending and dark atmosphere withheld it from reaching the popularity its masterful writing should have granted it. In the second chapter I will explain what is understood by a biocultural approach and how this multidisciplinary approach that joins together literary studies with research data from other, often quite distant fields of research has been employed in literary analysis and how I intend to utilize it in this thesis to provide a more complete analysis of *Midnight*’s protagonist and the underlying cause of her behavior. In the next chapter I will acquaint the reader with current knowledge of loneliness with the help of research findings from various fields, including neuroscience and evolutionary psychology. I will first explain why loneliness is considered to be an adaptation, meaning it is an evolved trait that aids in the survival and reproduction of the species and how this important emotion can turn maladaptive with serious negative consequences to the lonely individual. I will provide evidence from research to list examples of these negative consequences. In the latter part of the chapter I will reveal how the negative effects of loneliness are present in the novel and what consequences they have for the novel’s protagonist and how they provide an explanation for Sasha’s behavior. In the next chapter I will discuss how *Midnight* and Sasha Jensen are fundamentally different from Rhys’ other novels and their protagonists and discuss how, in my opinion, Sasha cannot be seen simply as a portrayal of an older version of Rhys’ other female protagonists as she, for instance, does not contain the important feature of the Rhys woman, dependence on a man. In the succeeding chapter I will demonstrate, how from the very beginning of the novel, including the title – the first line from a poem by Emily Dickinson - the imagery of death and

references to death are present throughout the novel to guide the reader to the final conclusion of Sasha's story. In this chapter, where I will also explore Sasha's and the novel's final events, and with the help of a biocultural approach I will include pharmacological data to show how Sasha's abuse of prescription drugs and alcohol are evident in the portrayal of her behavior, especially in the final pages of the novel.

I will begin my analysis of loneliness and the theme of death in *Midnight* with a brief introduction to Jean Rhys' life, her writing style and the primary source of this thesis.

2. The Writer, Her Style and The Novel

Jean Rhys was a writer with a unique style and a unique life. In this section I will introduce Jean Rhys, discuss her continually changing narrative style, and present the events and style of *Midnight*.

2.1. Jean Rhys

Jean Rhys (1890-1979) the daughter of a Welsh doctor and a third-generation Dominican Creole of Scottish origins, was born Ella Gwendoline Reese Williams on the island of Dominica in the British West Indies. At the age of sixteen Rhys was sent to England to reside with her aunt to complete her education. She was mocked for her Caribbean accent and treated as an outsider by both her peers and her teachers. Rhys' parents were advised to take her out of school and return her to the Caribbean, but she refused. As she was denied the opportunity to train as an actor, she worked various jobs including a chorus girl and a nude model. Rhys had affairs with men, both married and unmarried, who helped her financially. She was married three times. Rhys had two children, a son who died at two weeks and a daughter with her first husband Jean Lenglet.

Rhys began writing after a traumatizing, near fatal abortion. The female characters in her novels often share similar backgrounds, relationships and occupations to her own. The English author Ford Maddox Ford, one of her lovers gave her guidance and encouraged her to write as she began her writing career (Savory 2009, 7). Maddox Ford recognized her "singular instinct for form" (Wheeler 1994, 99). This combined with her Caribbean background gave her a unique perspective to write insightfully from the point of view of the outsider, giving her a reputation of "one of the greatest novelists of alienation" (Gardiner 1982, 233). She changed her penname to Jean Rhys at Ford Maddox's suggestion and began writing about misunderstood, mistreated, lonely, homeless female characters. Rhys' first published work was a collection of short stories *Left Bank and Other Stories*, published in 1927. It was followed by the novels *Postures* (1928, published in the United States as *Quartet* in 1929), *Leaving Mr. McKenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning Midnight* in 1939. Rhys' best-known and commercially most successful work, her final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was published in 1966. Rhys' novels are often said to have the same female character, described at different times in her life, from a young woman to the aging middle-aged woman portrayed in *Good Morning Midnight* (Savory 1998, 57). Rhys' protagonist is usually rootless, with no family network for support. They rarely have any friends and find themselves isolated in the margins of society, often abused, barely surviving (Voicu 2014, 109).

Good Morning Midnight, (henceforth *Midnight*) received praise from the critics for its unique style, but the story was labelled as too dark and depressive (Savory 1998, 117). It was published at the dawn of the war and after the war people were badly in need of an escape from the deprivation suffered during the war years and from feeling anxious about the future in the new world (Quinn 1996, 12). The writing of the thirties, such as the dark, depressive, pain-filled lines of Rhys's *Midnight*, no longer seemed to many to have much relevance (ibid.). *Midnight* was not a financial success and after its publication Rhys retired from writing and fell into obscurity to the extent that she was presumed dead (Lindfors 1992, 269). Rhys did finally return to the public sphere and returned to writing publishing her most successful novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 at the age of 76. In an interview for her biography Rhys herself claimed, that the success came "too late for her" (ibid.). Like Sasha, *Morning's* protagonist, she had moved too far into a solitary, lonely existence and been invisible and forgotten for far too long to be able to return to truly appreciate or benefit from the recognition and admiration of others and like Sasha, throughout much of her life, Rhys struggled alcohol and substance use (Savory 2009, ix). Rhys died in 1979, at the age of 88.

2.2. Jean Rhys' Narrative Style

From the very beginning of her writing career Rhys explored with a variety of literary strategies in an attempt to develop her craft, and was ambitious in experimenting how form, style and subject are influenced and determined by one another (Wheeler 1994, 99). Rhys was very preoccupied with experimentation and her texts showcase a continuing experiment of what fiction could be and what it could be able to become (ibid., 101). Each of her novels is an attempt to liberate her writing, and each of her female protagonists can be seen as a metaphor for a new achievement in style and form that each new novel represents. (ibid., 101).

Rhys wanted to redefine her style with each text and was continually searching for a style and voice that were, much like the unconventional women she wrote about, unique, completely her own and uncategorizable (Wheeler 1994, 103). She achieved this as her style and each of her novels "possess individuality to the point of distinction" (ibid., 102). Through style and characterization her novels depict and through their subject matter discuss Rhys' "never-ending search for an original way of writing" as well as living (ibid., 103). Jean Rhys used narrative strategies that helped portray the marginality of her female characters, who often displayed a psychic fragmentation, typical of the modernist decentered self (Voicu 2014, 86). Rhys incorporated modern and postmodern constructions of fragmentation, but simultaneously her writing "relied on notions of sublimity, passion and the supernatural" (ibid.), all of which

are typically seen belonging to Romantic fiction (ibid.). Rhys further expanded the sense of fragmentation by using languages other than English in her novels, such as French in *Midnight* and Creole French in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (ibid.).

Rhys' style and characters share similarities with one another, so much so that the female protagonists, developing with each novel, are often seen to portray the same woman at different stages of her life (Savory 1998, 57). Rhys was never interested in writing a similar novel to the one she had already written and each of her novels, as well as the woman portrayed in it, embodies a new literary form and a new self, created by the writing (Wheeler 1994, 115). Her novels have been said to all be about "lonely depressed women" (ibid., 116) with the sole concern on their abject misery (ibid.) but Wheeler (ibid.) points out that Rhys' characters and her novels are much more complex than these characterizations grasp. They are like her style, which looks simple at first sight, but is in fact quite the opposite (ibid.). As for the similarity of the character she portrays, just as her novels, they too, may seem similar at first glance, but are all unique individuals, from whom meaningful general insights into a person's inner world can be drawn (ibid., 117). From very early in her career, Ford Maddox Ford realized Rhys' unique skill and Rhys' "passion for stating the case of the underdog" (Savory 2009, 14). Her characters and the plots of her stories puzzled her contemporaries, because they as readers expected literature, especially by female authors, to provide them with a moral compass (Wheeler 1994, 108) which Rhys of course refused to do.

Rhys' fiction displays narrative structures that are constructed to display varying states of consciousness (Voicu 2014, 93). Her narrative vacillates between daydreams, nightmares, memories, drunkenness, moments of clarity, fits of madness (ibid.). The plots in her novels advance through a variety of alternative narrative techniques including overheard conversations and letters written and read (ibid. 86). The application of flashbacks and circular narrative in combination with alternating between free-indirect style and stream of consciousness also contribute to the sense of fragmentation present in the plots and characters of her novels (ibid.).

Rhys' earlier novels, especially *Midnight* show "extraordinary restraint" (Wheeler 1994, 116), giving them great individuality (ibid.). This quality is lost in her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is much more openly intense and freely impassioned (ibid.). Her first novels and their characters can be seen to gradually develop a voice from which they can move forward and a style from which also Rhys herself can move forward as a writer (ibid., 103). By her third novel *Voyage* published in 1934, her technique has developed into experimental use of time, increased intensity of symbolism and imagery, constant transformation between reality

and fantasy and its use of repetitive and disjointed sequences (ibid.). This is all the more developed by *Midnight*, with its extensive use of internal dialogue, where two voices engage in conversations in the protagonist's, the more intense use of inner monologues, and the voices given to inanimate characters (Voicu 2014, 97-98). The flitting between reality and fantasy, between the past and the present have become more intensified in *Midnight* (Wheeler 1994, 103). The more conventional plot techniques, diction, narrative and style Rhys has already abandoned after *Quartet* published in 1928 and the distance between Rhys' style and conventional writing seems to grow with each new novel (ibid., 104).

In all of Rhys' novels style and form are an integral part of the novel and with the abandoning of conventional plot developments, linear time and disconnected, fragmented sequences. According to Wheeler (ibid.) the style and form are what build and carry the story and its characters. They are what give Rhys her unique signature style. A style that can be recognized even though it is never repeated but always further developed in each new text (ibid.). Rhys's texts are layered and are able to accomplish a great deal in short spaces Savory (2009,105). Savory (ibid.) feels Rhys' texts are best suited for readers "who enjoy discovering the language games she plays" because her writing and the concerns that inform Rhys' work, can be accessed much more profoundly through her style than the storylines in her novels.

2.3. *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) – Sasha's Story

Midnight set, unusually precisely for a Rhys novel, in Paris in October 1937 (Carr 2012, 55), tells the story of Sasha Jensen, a middle-aged alcoholic living in London and who returns to Paris for two weeks after years of absence from the city. The novel has a very limited plot, consisting mostly of Sasha's wandering the streets of Paris, going to the cinema and drinking in various bars and then returning to her room in a run-down hotel. The streets and places she visits trigger memories of her years spent in Paris and through these fragments Sasha's past life a picture of a desperately lonely woman whose life's disappointments and tragedies have shaped her into an isolated person who sees no light in her future is formed. The novel is very dark in tone and Sasha's despair and a nightmarish, grey gloom penetrate the entire novel; its every page and paragraph. Savory (2009, 76) accurately describes *Midnight* as a novel "about a life sinking deeper and deeper into bitterness, self-destructiveness and the embrace of nothingness." Sasha has been disconnected from others for so long that it has become her normal state and as the title suggests, for her darkness and night have become her day.

The text's circular narrative, it "begins where it ends, ends where it begins" (Bowlby 1992, 35) - in Sasha's hotel room. The circularity also applies to the very first and last dialogue

in the text (ibid.). The story begins in an uncertain question “Yes? No?” (*Midnight*, 3) and comes full circle ending in a certain answer to the question, a very assured “Yes – yes – yes....” (*Midnight*, 156). The text centers around Sasha’s inner monologue and all the events and other characters are introduced through Sasha’s first- person narrative. The past and the present are mixed together in reoccurring time-shifts and the dialogue, including Sasha’s inner dialogue, is often short and partly in French. Rhys’s use of stream of consciousness in this novel is far more complex than in *Voyage* (Savory 2009, 69) and the reader has to make the effort to comply a coherent narrative out of Sasha’s, often drunken account as her memories take her back and forth in time (ibid, 70).The narrative is filled with “clipped lines, sentences of single staccato words, sentences without a verb” (Angier 2011, 386) following the structure of an actual typical thought process.

Midnight is often paratactic, meaning that phrases or clauses written without coordinating or subordinating connectives (Voicu 2014, 97). The very opening of the novel is a paratactic description of Sasha’s hotel room in Paris: “The big bed, the little bed with the tube of luminal, the glass and the bottle of Evian, the two books, the clock ticking on the ledge, the menu...” (*Midnight*, 3). The novel begins and ends in exactly the same place emphasizing the circular narrative structure and creates a sense of the opening of the novel being the beginning of its, and simultaneously Sasha’s end (Carr 1986, 55). Sasha’s room overlooks a cul-de-sac, emphasizing Sasha’s inner feeling of having nowhere left to go, having no way out of the situation she finds herself in (ibid.).

In the novel rooms and houses also have voices. They judge Sasha but are also her companions in her lonely existence, for example the room that greets her at the very beginning: ”’Quite like old times,’ the room says” (*Midnight*, 3). The voices of rooms and houses both help ease, but also underline her piercing loneliness (Carr 1986, 55). The other human voices in the novel mostly belong to people in her memories. The few present voices belong to strangers in bars and to the small number of acquaintances she meets, primarily two men René, the gigolo and a Russian named Serge. The other important character in Sasha’s present-day Paris is the man in the hotel room next to hers, the commis. He plays a central role in Sasha’s fate. The novel’s title “Good Morning, Midnight” is the first line of Emily Dickinson’s untitled poem number 425. Rhys has the first part of the poem printed on the first page of her book, as if to make certain no reader misses the reference (Savory 2009, 67). *Midnight* is also garnished with other contemporary references to popular songs, books, films and products that enrich the text and often aid in conveying the character’s mindset or the atmosphere (Carr 2012, 10).

The ambiguous ending, emotionally heightened, as in all of Rhys' texts (Savory 2009, 66), has been interpreted in numerous ways ranging from Sasha surrendering to "loveless sex with a total stranger" (Savory 1998, 130), and "rebirth through transcendence of the self in union with another human being" (Emery 1990, 145-146) to spiritual suicide (Savory 1998, 116) and a welcome to death (Emery 1990, 145-146). It has puzzled readers and critics alike and it may well contribute to *Midnight* never receiving the popularity achieved by Rhys' next novel.

Savory (1998, 132) finds *Midnight* as Rhys's most contemporary novel, which seems to belong to the latter half of the century. It took a long time for *Midnight* to find its time and even today, it seems to be "the most neglected of Rhys' major texts" (ibid., 117). Yet, in a way, *Midnight*, even if never Rhys' most popular novel, is the one to which she owes her success. Had the actress Selma Vaz Dias not tracked Rhys' down from obscurity to gain her permission for a radio adaption of the novel (Lindfords 1992, 269) and "reawakening her literary inclinations" (ibid.) by lifting "the numb hopeless feeling" that had stopped her "writing for so long" (ibid.), Rhys may have never returned to writing. After this reawakening she wrote her most popular novel *Sargasso*, which in turn led to a renewed interest in her earlier work and to reprints of her previous novels (ibid.). Without these events, put into motion by the interest in *Midnight*, it is likely, that she never would have finished *Sargasso* and never gained the recognition she now enjoys.

3. A Biocultural Approach

In this chapter I will introduce the term biocultural and explain what is meant by a biocultural approach and how it can be used to enrich the understanding of our species, our selves. I will explain how I intend to connect contemporary scientific research findings to literary character analysis in order to establish a deeper understanding of the social isolation evident in the novel's protagonist and how this social isolation, i.e. loneliness, effects Sasha's emotional and physical well-being and is the underlying cause of her demise.

The term "biocultural" has been used to define a multidisciplinary approach, and an intersection of biological, technological, medical, cultural, social and political methods (Davis 2014, vii). A biocultural approach attempts to unite the research findings of different fields in various ways to diminish the limitations of individual areas of study (Carroll et al. 2017, 2). It allows novel uses of research data from outside the disciplines own sphere of study and attempts to generate a more constructive exchange between evolutionary and cultural research and produce a more exhaustive understanding of human behavior (ibid.). It is a truly multidisciplinary approach, aimed at investigating "the causal interactions between biological adaptations and cultural constructions" (ibid.) and that has, with contributions from many fields, gradually over the past two decades, emerged as an exhaustive framework for human behavioral study (ibid.).

One of the main concepts in biocultural theory is the gene-culture coevolution (Carroll et al. 2017, 3; Carroll 2015, 21). It means that from a biocultural standpoint, the biological essentials of the human life cycle form the base for cultural processes and culture in turn organizes, constrains and develops these biological processes (ibid., 2.) In the history of our species there has been a continuing bidirectional transfer between biology and culture as all biological evolutionary processes have had a widespread impact on cultural practices and in return significant cultural developments have modified the human genome (ibid., 5).

In the area of humanist biocultural research that studies gene-culture coevolution there are different schools of thought in the question of why art exists (Carroll et al. 2017, 6). Some see it as an adaptation, and argue that the main adaptive components that made survival of our ancestors achievable (self-preservation, sexual desire, kin relations, competition) are still present in art, incorporating into art and stories things that, for example, serve as warnings of what certain behavior can cause and thus steer behavior towards a path that aids survival (ibid.) And even though fiction's parts do not necessarily have empirical correspondence in the real world, fiction nonetheless provides "a useful simulation of selves in the social world and as such aid survival in the real surrounding world" (Oatley and Mar 2005, 180). Not all scholars

agree with art's adaptive function and argue that art and aesthetic responsiveness developed simply as a side effect of the evolution of cognitive powers (Carroll et al. 2017, 6).

Whether art is viewed as adaptive or merely an enjoyable side effect of cognition evolution, the humanities, including literary theory, could nonetheless learn from other fields, such as cognitive neuroscience, anthropology and evolutionary psychology, the way in which to study connections reachable outside the typical focus on interpretation (Davis 2014, 126). Biocultural literary research has typically tried to identify how culturally distinct beliefs and values and creative heritage are related to "the universal features of human nature" (Carroll 2015, 21). Literary research within the biocultural scope has been used, for example, to study the worldview of schools of literature and individual authors (Carroll 2017, 1). Character analysis is another example of an area where adopting a biocultural approach can prove fruitful. Psychoanalytic character analysis uses psychoanalytic theory as a tool to explain a character's behavior and motivations (Hossain 2017, 42). Biocultural character analysis echoes this but it utilizes a more scientifically relevant and evidence-based approach (Paris 2017, 308). A biocultural approach applies results from research conducted in such fields as neurosciences to provide a completely novel interpretation of the feelings and actions of a character. This approach aids in developing our understanding of the possible underlying causes of characters' actions. For example, John A. Johnson, Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall and Daniel Kruger (2011, 50) integrated empirical research, life-history theory to literary study to demonstrate how portrayal of characters' personality in Victorian novels mirror modern research findings. As biocultural research develops a more comprehensive framework for the study of human behavior by utilizing the knowledge from multiple research areas (Carroll et al. 2017, 2), all the participating fields involved can benefit from this broader focus. For literary research it presents the opportunity to co-develop together with the ever-increasing understanding of human cognition, identity, emotions, motives and social interactions gained from scientific research (Carroll 2015, 21).

In this thesis I will use a biocultural approach to analyze the character of the protagonist of *Midnight* and show how the effects of loneliness known to us from research in neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and social sciences, can be seen in the thoughts, behavior and actions of Sasha Jensen, I will also argue, that loneliness and, as research reveals as some of its known consequences, including depression, alcohol and substance abuse, are the main factors contributing to Sasha's deteriorating mental and physical health. I will include pharmacological evidence to offer an explanation for Sasha's condition.

In the following section I will use evolutionary theory to define loneliness and theorize the reason for its existence. I will also introduce research findings from neuroscience, physiology and behavioral research that will eventually be connected to the attributes of the novel's protagonist.

4. Loneliness and Identity Formation in Research and in *Good Morning, Midnight*

Loneliness is not a modern phenomenon, but it is a very prominent issue in contemporary discussion (McLennan and Uljaszek 2018, 1480). Loneliness is also a very prominent theme in *Midnight*. By utilizing a biocultural approach, I wish to combine findings from contemporary scientific research to the novel and in particular to the behavior portrayed by Sasha. In doing this, I want to show that Sasha displays symptoms of chronic loneliness identified by modern science, and that these symptoms are vital in understanding Sasha's emotions and actions. In this section I will first introduce a contemporary perspective on loneliness. I will then examine the evolutionary basis of loneliness and contemplate how it affects modern humans. After that I will move on to list selected research findings of loneliness studies that are relevant to my analysis. Finally, I will connect those findings to Sasha's behavior and actions in the novel to reinforce my argument of loneliness as the underlying cause for Sasha's decline.

4.1. Loneliness and Identity Formation in Research

Today loneliness is recognized as a severe health risk and a national health issue (Cacioppo and Cacioppo 2018, 426). It has been said, that we are amidst a worldwide loneliness epidemic and, due to the number of serious physical and mental concerns associated with loneliness, this previously personal problem, has become a public health concern (Worsley 2018, n.pag.). In 2018, British Prime Minister Theresa May even appointed a minister of loneliness to combat this loneliness epidemic (McLennan and Uljaszek 2018, 1480). The reason for the rise in the number of people who feel lonely has been blamed on our modern individualistic lifestyle and on today's communication devices (Worsley 2018, n.pag.). Communal activity is on the decline, and people spend more time online and communicating in social media platforms than face-to-face (ibid.). But there is no clear or simple answer or consensus among researchers as to what the underlying cause of this alleged epidemic is and what can be done to cure it (Cacioppo and Cacioppo 2018; 426, McLennan and Uljaszek 2018, 1480). What is known is that the feeling of loneliness has accompanied humans since their evolutionary dawn (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2015, 765), and for a good reason.

Our ancestors depended on close social connections to survive and being alone was extremely dangerous in the dangerous world they inhabited (Worsley 2018, n.pag.). Humans have evolved into an ultrasocial species that by definition, has various social organizations emerging beyond the individual (Cacioppo, Cacioppo and Boomsma 2014, n. pag.). There were numerous benefits to sociality, such as mutual assistance and protection, but also costs

including increased risk of pathogens, competition for both mates and food (ibid.). The philosopher Lazare Mijuscovic (2012, 4) wrote in the opening chapter of his book on loneliness that he believes that “The drive to avoid a sense of isolation actually constitutes the dominant psychic force underlying all human consciousness and conduct”. To the survival of our ancestors at least, this was most likely very true. John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick (2008) also see the need for social connection and the uneasy, even painful feeling caused by lack of, as a defining characteristic of our species. Loneliness has an adaptive function and the feeling of loneliness evolved as a biological signal to alert an isolated individual of a social species of the need to reconnect with their social group (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2015, 766). It was a stimulus to get an individual to renew fragile or broken social bonds as reproduction and the individual’s own survival and that of their offspring depended on protective social bonds (Eisenberger 2003, 290).

This defining characteristic and dominant psychic force called loneliness has been described, for instance, as “a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's social needs are not being met by the quantity or especially the quality of one's social relationships” (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2010, 218). In later chapters it will be shown how the pain associated with loneliness is very evident throughout Rhys’ *Midnight*. Furthermore, it is also seen as “a response to a disparity between a person’s desired and their actual social conditions and not their objective social isolation” (Cacioppo, Cacioppo and Boomsma 2014, n.pag.). Louise C. Hawkey and John Cacioppo (2010, 218) explain its function to be the social counterpart for hunger, thirst or physical pain. The hunger for social connection and the pain felt by disconnection motivate the members of a social species to maintain and form social connections essential to the survival of genes. Once the social connections were renewed, social hunger cured, the feeling of social pain disappeared (Eisenberger 2003, 290). The social pain associated with loneliness is in fact not a mere metaphor since loneliness actually activates the same region of the brain that registers the emotional response to physical pain- the anterior cingulate (ibid., 291).

Even though the dangers of isolation that were present in the lives of our ancestors is not an everyday threat for the modern western human and in the modern cities we are constantly surrounded by others, yet still feel the same pain caused by loneliness as the humans at the evolutionary dawn of humanity (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2015, 765). Humans still exist in the shadow of the evolutionary history of our species and still possess the same capacity for social pain caused by loneliness (ibid.). Worsley (2018, n.pag.) describes that today, the threat caused by wilderness has moved from the outside to inside us. We may be surrounded by vast numbers

of humans, but with a lack of close emotional ties to them, our ancestral brains, feels as if we were physically alone (ibid.). We feel unsafe and lonely and our neural systems signal us, that we need to find our way back to our close allies, because then the feeling of loneliness will stop (ibid.). Today loneliness does not necessarily mean physical isolation (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 218). In fact, loneliness indicates self-observed not objectively measured social isolation (ibid.). People that live a life of solitude may not be at all lonely, but on the other hand, people with very rich social lives can feel terrible lonely (ibid.). Being alone and being lonely are not the same thing. As mentioned, the sense of pain or sadness of loneliness is caused by a subjectively observed lack of closeness to others and one's own assessment of being alone or somehow isolated (Svedsen 2017, 18). The actual number of people surrounding an individual at any given time does not correlate with the subjective feeling of loneliness. It is the quality of one's relationships that matters, and more specifically, how the individual experiences these relationships (ibid.). Therefore, it is very possible to feel completely alone in a room filled with people, if the sense of connection is lacking. Sasha, for example, is surrounded by other people most of her day, but she does not feel connected to them and feel at least as lonely surrounded by others in a bar as she does alone in her hotel room.

As said, the emotional response to social pain, i.e. loneliness, is beneficial and evolved to increase our species' survival, but it, much like aspirin that "heals in small doses, but harms in large ones", loneliness that occurs too often and for too long can become chronic and turn maladaptive (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 218). When this happens, it causes changes in our nervous system, isolation no longer motivates to seek social connection with others and the rewarding feelings previously achieved from interaction diminish (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 217). It has been proven that in the chronically lonely, the ability to respond actively and purposefully in social situations declines and impulsive and selfish behavior increases (ibid.). Chronic loneliness distorts cognition, empathy and causes increased aggressiveness, self-defeating and self-destructive behavior (ibid.). This declined ability to respond in social situations is present in Sasha Jensen's behavior and will be further discussed later.

As can be seen, chronic loneliness alters behavior, but changes caused by it can also be detected in physiological measurements of stress hormones, immune- and cardiovascular functions and in the activation of dopaminergic and serotonergic neurons, which are key to our emotional well-being and the activation of which help trigger that motivation to re-engage in social interaction (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 5). As social animals, being socially connected is an integral part of who we are and by controlling the hormonal and neural signals governing our behavior and by helping regulate our emotional and physiological balance, it is not at all

surprising that feelings of social connectedness and disconnectedness have a colossal influence on both our bodies and behaviors (Cacioppo et al. 2014, 12). Loneliness has been said to be at least as bad, and in most cases worse, for our health than obesity, smoking or high blood pressure (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 93). Left untreated, loneliness can severely effect behavior, cognition, emotions, and overall health (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 218) as will be evident when the following list of research findings is connected to descriptions of Sasha Jensen.

The list of the effects of chronic loneliness is long: loneliness has, for instance, been affiliated with psychoses, personality disorders, damaged cognitive abilities and suicide (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 219). Chronically lonely individuals also have been observed to have an elevated risk to develop Alzheimer's disease as well as showing an increase in depressive symptoms (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 219). Recent analyses have shown, perhaps surprisingly, that over time loneliness clearly predicts an elevation in symptoms associated with depression, but being diagnosed with depression, does not in turn predict a similar elevation in loneliness (ibid.). This would indicate that loneliness can cause depression but not vice versa (ibid.). Analyzing the development of Sasha's emotional state, it can quite clearly be seen, how loneliness precedes depression and not the other way around. In addition, an increase in depression, anxiety, anger, sensed stress and of fear of unfavorable evaluation from others have all been observed outcomes of loneliness (ibid.).

Loneliness also decreases optimism and self-esteem (ibid.) as will become apparent when exploring Sasha's view of herself and her future. Chronic loneliness not only alters behavior, but the changes it causes can also be detected in physiological measurements such a levels of stress hormones, cardiovascular functions and immune functions (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 5). All of these are known to be involved in several processes that in turn accelerate the aging process (ibid.). The symptoms caused by loneliness may be measurable from lonely individuals but not everyone is equally susceptible to loneliness.

In a study conducted by Abdel Abdellaoui et al. (2012, 386) high levels of neuroticism revealed a connection to loneliness and depressive symptoms. Abdellaoui et al. (2012, 386) investigated the association between personality traits and loneliness and found that the only personality trait linked to loneliness, independent of other personality traits, was neuroticism. Marcus Mund and Franz J. Neyer (2015, n.pag.) found evidence that personality measures taken in adolescence correlated with the participants' loneliness and health scores in mid-life and vice versa: the loneliness and health scores correlated with mid-life personality measures (ibid.). Individuals with high neuroticism scores in their twenties were lonelier in mid-life and

ones who felt lonelier in their twenties displayed a higher neuroticism score in mid-life, leading to the conclusion, that experiencing loneliness when young, would appear to shape personality development in unfavorable ways (ibid.). From the scarce information received of Sasha's younger years, this would appear to have happened to Sasha.

Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010, 219) interpret these data from their meta-analysis to imply that a feeling of social connectedness functions as a platform for the self. If damaged, it causes the rest of the self to begin to collapse (ibid.). Overall, it would seem that some aspect about the sense of disconnectedness with other people affects the whole individual and endangers the individual's mental as well as physical well-being (ibid.). When faced with prolonged, i.e. chronic, loneliness a person will unconsciously begin to surveil for social threats, which will lead to a cognitive bias and cause the chronically lonely to view the social world as relatively more hostile than their nonlonely counterparts (ibid., 220). This is also an accurate description of Sasha's outlook. People suffering from loneliness will also recollect more negative social information and anticipate a greater amount of adverse social interaction (ibid.). Behavior instigated by negative social expectations have a tendency to cause negative reactions from others and thus confirm what the lonely anticipated, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy and increased isolation as the individual will actively begin to distance themselves from possible social partners (ibid.). Low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, pessimism and feelings of hostility accompany this self-reinforcing loop of loneliness, causing a predisposition that activates behavioral and neurobiological processes that strengthen disadvantageous health consequences (ibid.). Among other health-compromising behavior of chronic loneliness, studies have shown a greater propensity to abuse alcohol and disturbance of sleep (ibid.). It seems that the same amount of sleep is more insalubrious for people who feel lonely and in return, less invigorating sleep increases the feelings of social isolation (ibid.). My examination of Sasha's behavior will demonstrate her caught in the above-described loop and the consecutive alcohol and drug abuse.

In their 2014 (n.pag.) Cacioppo, Cacioppo and Boomsma argue, that loneliness is not a mere symptom or consequence, but the disease itself. Loneliness directly changes our perception and thoughts (Cacioppo, Cacioppo and Boomsma, n.pag.) It restructures the brain and alters its chemistry and is the cause, not a mere consequence of a variety of mental and physical symptoms (ibid.). This leads to a reduction in excitement about possible social contact (ibid.). It is well-known that loneliness is a risk factor that impacts brain and behavior, but to test its causal role on neural processes and mortality conclusively is problematic, if not impossible, in human trials (Cacioppo, Capitano and Cacioppo 2014, 1464). Therefore, animal

models are helping us understand loneliness and its biological correlates (ibid.). Studies have shown that social isolation generates considerable changes in both brain architecture and mechanisms in adult social animals. (ibid.). In tests performed on mice, being raised in isolation can be seen to deplete key neurosteroids, reducing brain myelination (ibid.). Myelin is a material that in a process called myelination forms a sheath wrapped around nerve fibers protecting and helping to increase the speed of electric signals between nerves (biologydictionary.net). Myelination, that continues to middle-age, is vital to brain plasticity and is believed to be a contributing factor in the social withdrawal seen in isolated animals (ibid.). Models also suggest that dysregulations in the myelination process contribute to, for example, formation of addictions (Bartzokis 2005, 55).

The human brain has a uniquely high myelin content and long myelination process, that continues until an individual is approximately 50-years-old (ibid.). Alcohol and other substances are also known to be toxic to the vulnerable myelination process (ibid.). In the novel *Sasha is under fifty* which makes her the age when myelination still occurs, but as will be demonstrated, has dysregulations in the myelination process. Loneliness changes the neural tissue of social animals as it suppressed growth of new neurons (Cacioppo et al. 2014, n.pag.). This could be detected especially in brain areas that related to memory and communication, in animals kept in isolation (ibid.). Sleep is also disturbed by loneliness and animal studies show how during deep sleep reduced delta-wave activity was detected in the brains of isolated mice (ibid.). Delta-waves are associated with the cell-repairing deep-sleep stages (ibid.). These and numerous other studies leave no doubt, that based on both human and animal studies, chronic loneliness has a direct and a very negative impact on health. Our social connections or lack of, also factor into our identity formation. Certain personality traits, most prominently neuroticism, can have a role in a person's probability of becoming lonely and depressed.

No organism can exist outside of an environment, but humans are an unusual species in the capacity to adapt to diverse environments and ability to use their evolved intelligence to develop tools and technology that allow them to live social lives in such a wide range of environments (Easterlin 2016, 233). As humans are an ultra-social species, it is not surprising that the attitude toward any given physical environment is strongly colored by the quality of relationships in that locale (ibid., 228). An opinion about the quality of a place is of course not only formed based on relationships but this crucial importance of social relationships in place attachment make evolutionary sense, as human sociality has been so instrumental for survival of both the individual and the species (ibid., 230). The place called "home" is seen as the quintessential place for including and completing the sense of identity and self-image of a

person (ibid., 231). Home, strongly affected by the people connected to it, is a place usually linked with attachment, security, order, rootedness and privacy and various fields, including neuroscience, evolutionary studies and developmental psychology, share the view that in the process of self-identification, a person's home is the place that offers this process its key anchor and evolving site (Easterlin 2012, 117-125).

Easterlin (2016, 238) describes home as the place “that provides a point of reference for structuring reality” (ibid., 238). The assumption that identity is physically and spatially grounded is overwhelmingly recognized by contemporary science and social science (ibid., 231). As place, home and self are interrelated concepts that transform with experience (ibid.) and “landscape acts as a symbolic extension of the self” (ibid., 242), it is not surprising that placelessness or place alienation has been found to correlate with feelings of uprootedness and often seen together with problems of identity and self-worth (ibid., 231). Fundamentally, attachment to place, especially home, and people strengthens positive self-image and feelings of security that allow the constructing of extended spatial and interpersonal relationships (ibid.). As will be illustrated, Sasha ties to her family are non-existent and she does not have a deep connection to her childhood home or any of her other accommodations.

In the 1980's the term “narrative identity” started to appear in the social sciences (McAdams 2011, 99). Narratives function to express diverse aspects of human identity and narrative identity can be viewed as a polyphonic novel, in which different voices of the self - like characters of a story - express themselves and each voice, with its own story to tell, contribute to the internalized dialogue through which the self evolves and our identity is formed and expressed (ibid.). Individuals receiving a high score on the trait of neuroticism, typically defined as a tendency towards, anxiety, depression, guilt, anger and other negative feelings, had a tendency to express negative emotional tones in their narratives (McAdams et al. 2004; McAdams 2011,). According to Jonathan Adler, Emily Kissel and Dan McAdams (2006, 39), depression, one of the possible consequences of loneliness, has been connected to life stories with frequent contamination sequences (a narration where good events suddenly turn bad). Sasha displays a tendency to negative emotional tones, rather frequent contamination sequences as well as a number of traits associated with high levels of neuroticism. If neuroticism is a defining personality trait, i.e. a person scores high in tests for neuroticism, it seems to factor into various symptoms associated with loneliness. We already saw high neuroticism scores in the twenties predicted more loneliness in mid-life, and loneliness in one's twenties predicted a higher neuroticism score in mid-life (Mund and Neyer 2015, 646). Nicholas A. Turiano et al. (2012, 295) also found that higher levels of neuroticism and lower

levels of agreeableness were among the factors that predicted increased substance use in midlife.

As can be seen, loneliness, depression, identity formation and personality are all connected in one way or another in the social humans. This interconnectedness is well-illustrated in the novel's protagonist Sasha Jensen on who will be the focus of the next section.

4.2. Loneliness and Identity Formation in Sasha's Story

In this section, I will demonstrate how the loneliness Sasha has experienced, most likely throughout her life can be seen as the underlying cause of her emotional state and its consequences. Miljusovic (2012, n.pag.) used an interdisciplinary approach, including philosophy, psychology and literature, to support his ideas on loneliness. I will also use a multidisciplinary biocultural approach and use the afore discussed findings in various fields, including neuroscience, evolutionary biology and- psychology and social sciences to demonstrate, how the emotions and behavior of a fictional character in a novel display symptoms and consequences uncovered in contemporary research on loneliness.

Sasha displays various symptoms and consequences of chronic loneliness. She feels utterly alone in the world and even states that she does not have any friends (*Midnight*, 129). There are many times that she can be seen to surveil for social threats and to view the social world as hostile and she often has negative presumptions of how people view her and she assumes people always look at her and interprets the looks to be unfriendly, as was seen in the previous section to be typical for lonely individuals (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 220). Sasha feel out of place almost everywhere and thinks that where ever she is people are wondering and whispering to each other "What is she doing here, the strangers, the alien, the old one?... "(*Midnight*, 42). Sasha says she understands why people would wonder that as she constantly herself questions if she actually belongs where she is. Sasha feels that all her life, she has seen in people's eyes how they question her presence (*Midnight*, 42). Sasha has inaccurate ideas of what people think of her, resembling the findings in Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010, 220). In addition, Sasha thinks people laugh at her, when in fact they rather seem to pity her and "see great sadness" (*Midnight*, 36) and think she seems very lonely (*Midnight*, 52). There are times, when people do view her with disapproval, but it seems to be in regard to her, often high level of intoxication. Usually the negative attention she believes she receives is actually only existent in her own mind.

Sasha shows the altered behavior of a chronically lonely person (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 220) as her own assumptions of what she thinks people say about her or will

say to her, generally cause her to withdraw from social contact and even though she goes to restaurants, bars and the cinema, she mostly chooses “a table as far away from everyone else as possible” (*Midnight*, 137) and never talks to anyone at the cinema. By and large the idea of social contact does not seem to give her a rewarding feeling, as can be expected from the results of loneliness studies (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 217), and she often feels annoyed when someone tries to contact her, even if it is just small-talk in a bar. She feels it ruins her night, as all she wants most nights is to be left alone to drink in peace. When a woman from a near-by table starts talking to her she feels because of it the night “was a catastrophe” (*Midnight*, 3). She only wanted “one thing and one thing only - to be left alone.” (*Midnight*, 32). She shows signs of strongly negative and aggressive feelings towards other people as she announces to the gigolo that she is “very afraid of the whole bloody human race” (*Midnight*, 143), because she views them to be “a pack of damned hyenas” (*Midnight*, 143). She goes on to explain that what she actually means by this is that she hates people: “when I say afraid – that’s just the word I use. What I really mean is that I hate them.” (*Midnight*, 143).

Sasha does form some connections with other people in the novel, primarily with the Russian named Serge and René the gigolo. But even with Serge and René, the anticipation of meeting either of them for dinner or drinks causes her anxiety instead of joy and she repeatedly considers cancelling on them. She exhibits the primary human need for social connection but it appears as though her neural response to rewarding social stimuli is suppressed and concentration on such social incentives as social threats and self-preservation are increased, as has been observed in chronically lonely subjects in studies using functional imaging (Cacioppo, Capitanio and Cacioppo 2014, 1464; Cacioppo, Cacioppo and Boomsma 2014, n.pag.). For Sasha the anticipation of a night out with someone triggers her conceivably altered brain processes to view such an event as a threatening situation and withdrawal from it as a method of evading that threat.

In addition, Sasha anticipates a negative outcome for social connections, and takes precautions, such as making sure she has money for a taxi back to her hotel, as there is the likelihood of an argument that leaves her stranded alone somewhere away from her hotel. These findings demonstrate a negative emotional tone in her narrative identity and a tendency to exhibit frequent contamination sequences in her narrative and expectations in social situations, not unusual for a person with high neuroticism levels (Adler, Kissel and McAdams 2006, 39). As would be expected from a member of an ultra-social species, Sasha has tried to form social connections and to fit in. “Faites comme les autres” has been her motto all her life (*Midnight*, 86). She feels, typically for the lonely, that social isolation is in no way in her

control. She feels, she has tried so hard to be like the others and fit in but thinks she could just as well have “saved myself the trouble” as she always knew, she would not succeed and no one appreciated her efforts (*Midnight*, 86-87). Sasha displays how loneliness provokes the juxtaposition of the evolved demand for social connection and the behavior produced by the changed brain structure and processes.

A person’s personality traits can also have a role in loneliness as was indicated in Abdellaoui et al.’s (2012, 386) study. Sasha illustrates characteristics that would very probably cause her to score high on neuroticism (McAdams et al. 2004; McAdams 2011.): she is anxious and has been already when young (*Midnight*, 128). She also displays symptoms of depression, one of the probable results of loneliness (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2010, 219) and in addition, Sasha has certainly shown an array of negative feelings towards people, places as well as herself. As was shown by Mund and Neyer (2015, n.pag.) high neuroticism scores in one’s youth can predict a higher tendency to be lonely in mid-life. We know, that Sasha is very lonely in her mid-life and as she herself points out, she has “never been young.” (*Midnight*, 128). By this she would seem to mean to never have exhibited the carefree, light and happy feelings associated with one’s youth. Instead she proclaims to have been “strained up, anxious “in her youth (*Midnight*, 128).

From the little we learn of Sasha’s family history and her desperate wish to leave London after the war, we can well assume that she was not only anxious and neurotic in her youth but that she was also lonely or at least without deep connection to her family. Her non-existent relationship with her family is demonstrated when she comes back to London after her first stay in Paris and the “old devil”, whom we can quite probably assume from the context to be a relative of Sasha’s, asks her why she didn’t drown herself in the Seine (*Midnight*, 31). Their meeting is about some money that has been left to Sasha by another relative. When Sasha hears who this generosity came from, she is surprised as she “shouldn’t have thought she liked me at all” (*Midnight*, 32) but when she looked at the “old devil” and “saw the expression in his eyes” (*Midnight*, 32) she knew the reason she had left this money to Sasha: “She did it to annoy the rest of the family...” (*Midnight*, 32). This clearly indicates that the family did not consider Sasha worthy of receiving a single dime. The reason Sasha only found out about the money about a year and a half after her benefactor’s death was that Sasha’s contact with any member of her family was so rare that the family did not even know her address (*Midnight*, 32). The negative quality of their relationship is also displayed in the “old devil’s” refusal to call Sasha by the name she now goes by. He will not even call her Sophie, but insists on calling

her Sophia, which Sasha dislikes (*Midnight*, 32). She is referred to as “Wild, wild Sophia” (*Midnight*, 32) filled with negative undertones.

As was shown in the previous section, a person’s relationships have a strong influence on how a person feels about a place (Easterlin 2016, 233). As Sasha’s relationship with her family has obviously been strained for a long time, it is easy to see, why she so desperately wanted to escape London after the war that she fastened herself to Enno (*Midnight*, 107) even though she never thought they should really get married (*Midnight*, 94). But because the war was over, people were “doing crazy things all over the place” (*Midnight*, 94) and for Sasha the appeal of not being in London was too great to resist. We can assume that Sasha’s family home is in London, or at least somewhere in England. The attitude toward any given physical environment is strongly colored by the quality of relationships in that locale (Easterlin 2016, 228). Considering Sasha’s noticeably adverse relationship with her family, it hardly seems unexpected that she has such negative feelings about London. She has a desperate wish to get away from the city, as her view of London is influenced by her emotions about her family.

As stated in Easterlin (2016, 238), home is the place where identity and self-esteem have their foundations and it is usually linked with attachment, security, order, rootedness and privacy the (Easterlin 2012, 117-125). For Sasha, the animosity between her and her family, affecting her connection to her home, it can be thought to be a contributing factor in her unstable identity and low self-esteem. For her home does not indicate attachment, security, rootedness or privacy and it is likely to be a factor in her inability to build a permanent home anywhere. She stays in countless hotels, which to her feel undistinguishable from one another: “Always the same hotel. You press the button. The door opens. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room...” (*Midnight*, 23). For Sasha “All the rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair, and perhaps a bidet. A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that’s all any room is” (*Midnight*, 28). For Sasha her ever-changing accommodations are at times a safe haven from the threatening social environment full of other people, “the wolves” and at times it feels like prison or a coffin, with its lid “shut down with a bang” (*Midnight*, 32).

The rooms talk to Sasha, as if taking the place of family members. Sometimes their voices are friendly, but at times they are hostile and ridiculing. According to Sasha houses know whether you have money and friends or are a “poor devil without any friends and without any money” (*Midnight*, 22) and act accordingly. Sasha’s perception of houses is that “If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know” (*Midnight*, 22). These are the people to whom home has meant security, rootedness. For them “houses are just houses [...]

friendly houses where the door opens and somebody meets you, smiling” (*Midnight*, 22). But for Sasha, without a secure home, houses frown, leer and sneer. One after another they frown in the darkness and crush you, without hospitable doors or lit windows (*Midnight*, 22). If “landscape acts as a symbolic extension of the self” (Hummon in Easterlin 2016, 242) it is easy to see how Sasha’s lack of a place to call home, contributes to her instability in both her relationships and her personal identity. For her the houses and spaces, she lives in, the ever-changing hotel rooms in shabby hotels are a symbolic extension of and have become to represent isolation and loneliness instead of the warmth and the rooted feeling provided by the shared experience in a loving, secure home (Easterlin 2016, 243).

At first, after getting married, even if it was not for love, Sasha felt hopeful and excited about the future. She had escaped, just as she had hoped and that there was nothing more she could want. A door had opened, she had been let out into the sun and “anything might happen” (*Midnight*, 102). Even though, the first time she felt any joy or warmth on their wedding day was when she got more port to drink (*Midnight*, 94) and when narrating their marriage, the happiest moments would appear to be when she is pregnant and alone and she sees a future with possibilities in front of her. When pregnant she spends long hours by herself reading and is at her happiest (*Midnight*, 109). The “musty smell, the bugs, the loneliness, this room, which is part of the street outside – this is all I want from life” (*Midnight*, 107), she says feeling very well and happy. For her at this point loneliness does not cause her to feel depressed. As was detected by Louise C. Hawkley and John T. Cacioppo (2010, 219), loneliness precedes depression and not the other way around.

Even though the idea of having the baby causes her great anxiety and for her mind to go blank, a door shut in her head (*Midnight*, 113), Sasha’s emotional status during her pregnancy is positive and the baby inside her brings her enjoyment and with the baby, she does not long for anyone else. Enno is often away, but even the fact that he will not be in Paris when the baby is born, does not frighten her (*Midnight*, 113). After the baby is born and dies “lying so cold and still with a ticket around his wrist because he died” (*Midnight*, 115) Sasha’s heart is “heavy as lead, heavy as a stone”. The loss spoils all faith in the future and in God, who she blames for what happened, calling him a devil whose extreme cruelty is “the only possible explanation” (*Midnight*, 115). Sasha is displaying contamination sequences and signs of her loneliness and beginning to cause depressive symptoms. Her loneliness becomes ever more overpowering as Sasha feels utterly alone, receiving no support from Enno or anyone else. She tries to bury her sorrow and tries hard “Not to think. [...] Above all, not to think....” (*Midnight*, 115).

Enno leaves Sasha, who says she knew from the start that one day they would say good-bye and it would be finished (*Midnight*, 11). She later recalls that “it was after that that I began to go to pieces. Not all at once, of course. First this happened, and then that happened...” (*Midnight*, 117). But the shift in Sasha’s mood seems to happen already before Enno’s departure. It happens when the baby dies. It seems as the only true unity she had ever felt with anyone was gone with her son. She stays in their room and when she eventually does go out, she only feels sad and that their “luck has changed and the lights are red” (*Midnight*, 115). Now, that she was alone, she asks for money from England, which she does eventually receive, with a letter saying they cannot “go on doing this” as she has insisted against their advice to leave England with Enno (*Midnight*, 118). She calls them “a Spartan lot” and states, she will not ask them again (*Midnight*, 118). This was when the always frail ties to her family were completely cut off. She barely eats and mostly sleeps in her room. She feels utterly defeated and states she has had enough (*Midnight*, 20). Sasha begins thinking about killing herself, a mentioned concern of loneliness (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 219), with “the usual whiff of chloroform (*Midnight*, 70). She starts drinking heavily. It helps her in her goal of not thinking because after “a couple of drinks I shan’t know whether it’s yesterday, today or tomorrow” (*Midnight*, 119). Sasha’s behavior is not unexpected as was seen in the studies referred to earlier, lonely individuals have a greater tendency to abuse alcohol (*ibid.*, 220) and as loneliness also causes problems in the myelination process, a possible contributing factor in addiction formation and social withdrawal. Alcohol, in return, is toxic to the myelination process (Bartzokis, 2005, 55). Sasha has been drawn into a self-destructive, vicious cycle of loneliness, alcohol abuse and ever-increasing social isolation.

When she returns to London and receives her “two-pound-ten every Tuesday and a room off the Gray’s Inn Road” (*Midnight*, 32), she “crept in and hid” (*Midnight*, 32) and wanted nothing but to be left alone (*Midnight*, 32). For the socially isolated Sasha a happy life was “when you don’t care any longer if you live or die” (*Midnight*, 74). It is a mentality you only internalize “after a long time and many misfortunes” (*Midnight*, 74). Sasha had obviously reached such an emotional state in Paris, socially isolated, spending her time sleeping and drinking in her “heaven of indifference [...] dead to the world” (*Midnight*, 74). Returning to London, she is “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” (*Midnight*, 74). And detested and ridiculed is, what she feels by her family, by the world and in her room in London comes up with “the bright idea of drinking myself to death” (*Midnight*, 32). Sasha no longer feels any hope for the future. She feels utterly defeated, with the passages

never leading anywhere and doors always being shut (*Midnight*, 21). Such loss of optimism and increased pessimism is typical for the lonely as was detected by Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010, 219). Sasha has “had enough of thinking, enough of remembering” (*Midnight*, 32) as understandably her attempts to forget the tragedy of her son’s death could not be achieved by trying not to think about it.

Sasha’s attempt to drink herself to death fails (*Midnight*, 32-33) but the loneliness and abuse of alcohol and sleeping pills, which she received for her sleeping disorder, another common consequence of loneliness and depression mentioned earlier (Cacioppo, Capitanio and Cacioppo 2014, n.pag.), undoubtedly deteriorates both her physical and mental health. Her cognitive decline, a consequence mentioned by Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010, 219), can be seen in her ever-increasingly fragmented mind, where memories, although vivid, become entangled reality and dreams become harder to differentiate from one another and details and dates are difficult to recollect “was it 1923 or 1924 [...]1926 or 1927?” (*Midnight*, 5). She eventually runs into an old acquaintance, Sidonie, in London who is shocked by Sasha looking like someone who drinks and “getting to look old” (*Midnight*, 5). Both drinking and loneliness contribute to premature aging as was stated by Cacioppo and Patrick (2008, 5).

As has been seen in this section many aspects of Sasha’s behavior and actions can be traced back to loneliness, signs of which are displayed throughout the novel. With the help of contemporary research findings, we are able to trace Sasha’s trail of loneliness beginning with the disturbance in identity formation and her rootedness due to her strained relationship with her family, probably causing loneliness in her early life and later inability to settle down permanently. We can see her anxiousness, a sign of high levels of neuroticism in her youth, another contributing factor in her social isolation later in life. We are exposed to the death of her child, most likely the only person with whom she felt true unity and how his death deepened her social isolation leading to a downward spiral of a long list of effects of loneliness: pessimism, loss of hope for a future, alcohol and substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, hostility toward other people, seeing social situations as threatening and decreased feelings of rewards from social contacts. Jean Rhys has in her 1939 novel written a protagonist, understanding of whose dark desperation and faith can today, with an interdisciplinary, biocultural approach to character analysis, be increasingly developed. In accordance to the protagonist’s lonely existence, *Morning* is a novel that has notable differences from Rhys’ other novels. In the next chapter I will show, how similarly to Sasha, it also seems to stand alone.

5. *Good Morning, Midnight* – The Novel that Stands Alone

Rhys's novels *The Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. McKenzie* (henceforth *McKenzie*), *Voyage in the Dark* (henceforth *Voyage*), *Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (henceforth *Sargasso*) have often been viewed as stories of essentially the same Creole female character, living in the margins of society as a victim of patriarchal society (Savory 2009, 9). In 1950 Francis Wyndham commented that Rhys' heroines in *McKenzie*, *Voyage* and *Midnight* are very similar women (ibid.,109) and the argument of 'the Rhys woman' has sustained in Rhys criticism (ibid., 9). The critical debate of the single character portrayed in all the novels is also connected to the character being Rhys herself (Savory 1998, 58). According to Savory (1998, 58). Rhys herself has believed in all writers having to take from their own experiences into their writing, I believe that if all her protagonists have pieces of her own life history, *Midnight* is the one that portrays her internal experiences most accurately. Her struggles with substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, need for independence and most of all the loneliness and disconnectedness she felt where-ever she was, can all be heard echoed in Sasha's thoughts.

According to Molly Hite, the defining characteristic of these Rhys women, is their financial dependency on men (Savory 1998,58). This is one of the ways in which Sasha is different from the other protagonists. Sasha does not marry for financial security, even though when they first meet, they both think the other has money (*Morning*, 94) but she knows the truth before she decides to marry Enno. It in fact seems that throughout most of their marriage, Sasha is the one most often providing for them. She, for example, gives English lessons even when she is very heavily pregnant (*Midnight*, 108). It is true that other women in Rhys' novels work as well, but their occupation is that of a chorus girl- a profession closely associated with prostitution. Sasha's various occupations are more respectable. Savory (2009, 67) points out, that Sasha is Rhys' only intellectual protagonist. The other protagonists working as chorus girls know capitalizing on youth and sex is only possible for a limited time and while they still can, they hope to get a husband, some real estate, or, if nothing else a good fur coat, at the very least (Savory 2009, 61). After her marriage, Sasha's small inheritance checks allow her to remain independent, although, the socially severely isolated Sasha uses this independence to self-destructively drink as much and often as possible (*Midnight*, 32). In addition to her small cheques perhaps it is Sasha's wish to die that free her from concerns of future livelihood.

Different from the other protagonists, Sasha does not attempt to exploit her sexuality for financial gain or security (Savory 2009, 49). Money and sex are closely connected in all of the novels, but in *Midnight* the gender roles are reversed (ibid.). In all the other novels it is the woman who is paid for sex but in *Midnight* it is René the gigolo who attempts to use his looks

and charm for financial gain from performing sexual favors (ibid.). Savory (2009, 77) points out how Sasha's admiring of the gigolo's beautiful teeth is a reversal of Walter's reaction to Anna's teeth in *Voyage*. Another aspect can be added to this interpretation with the idea that Sasha, and Walter, look at the teeth as slave buyers looked at the teeth of slaves at auctions and the way the teeth of a horse are looked at and made assumptions about its health before a possible purchase. Sasha and Walter can be seen as possible acquirers of slaves or livestock. This puts them in the position of power, which again separates Sasha from Rhys' other protagonists. She is not the one selling herself or being bought. Instead, it is a man, the typical powerholder in Rhys' production, that is being evaluated for their appearance and potential value.

The national identity and background of Rhys protagonist has usually been seen, similar to Rhys herself, of Caribbean origin. Savory (1988, 17) is among the Rhys scholars who maintain a Caribbean-centered approach to all of Rhys' writing. Antoinette in *Sargasso* and Anna in *Voyage* are clearly described as Creole and Marya in *Quartet* and Julia in McKenzie are both stated to have exotic features (ibid.). Savory (ibid.) is of the opinion that Rhys "means Sasha also to have a West Indies background" (Savory 1998,117) but the Caribbean is "a submerged text in this novel" and the reader needs to be alert to clues in order to find it (ibid.). One such clue for Savory (ibid.) is what she calls an erased nationality, in her opinion of such importance in the novel that it suggests an erasure of the Caribbean. I disagree with this interpretation and again regard *Midnight* and Sasha unlike other inventions. I think, that because Rhys is considered a Creole writer who writes of Creole women, critics easily assume all her protagonists to be Creole, whether or not Rhys has written them that way. Unique from other Rhys protagonist, there is no mention of Sasha's possible exotic looks or hints about a Caribbean childhood. Instead there are several mentions of her Englishness throughout the novel. Sasha talks of the English as "We English" (*Midnight*, 32). She feels the hotel receptionist can right away tell her nationality from her appearance: "It shouts 'Anglaise', my hat." (*Midnight*, 8). She also thinks that it would be, how the man next door would describe her to his friends: "'An English tourist has taken the room next to mine.'" (*Midnight*, 25). Also, she believes people in a bar refer to her as "The Englishwoman" (*Midnight*, 31) or worse maybe even "A mad old Englishwoman, wandering around Montparnasse" (*Midnight*, 31). I consider her nationality of no grave importance in this novel and her rootlessness having more to do with never having felt at home anywhere.

All in all, *Midnight* is not a story about a Creole experience as her other novels are, but a novel about the experiences of a detached individual, whose loneliness has nothing to do with

her nationality. Savory sees the other characters such as the gigolo and Serge, both with national identities “complicated by migration” (Savory 1998, 117), as another clue to Sasha’s own complicated, Caribbean identity. I argue it to be more a description of the situation in a large city, such as Paris, during the years between the World Wars. Thousands of people from numerous countries came to these cities in search of peace, work and happiness after the end of the first war and were naturally drawn to the company of other outsiders, feeling a certain kind of comradeship to others in a similar situation. Savory (ibid) sees the image Sasha sees when listening to Martinique music (*Midnight*, 18) as a “sure code of the coastline of Dominica and Sasha’s inheritance of memory of the island” (Savory 1998, 117). The other interpretation of this could be that as an avid cinema visitor, it is the imagery associated with such music in films, that her view is based. None of this, of course indisputably erases the possibility of Sasha Creole background, but I argue, that even if she were meant by Rhys to be of Caribbean origin, I do not see Sasha’s nationality of importance in this novel. Social isolation, not her nationality, is key to Sasha’s fate.

Midnight has a very limited plot even for a Rhys novel. Compared to other Rhys’ novels, for example *Sargasso*, not very much seems to be happening. Savory (2009, 66) recaps the events as ordinary activities where Sasha is wandering in Paris, noticing people and things, meeting strangers, going back to her room, to shops, eating and drinking. Sasha’s first-person narration, with much fragmented inner dialogue and recurring flashbacks that return to present day often without warning, is, according to Savory (2009, 66), much more challenging to comprehend than Rhys’ other protagonist. Rhys’ writing, especially in this novel, requires the reader to be willing to take a deeper and more intense look at the story beyond the words on the page. The lack of events along with the demanding narration are probably among the reasons that have kept this novel from becoming a favorite with a wider audience. The novel’s ambiguous ending is unlike the ending of other Rhys novels where the protagonist’s future maybe left open but still with clear indications of what that futures holds. *Midnight* on the other hand “leaves the reader simply shocked and even terrified” (ibid.). *Midnight* has been named Rhys’ best work (ibid., 107), her masterpiece (ibid., 66), but still to this day it has never become nearly as popular as *Sargasso*.

Midnight and Sasha’s story do share some characteristics with Rhys’ other novels: they are all stories about women living their lives in less than favorable conditions. But in my opinion, there are such differences in both *Midnight*’s style and story that differentiate it from the others. Sasha herself says it best: “Don’t tell me I’m like other women – I’m not” (*Midnight*, 133).

6. Death

In addition to loneliness and isolation, death is a dominant theme in the novel. The novel is filled with references to death and death is present in both Sasha's past and present. Death is personified and described in a number of ways throughout the novel and is, in my argumentation, the final event of the novel. It is the ending to Sasha's journey, as well as a process that starts from the very beginning of the novel and is completed only at the very end. It begins with the title, a line from a poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) that sets the tone for the whole novel. This poem supplying Rhys' novel the highly appropriate title and Emily Dickinson, its writer, are the first subjects of this chapter. After introducing the poet and her similarities with Rhys, I will analyze other death references in the novel and move on to discuss how death is personified in the text. I will conclude this chapter by interpreting the events of the final pages of the novel, including pharmacological evidence to justify my argument of death being the concluding event in Sasha's story. I will start from the beginning and focus on the title *Good Morning, Midnight*.

6.1. The Title and Its Poet

The poem from which the novel takes its title is "a perfect reflection of the novel" (Savory 2009, 67). Exactly like the poem's narrator, Sasha has turned to darkness and night, because lightness and day do not accept her (Savory 2009, 67). When the theme and style of Dickinson's poetry is examined beyond this poem, other similarities with Rhys and *Midnight* can be observed as can be seen in the following section where I will introduce Emily Dickinson and death as a theme in her poetry including poem number 425. I also examine the similarities between Dickinson and Rhys' descriptions of death.

Good Morning Midnight is named after poem 425 by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). Emily Dickinson, who is often said to be one of the greatest English poets, wrote 1775 poems in her lifetime, a quarter of which about death (Whicher 1957, n.pag.). Death can be said to have been the main theme in Dickinson's poetry, a theme that "gave its tint to the majority of her poems" (Daghamin 2017, 148). She personified death, often even writing it with a capital D (ibid). In her poems, death can presume a variety of different personalities from "a refined and respected coachman, a cruel victimizer and a personal enemy [...] an elusive lover, a suitor|...] "(ibid.). Daghamin (2017, 150) analyses Dickinson's use of concrete images in her portrayal of the abstract force of death as a way of coming to terms with it and on the other hand to fathom it. Giving death human as well as nonhuman characteristics is a part of her attempt to understand it. Another feature predominant in Dickinson's description of death is

its diachronic nature. In her poems, death is rarely described as a single moment, instead it is a process that “spreads out in a certain space and time” (Mengqi & Liping 2017,). Mengqi and Liping (2017) describe how Dickinson’s conceptualization of death as a process that fills both time and space will allow the reader to feel how death rises from the surrounding to become “pervasive reality” (ibid). In some of her work the narrator is sometimes the deceased, sometimes an outsider, a spectator of this process, in which the mental and physical aspects of the dying are separated from one another (ibid).

The first part of the poem is written in the novel’s epigraph:

“Good morning, Midnight!
I’m coming home,
Day got tired of me –
How could I of him?

Sunshine was a sweet place,
liked to stay –
But Morn didn’t want me – now –
So, good night, Day!

I

Emily Dickinson” (Rhys 1939, x)

The poem establishes the grey mood that is present throughout the novel. The rejection felt by the poem’s speaker (the second part of the poem, not printed in the novel, reveals this even more clearly as the poem’s speaker says they “chose day” but “he turned away” (Dickinson 425 in Johnson 1960)) and the turning towards darkness are very similar to the novel’s main character, Sasha, who also has turned to night and to darkness because day, lightness would not accept her. In Sasha’s world lightness – happiness and companionship are no longer available, and she feels she has no choice but to greet night – darkness, loneliness, and eventually death, with open arms. Knowing Emily Dickinson’s fascination with death as the subject of her poems, greeting midnight in the poem to come home can also well be interpreted as death being the greeted Midnight. This poem, as well as many others written by Dickinson, also share other similarities with Rhys’s writings. They both utilize short sentences, which in Dickinson’s case comes partly from the demands of her chosen form of writing. The use of repetition and the use of opposites (midnight-day, dark-light, life-death,) is characteristic to both authors. Rhys’s whole novel is structured through the repetition of the duality of darkness and lightness (Angier 2011, 389). The novel is constructed around a repetition and a sort of circularity, where it ends up at the beginning, that is simply seen from a different angle in the end. In the poem “Good morning, Midnight! [...] Good night, Day” and in the novel, as it

opens and end in Sasha's hotel room. In the beginning with her opening the door from the outside and in the end the inside (*Midnight*, 3, 158).

The idea of death as a process present in Dickinson's work (Mengqi & Liping 2017,) can also be seen in Sasha's journey. Her process can be seen to have begun long before we meet her in the gloomy room of the cheap hotel in Paris. We meet her as she is well into the process and she points this out in several places. Emery (1990, 152) points out that Sasha does what "anthropologists claim people do everywhere when the danger of death looms too menacing – she invents a ritual". She does indeed get her hair done, buy a new hat, new clothes. She even refers to the buying of the hat as an "extraordinary ritual" (*Midnight*, 70). Her revisiting her past life in her memories as she walks around Paris and visits and avoids certain places, can also be seen as a part of her ritual of preparation. In a way she relives her life before it is over. In a similar way, in which Dickinson sees death as something that spreads out in time and space (Mengqi & Liping 2017,) it fills Sasha's hotel room and the corridors of the hotel and with her sinking ever deeper into the darkness of her mind through revisited memories, it eventually spreads over her days and nights and all the places she visits.

The personification of death is an additional link between the two writers. Dickinson is well-known for her various descriptions of Death with humanlike qualities, for example describing death with qualities normally given to lovers or enemies and with the appearance of a for example, a gentleman or a coachman (Daghamin (2017, 150). In my interpretation of the character staying in the room next to Sasha in *Good Morning Midnight*, is that he is death personified. He is presented as human, but he is described "as thin as a skeleton. He has a bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression" (Ibid.). Sasha feels he is like "a ghost, something that doesn't exist" (*Midnight*, 7). She only sees him in the hotel, as he is never part of anything happening outside the landing of their floor or her room. She runs into him all the time, day or night "Hanging around. He is like a ghost of the landing. I am always running into him." (ibid.). Also, no one except Sasha is ever seen or heard talking to "this damned man..." (ibid.) as she calls him. As in Dickinson's poems where death is described with qualities of men, Rhys describes the man with qualities of a ghost, or the of the Grim Reaper, both personifying death and as in many Dickinson's poems, in Rhys's novel death eventually becomes Sasha's lover, her final companion. The choice to make the first lines of Dickinson's poem as the title of the novel is a brilliant one. It not only sets the stage for the grey, gloomy mood of the novel, it also shows the dynamic duality of dark and light that Angier (2011, 389) writes is repeated in various ways in the novel and as a structural device for the whole novel.

By examining Dickinson's work more closely, it is also the first fragment of information Rhys gives the reader to piece together Sasha's destiny, which I argue is death.

In the next section I will continue to explore the theme of death and how it is portrayed in the novel beyond the title and examine further the personification of death and its diachronic nature mentioned in this section. I will also analyze the novel's ending and give evidence to support my argument of the ending being death and continuing with a biocultural approach I will include some pharmacological evidence in my examination.

6.2. Death Referred to and Personified

I argue that the man next door to Sasha is death personified but there are also various other references to death in the novel, beginning with Emily Dickinson's poem 425 printed on the first page of the book. The novel has numerous popular culture references one of which, a reference to a popular song, in the first part of the novel is one of the most straightforward death-references (*Midnight*, 9). One evening Sasha meets a woman in a restaurant, who is humming a popular song. Sasha describes the incident: "She had the score of a song with her and she had been humming it under her breath, tapping the accompaniment with her fingers" (*Midnight*, 9). Sasha tells the woman that she likes the song and Rhys then lets the reader know what song the woman is humming when the woman replies: "'Ah, yes, but it's a sad song. *Gloomy Sunday*.' She giggled. 'A little sad'" (*Midnight*, 9). For Rhys's contemporaries the reference to death would have been evident as *Gloomy Sunday* was a popular song about suicide (Lin 2013, n.pag.):

Sunday is gloomy, my hours are slumberless
Dearest the shadows I live with are numberless
Little white flowers will never awaken you
Not where the black coach of sorrow has taken you
Angels have no thought of ever returning you
Would they be angry if I thought of joining you?

Gloomy Sunday

Gloomy is Sunday, with shadows I spend it all
My heart and I have decided to end it all
Soon there'll be candles and prayers that are sad I know
Let them not weep let them know that I'm glad to go
Death is no dream for in death I'm caressing you
With the last breath of my soul I'll be blessing you [...]" (Lin 2013, n.pag.)

The song with the above English lyrics by Sam Lewis, was released in 1936 (ibid.). It is this version of the lyrics, with a clear reference to suicide, that became the most popular worldwide

(*ibid.*). Lin (2013, n.pag.) explains that it was originally composed by the Hungarian pianist Rezso Seress with lyrics by the Hungarian poet and lyricist Lazzlo Javor in 1932. The woman's comment about the song being "a little sad" can be seen as a grave understatement or irony on Rhys's part as the song was associated with a number of suicides and nicknamed the "Hungarian Suicide Song" (*ibid.*). This kind of dry, partly disguised humor is sporadically found in the novel. It in a way highlights the alienated Sasha's view of people as shallow and emphasizes how little she feels she has in common with them. It again decreases the rewarding feeling obtained from social contact.

Savory (1998, 130) states how "death is very present" in the novel as it is in all her texts, threatening all her protagonists at one point or another (Savory 1998, 116). Savory (*ibid.*, 130) remarks on the various peculiar and death-related descriptions of the commis': his "priest-like presence" and that he is "like some Egyptian god" and has a "bird-like face". Sasha also refers to him as "a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist" but Savory (*ibid.*) still chooses to interpret the final encounter of Sasha and the commis as Sasha surrendering to loveless sex with a total stranger (*ibid.*) instead of viewing it as Sasha finally being ready to surrender to death.

The ambiguous ending of Sasha welcoming of the commis, the man next door, into her bed has been interpreted in a number of ways over the years. It has been seen as Sasha's salvation where she is finally able to connect with another human or as expressed in Emery (1990, 145-146) "a rebirth through transcendence of the self in union with another human being". It has also been explained as a welcomed death, either symbolic or physical (*ibid.*). Savory (1998, 116) insists that even though it seems that "Sasha does appear to have chosen a kind of spiritual suicide" it is a very real possibility that she will come through it and, finds herself rejuvenated on another spiritual level but we simply cannot see this as it is beyond the novel's scope.

An interesting interpretation of the ending is given by Flora (1996, 273). She sees it as Sasha's transformation from a helpless victim to a person of power- the power to hate and to hurt (*ibid.*). She sees Sasha's rejection of René as an indication of her metamorphosis from the passive, helpless woman, a mere character, into an active participant, who takes her faith into her own hands and no longer suffers silently but takes revenge and by hurting René she gains the knowledge that she is as capable of hating and hurting and voicing that hatred as anyone else. The completion of her metamorphosis from a character to a narrator and finally to an author will occur, when she returns to London and presumably edits her "last performance" (*Midnight*, 51 in Flora 1996, 273). By gaining the ability to write Sasha has the

power to force the readers to “confront their own inner division” (ibid., 274). Flora (ibid.) sees the metamorphosed Sasha as a type of a prefigure to Rhys’ next heroine, Antoinette in *Sargasso*. Antoinette is a woman who changes from a fragile character into a woman with the power to act out her inner violence and to admit it simultaneously “voicing her own story” (ibid.). Rhys herself has said of *Midnight* in her *Letters* (Rhys 1969, 4) that she had never meant the novel to “be hopeless”. Flora’s interpretation of the ambiguous ending certainly conveys a hope of a future for Sasha. It gives Sasha a way to move on and to obtain control of her destiny by transforming her dark thoughts into stories and herself into a writer.

I do not share Flora’s (1996, 73) interpretation of the novel’s ending. It is not the sort of hopefulness I believe Rhys meant. I argue, that there is evidence throughout the novel, beginning with Dickinson’s poem at the very beginning to the final “yes,yes,yes!” (*Midnight*, 158) uttered by Sasha while embracing the commis, that the only hope for liberation from her misery and isolation Sasha unfortunately feels she is ever able to obtain is through death. Sasha’s death is what I interpret the embrace with the man next door represents. The commis is described as “a ghost, something that doesn’t exist” (*Morning*, 7) He is wearing a white dressing gown, similar to the one worn by Sasha’s deceased father in her nightmare (*Midnight*, 7). His appearance bears great resemblance to the popular imagery of the Grim Reaper.

The man next door, the commis who Sasha at one point speculates could be “a commercial traveler out of a job for the moment” (*Midnight*, 23), does in fact seem that he could be there patiently waiting for his next commission. Sasha conveys an image of a man with, sunken, dark eyes and a peculiar expression, a man who is thin like a skeleton with a face that looks like a bird’s and who seems to be “cringing, ingratiating, knowing” (*Midnight*, 7), like “a ghost, something that doesn’t exist” (*Midnight*, 7). Sasha feels the man is always looking at her and he has an air about him that makes Sasha nervous. She certainly does not “like this damned man...” (*Midnight*, 7).

Sasha only ever sees the man at the hotel, on the landing of their floor. She says she cannot even imagine the man in street clothes” (*Midnight*, 7). Sasha says he is like “a ghost of the landing. I am always running into him” (*Midnight*, 7). The commis always wears a dressing gown, either a blue one or “the famous white one” (*Midnight*, 7). I argue, there is a specific reason for the two different dressing gowns and distinct pattern to when he wears which one. When Sasha has just arrived at the hotel and meets the commis for the first time, he is described greeting her in his white dressing gown (*Midnight*, 7). The next time he appears in his “beautiful dressing-gown, immaculate white, with long, wide, hanging sleeves” (*Midnight*, 26), looking “like a priest, the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion” (*Midnight*, 26), is

when he knocks on Sasha's door for the first time. When she opens, he stands there smiling and says he wants nothing, when Sasha asks him. She tells him to go away, but he just stands still. We are given Sasha's interpretation of his reason being there in parentheses. She interprets him "(Now then, you and I understand each other, don't we? Let's stop pretending.)" (*Midnight*, 26), which can be read the commis coming to her door for sex, but when Sasha then puts a hand on the man's chest to push him backwards, to her surprise "It's quite easy. It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist" (*Midnight*, 26). He does not try to force himself in but is instead easily pushed away like someone who is not quite real.

Afterwards Sasha gets a nightmarish feeling when she thinks of "that white dressing-gown, like a priest's robes. Frightened as hell" (*Midnight*, 26). She does not seem frightened by what he was doing there but instead by what he was wearing, the way he looked which is quite similar to what Sasha's deceased father in her nightmare "dressed in a long, white nightshirt" shouting 'Murder' with blood running from a wound on his forehead (*Midnight*, 7). After this incident, he can only be seen wearing his blue dressing gown, until the very last page of the novel, when he has again put on the famous white one (*Midnight*, 158). Before that we only see the commis scowling at Sasha and retreating to his room, when he sees her (*Midnight*, 29) and calls Sasha a "Sale vache" and then again slams the door to his room but continues to talk "in a high, thin voice" (*Midnight*, 123). Then suddenly the voice stops as someone knocks on Sasha's door. It is not the commis as she thought, but the gigolo René (*Midnight*, 123). Again, no one else sees the commis nor hears his voice, the sound of which ends when Sasha hears the knock.

I believe the way the commis appearance is described, the fact that he is only ever seen or heard by Sasha and always only on the fourth floor of the hotel, together with the two different-colored dressing gowns, including the famous, priest-like white one, all imply that he in fact is not human, that he is death personified, the Grim Reaper, who has come to the hotel by Sasha's own invitation and is patiently waiting for her to be ready, to set her peace and complete her ritual. He wears the white gown, when he "collects" someone and the rest of the time he is as Sasha herself speculated, "out of a job" wearing his blue gown waiting for his next "commission". I consider the understanding Sasha thinks the commis presumes they have, when he knocks her door (*Midnight*, 26) is not concerning sex but regard the suggested sexual contact to be symbolic, and their understanding of one another's wishes to refer to an understanding, where they both know he has come to get her, in his role as the Grim Reaper and just as at the end physical intimacy with the commis symbolizes death.

After Sasha refuses to let the commis in, his attitude toward her can be seen to change. I believe the commis is getting frustrated and Sasha connecting with another human could mean she has changed her mind, that she has found something for which she wants to live alive. In which case the commis would have come to the hotel and waited there for nothing. The commis keeps reappearing on the landing but does not attempt to enter Sasha's room until she finally leaves the door open for him, welcoming his entrance.

When he finally enters her room and Sasha is in bed as still as if she were dead (*Midnight*, 158), and the color of his dressing gown is of grave importance to her. Sasha says she must find out, but also that she does not need to look, she knows and when she finally takes her arm away from her eyes, she sees him standing there, looking down at her in his famous white gown (*Midnight*, 158). But as she has kept him waiting for ten days, Death has become unsure of himself and just stands there quietly, with "his mean eyes flickering" (*Midnight*, 158). But this time Sasha is ready, her ritual completed. She has walked the streets of Paris, visited the restaurants and relived her previous time there. The money for the night has come for her hair, teeth and shoes (*Midnight*, 118). The night has come and there are still sixteen hundred francs left which is enough for her dress, the hotel bill as well as "the journey back to London" (*Midnight*, 126). I surmise Sasha means to go back to London in a casket. Buying new clothes, getting her hair done is all part of her "extraordinary ritual" (*Midnight*, 70). Emery (1990, 152) explains that Sasha inventing a ritual, is something anthropologists have observed people doing everywhere in face of death or when its danger "looms too menacing". Sasha has had her good-bye drink (*Midnight*, 136) and there are no more strings left untied and when she thinks of tomorrow, there is a blank, a gap in her head just like she is falling through emptiness (*Midnight*, 131- 132), because Sasha knows that for her tomorrow will never come (*Midnight*, 132).

6.3. The End

I argue that Sasha comes to Paris to die. She has been socially isolated for a long time and does not see a brighter future for herself. She has given up hope and feels that nothing ever changes. She has been in what Savory (1998, 13) calls "a self-destructive emotional state" for years. As far as we know, Sasha has been without roots and without reliable, solid social connections all her life. Her relationship with her family is non-existent, she marries an unreliable man to escape, not for love. Her husband provides no support or possibility to repair her unnourished need for connection. The happiest time for Sasha is in Paris, when she spends most of her time reading alone while pregnant. Even though having the baby terrifies her, it seems as though

her connection with her baby, is the one relationship in which she finds more than a short, passing moment of happiness. Paris is also the site of her ultimate tragedy. It is where she loses her baby and her heart becomes “heavy as lead, heavy as a stone [...] because he died” (*Midnight*, 115) and after that is when Sasha feels that her luck has changed and everything is all spoiled with the strings now being pulled “by a man with a long, thin nose and sharp blue eyes” (*Midnight*, 115), a description that interestingly bares similarities with Sasha’s description of the commis, the personification of death.

After the death of her son Sasha’s mood begins to shift and becomes increasingly dark. She begins to think about suicide, about killing herself with chloroform (*Midnight*, 70) or by drinking (*Midnight*, 32) and becomes increasingly isolated from others. All she wants is to be left alone to drink with “the lid of the coffin shut down with a bang” (*Midnight*, 32). She feels nothing but indifference and a “bitter peace that is close to death, to hate” (*Midnight*, 126). When Sasha is offered the chance to return to Paris, the city where she has been the happiest and most sad, she decides to go. She is offered one more chance to once more walk the city’s familiar streets and to relive the happiness as well as the pain. And then end it, because she has had enough (*Midnight*, 145) She has not given up because of one particular thing at any specific time (*ibid.*) Instead, it has been a slow process (*ibid.*) that has taken many years of loneliness and numerous disappointments to get to this point (*Midnight*, 9). Now she is back in Paris, the city that couldn’t kill her after all (*ibid.*). “And they couldn’t either” (*Midnight*, 9): not her family, not other people, from whom she has always felt detached (*Midnight*, 42). Sasha says she has never before had the guts (*Midnight*, 143), but now she is ready to take her destiny into her own hands. I believe that because people play such a vital role in our feelings about a place, Sasha feels connected to Paris more strongly than any place else, because of the connection to her child and for that reason she goes there.

Sasha has dreams in her empty room “waiting for the door that will open, the thing that is bound to happen” (*Midnight*, 81). As Sasha goes upstairs to her hotel room after her last night in Paris, she is neither sad nor happy, she is not regretful or thinking about much anything besides “the tube of Luminal and the bottle of whisky. In case....” (*Midnight*, 146). Those she sees “very clearly in her head (*Midnight*, 146). After her last encounter with René, having told him she is as the dead (*Midnight*, 151) Sasha continues drinking her whisky and it seems, takes her Luminal. She hears a “damned voice” in her head which she attempts to silence by drinking more (*Midnight*, 156). Sasha lies in bed trembling, cold and tired (*Midnight*, 157), crying perhaps “because the light in my sale cerveau has gone out” and because she now knows she will never sing again (*Midnight*, 157). Sasha is unable to move, because her legs feel funny

(*Midnight*, 156). She has hallucinations and her level of consciousness is clearly decreasing. These - decreased level of consciousness and hallucination, poor coordination and muscle weakness and decreased temperature causing the person to feel cold and shiver- are all typical signs of barbitol overdose (Suddock and Cain 2018, n.pag.).

The sleeping pills, Luminal, Sasha uses because she cannot sleep (*Midnight*, 5) is a phenobarbital, a drug that has been associated with increasing suicidal thoughts and in committing suicide, often consumed together with alcohol (López-Muños, Ucha-Udabe and Alamo 2005, n.pag.). Phenobarbital causes addiction with prolonged use and cases of death, both intentional and accidental, were quite common among chronic users especially during the 1900's when the drug was much more commonly used than today (ibid.). Fatal symptoms often include respiratory depression, low blood pressure and coma and eventual death (Suddock and Cain 2018, n.pag.). These symptoms could be what cause Sasha's behavior in the final scene. She no longer moves and lies still as she closes her eyes "because dead people must have their eyes shut" (*Midnight*, 151). Sasha is described to be "as still as if I were dead" (*Midnight*, 158) as she looks down on "another poor devil of a human being for the last time" (*Midnight*, 158) and falls passionately into the commis' deadly arms.

7. Conclusions

Sasha is often seen as a victim of patriarchal society and that her state and faith are almost entirely caused by external factors. I do agree that she is limited by her circumstances, as we all are, but I argue that internal factors play a crucial role in her story. She is not merely a victim of patriarchal society, but if we want to see her as a victim, she is mostly a victim of her own biology. By biology I do not refer to her gender, but her species and how evolution, together with culture, has shaped how we react to such emotions as loneliness and how they, in certain circumstances- external and internal- can affect our behavior and actions.

As can be concluded from a multidisciplinary biocultural approach utilizing findings from scientific research, loneliness, with an evolved adaptive function to aid the survival of both individual members of the human species as well as that of the entire species, has become partially maladaptive in the lives of modern city dwellers. Regardless, it still influences our lives in a profound way. The effects, which in short-term exposure, developed to lead a lonely individual back to the company of others, in long-term exposure and even if surrounded by others but without the required close connection to them, has the opposite effect. It becomes hazardous with multiple negative consequences to the individual's health and well-being. By using a biocultural approach to analyzing Sasha's character, the importance of her loneliness can be exposed. Utilizing research outside the field of literary research, novel explanations for Sasha's actions can be discovered.

As I have traced Sasha's journey from the very beginning, focusing on the various references to death it can be concluded that Sasha can be perceived to be more than a mere victim. I see a level of independence, desire and ability to choose her own faith, be it that her choice cannot be supported, in the time and circumstances Sasha finds herself in, she chooses the option she herself feels is the best for her. Sasha feels trapped in an endless cycle of ever-changing cheap hotel rooms that one after another do not provide her a sanctuary, an escape from her lonely misery. The importance of a home or lack of one was discussed and it plausibly has played a role in Sasha's development into permanent rootlessness. It appears she has never truly felt at home anywhere or with anyone. Her family does not feel deeply enough connected to her, to wish to come to her aid, nor does she have any close friends and it seems she probably never did. Sasha feels that all her life she has always heard people wondering what she is doing there, which seems like the negative expectation a chronically lonely person would have when meeting people.

Sasha's description of her marriage seems like it was more an attempt to escape her previous unfulfilling, lonely life in England by marrying someone who would take her to a new

country, new surroundings expecting her loneliness to stay behind, than an actual wish to be with a loved one. Her escape attempt does not work either, as her loneliness not only follows her, it increases which brings with it other problems such as depression and alcoholism. My interpretation is that even though Sasha at first is terrified of her pregnancy, she eventually forms a bond with the baby growing inside her. I feel that could have been her possibility to take a step on a path towards a less lonely existence. A baby, who is a part of her, a part of her inner world in a way and not completely from the outer world- the world with which she struggles severely to connect, appears to be with whom she feels content to be alone. This is the part of the novel with the lightest feel to it. It is the only time when the dark, depressive feeling is temporarily lifted. But as her baby dies, her inner world loses the last of its light. Her husband Enno, who is far from being stable or mature and rather self-centered himself, is unable and unwilling to help Sasha. No strong sense of companionship can be sensed to exist between them and without a safety net consisting of friends and family Sasha is left on her own to find ways to survive. There are none of today's knowledge or means and resources available to help a mother who has just lost her child and is obviously suffering from depression and severe loneliness. This leaves Sasha very vulnerable and even more lonely than before.

Sasha attempts to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol and end her misery by "trying to drink herself to death". This is not too surprising as it has been shown that loneliness makes one more likely to become addicted to alcohol and drugs. Sasha does not reach out to anyone and I feel, losing her baby, which she also sees as the caused the end of her marriage, is for her the point of no return. It seems as though her loneliness has reached such a level that social contact no longer gives her the rewarding feelings normally associated with it. Had her acquaintance not offered her money for her trip to Paris, I believe she would have slowly but surely achieved her goal of drinking herself to death, her misery prolonged. Sasha's spirit is lifted with the idea of returning to Paris and she finds new energy to leave her place to hide in, her coffin with its shut lid. She returns to the city that houses her fondest memories but to which she is also connected to by her worst experience. And as the feelings about a place are so strongly related to the people in that place, for her Paris is associated with feelings of love, hope and connectedness she felt for her child and the hopeless misery felt after his death. Paris is the appropriate place for Sasha who now has a plan and she is ready to begin the final leg of her journey.

Once in Paris Sasha in a way relives her life and makes her peace with her past and finds closure while keeping herself busy with the movies, walks and of course drinking. She meets people along the way and in a few brief moments even feels a sort of happiness. Her

connections with people are not very deep and most of the dialogue is in her head with herself. She is so far along in her lonely existence that she no longer attempts to form deep connections or feels a sense of satisfaction from connecting with others. She is a chronically lonely individual, whose species' evolution has shaped her brain to seek connection, but also causes her to retrieve as the connection no longer provides emotional satisfaction do to her changed neural responses.

Savory (1998, 5) pointed out that Rhys can be read in many ways and that our political and national background can lead to different interpretations. Also, the time we find ourselves in and our viewpoint will lead to different readings. With the knowledge we have today about the evolutionary background of loneliness and its symptoms and consequences and with a biocultural viewpoint, I see a chronically lonely woman, who has suffered from this condition for a prolonged time period that it has impacted both her physical and mental well-being and altered her behavior. I believe Sasha mistakenly because of her condition thinks death is the only way left for her to escape her miserable loneliness, the cul-de-sac, she finds herself in both physically and especially mentally. I interpret there are three reasons for Sasha's refusal to sleep with René in the end: first of all she is no longer able to feel satisfied by connecting with another person, secondly I think choosing to refuse his advances she is left with a sense of power over her own body and her own faith. She is the one making the choice of her faith and future. And thirdly, sleeping with the gigolo, would have caused her to "miss her window of opportunity" with the commis, whose arrival I believe she herself requested. As his shoes can be seen outside his door which according to Sasha is "never a good sign" (*Midnight,*) he may be getting impatient and ready to leave to work on another "commission" after being pushed away and avoided, giving the impression that Sasha has perhaps changed her mind and is not be ready for him after all.

As Savory (1998,) has indicated, Rhys relies on the reader to read carefully and pick up on the clues she leaves on the way, I see the clues of Sasha's faith laid in front of us already in the title of the novel. I argue, that death is spelled out in capital letters by the final scene. Rhys guides us through Sasha's final journey, the rituals she performs, the arrangements she makes and in between, gives us the events in Sasha's lonely life that lead her to her final scene. We meet her in the room, facing the alley in the cul-de-sac, where there is no way forward. We meet the man next door, death, who tries to enter Sasha's room before she is ready but does not enter by force when she pushes him away and patiently waits until she is ready for him. And when she finally leaves the door open, when her voyage home is booked, her new clothes bought, hair dyed and last feast eaten, he enters and takes her with her consent. That is the

ending I believe Rhys meant, the one she did not mean to be without hope, where Sasha is no longer lonely and chooses to say Good Morning, Midnight since she felt Morn did not want her.

A biocultural approach to the novel and Sasha's character has exposed explanations for Sasha's decline that would otherwise have been unattainable. Also, focusing on discovering the references and descriptions of death in the text has enabled to provide powerful evidence to support the argument that the end of Sasha's trip and the entire novel is death. A biocultural approach can provide a highly valuable viewpoint and additional tools and another layer to deepen our understanding of literature and allow the study of literature to develop alongside rapidly developing scientific disciplines.

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Yksinäisyyden sietämätön pimeys: biokulttuurinen näkökulma yksinäisyyteen ja kuolemaan Jean Rhysin romaanissa *Huomenta, keskiyö*

Johdanto

Ravinnon, veden ja ilman jälkeen yksinäisyyden välttämisen on sanottu olevan ihmisen seuraavaksi tärkein perustarve (Miljusovic 2012, xxx). Yksinäisyys ja erityisesti pyrkimys välttää sitä, ovat olleet merkittävässä roolissa ihmislajin säilymisessä lajin historian aikana.

Tässä tutkielmassa lähestyn yksinäisyyttä ja sen oireita ja seurauksia biokulttuurisesta näkökulmasta. Yhdistämällä muiden alojen tutkimustuloksia kirjallisuustutkimukseen, analysoin Jean Rhysin 1939 ilmestynyttä romaania *Huomenta, keskiyö* (tästä eteenpäin *Keskiyö*) ja romaanin päähenkilöä Sasha Jensenä. Yksinäisyyttä käsittelevän tieteellisen tutkimusnäytön avulla analysoin Sashan käytöstä ja tunteita, sekä niiden taustalla olevia syitä, joiden ymmärtäminen ilman biokulttuurista näkökulmaa olisi vaikeaa. Havainnollistan tutkielmassani, miten useissa ajankohtaisissa tutkimuksissa todetut pitkäaikaisen yksinäisyyden oireet ja niiden seuraukset ovat nähtävissä Rhysin 1939 julkaistussa romaanissa ja Sasha Jensenin käytöksessä.

Sasha Jensenin kokema yksinäisyys on yleensä käsitetty pelkästään ympäristön aiheuttaman tilanteen yhtenä seurauksena, mutta biokulttuurisen tutkimusnäkökulman avulla kootun aineiston perusteella, yksinäisyyden voidaan havaita olevan Sashan tuhon perimmäinen syy ja avainasemassa romaanin tapahtumien kulussa.

Rhysin naishahmojen on sanottu kuvaavan samaa naista tämän eri elämänvaiheissa. Osoitan, että *Keskiyön* päähenkilö poikkeaa Rhysin muista naishahmoista niin merkittävällä tavalla, ettei väite tämän romaanin ja sen päähenkilön kohdalla ole perusteltu.

Käsittelen tutkielmassani lisäksi kuolemaa ja sen esitystapaa romaanissa. *Keskiyön* moniselitteistä loppua on tulkittu useilla eri tavoilla. Se on nähty milloin uutena alkuna, milloin Sashan henkisenä tai fyysisenä kuolemana. Tutkielmassani osoitan, miten lopun tulkinta kuolemana on perusteltu. Rhys rakentaa Sashan hahmon ja romaanin juonen pienistä palasista, jotka lopulta muodostavat ehjän kokonaisuuden ja samalla tavalla hän ohjaa lukijaa pienten vihjeiden avulla kohti Sashan tarinan loppua ja tämän kuolemaa.

Kirjailija, tyyli ja teos

Ella Gwendoline Reese Williams (1890-1979), joka myöhemmin otti käyttöön kirjailijanimen Jean Rhys, syntyi 1890 Dominicassa. Kuusitoistavuotiaana Jean lähetettiin opiskelemaan Englantiin, jossa häntä kiusattiin hänen eksoottinen aksenttinsa takia. Keskeytettyään opintonsa isänsä kuoleman jälkeen, hän työskenteli muun muassa tanssityttöinä. Jeanilla oli useita suhteita niin naimisissa oleviin kuin naimattomiinkin miehiin ja lopulta hän avioitui kolme kertaa. Jean Rhys alkoi kirjoittaa tarinoita, joiden naispuolisilla päähenkilöillä oli usein hänen itsensä kaltainen tausta. Rhysin ainutlaatuinen tyyli sai heti huomiota ja hänestä tuli ylistetty väärin ymmärrettyjen ja -kohdeltujen, yksinäisten naisten kuvaaja. Rhysin ensimmäinen julkaistu teos oli 1927 ilmestynyt kokoelma novelleja. *Keskiyö*, Rhysin kolmas romaani, ilmestyi 1939 ja hänen suosituin teoksensa *Siintää Sargassomeri* 1966. Jean Rhys kärsi lähes koko ikänsä alkoholin ja lääkkeiden väärinkäytöstä ja hän kuoli 88-vuotiaana 1979.

Jean Rhysin ainutlaatuista kirjallista tyyliä on aina kehu. Rhys ei ole koskaan halunnut pidättäytyä yhdenlaisessa tyylissä vaan pyrki uudistumaan jokaisen teoksen kohdalla. Rhys käyttää lyhyitä lauserakenteita ja hänen kerrontatyyliinsä on usein tarkoituksenmukaisen sirpaleinen. Rhysin romaaneissa, etenkin *Keskiyössä*, itse juoni ei ole kovinkaan merkittävässä roolissa. Kertomuksen varsinainen sisältö on päähenkilön sisäinen maailma ja dialogi.

Keskiyö kertoo keski-ikäisestä alkoholisoineesta Sasha Jensenistä, joka palaa Pariisiin viiden vuoden poissaolon jälkeen. Hän on syvästi yksinäinen ja on vuosia yrittänyt juoda itseään hengiltä. Sashan yksinäisyys on käsin kosketeltavaa ja sitä on kestänyt mitä ilmeisimmin läpi hänen koko elämänsä.

Sasha saapuu Pariisiin ja majoittautuu parhaat päivät nähneen hotellin huoneeseen, jonka ikkunasta avautuu näkymä umpikujaan, joka kuvaa samalla Sashan sisäistä tunnetta ja jonka naapurihuoneeseen majoittautuu Sashan kohtalon kannalta keskeinen ”kauppamatkustaja”. Romaani etenee enimmäkseen Sashan tunteiden ja ajatusten kautta.

Sashan pitkäaikainen yksinäisyys on johtanut masennukseen ja alkoholin ja unilääkkeiden lisääntyvään käyttöön. Sashalle sosiaalinen kanssakäyminen on tullut vaikeaksi ja hän kokee itsensä yksinäiseksi seurassakin. Romanin muut henkilöt koostuvat lähinnä miehistä, joita Sasha tapaa juodessaan Pariisin ravintoloissa ja baareissa. Tärkeimmiksi nousevat gigolo René, joka erehtyy luulemaan Sashaa varakkaaksi ja Sashan naapurihuoneessa asuva mies, jonka tulkitsen kuoleman henkilöitymäksi ja josta annettavassa kuvauksessa on

runsaasti yhtäläisyyksiä viikatemiestä kuvaavien luonnehdintojen kanssa.

Biokulttuurinen näkökulma

Biokulttuurinen-termiä käytetään määrittelemään monitieteellistä lähestymistapaa ja biologisten, teknologisten, kulttuuristen, sosiaalisten ja poliittisten tutkimusmetodien risteyskohtaa (Davis 2014, vii). Tämä lähestymistapa antaa mahdollisuuden uudentilaiselle tutkimustulosten hyödyntämiselle ja se pyrkii edistämään kulttuuristen ja biologisten tutkimusalojen yhteistyötä ja biologisten adaptaatioiden ja kulttuuristen innovaatioiden välisten kausaalisten suhteiden ymmärrystä (Carroll et al. 2017,1). Biokulttuurisen lähestymistavan päämääränä on kattavampi kuva ihmislajin käyttäytymisestä (ibid.). Tutkielmassani käytän avukseni biokulttuurista lähestymistapaa analysoidessani Sasha Jensenin kokeman yksinäisyyden syitä ja seurauksia hyödyntämällä kirjallisuustutkielmassa eri alojen tieteellisistä tutkimuksista saatuja tuloksia.

Yksinäisyys ja identiteetin muodostuminen

Yksinäisyyttä on kuvattu nälän tai janon kaltaiseksi tuntemukseksi, eräänlaiseksi sosiaalisen kanssakäymisen näläksi, joka poistuu, kun yksilön sosiaaliset tarpeet täyttyvät. Ihminen on ultrasosiaalinen laji, jolle sosiaaliset suhteet ovat elinehto. Yksinäisyys on evolutiivisesti kehittynyt adaptaatio, jolla on ollut merkitystä yksilön ja lajin selviytymiselle ja lisääntymiselle, sillä lajimme historiassa yksinoleminen on usein ollut hengenvaarallista (Worsley 2018, n.pag.). Pieninä annoksina yksinäisyys on yksilölle ja lajille eduksi, sillä se aiheuttaa halun sosiaalisten suhteiden ja yhteyden uudelleen solmimiseen, mutta pitkittyessään yksinäisyys muuttuu epäedulliseksi (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2010, 218). Liian pitkään jatkuessaan se muuttaa aivojen rakennetta ja toimintaa ja sosiaalinen kanssakäyminen ei enää tuota aiemmin koettua mielihyvää (ibid., 2017). Yksinäisyys ja yksin olo on kuitenkin erotettava toisistaan, eikä yksinolo välttämättä merkitse yksinäisyyttä (Svedsen 2017, 18). Vastaavasti yksinäisyyttä voi kokea, vaikka olisi ihmisten ympäröimä, sillä pelkkä muiden ihmisten ympäröimänä olo ei riitä tyydyttämään sosiaalista nälkäämme. Sen lisäksi tarvitaan tunne yhteydestä toiseen ihmiseen (ibid.). Yksinäisyys on subjektiivinen tunne, joka ei välttämättä millään tavoin liity yksin oloon (ibid.).

Yksinäisyyttä on etenkin viime vuosina tutkittu paljon ja sen aikaansaamien negatiivisten terveysvaikutusten on todettu olevan kansanterveydellisesti merkittäviä

(Cacioppo ja Cacioppo 2018, 426). Yksinäisyyden tiedetään lisäävän monien tautien riskiä ja sen on todettu voivan olla vaarallisempaa terveydelle kuin ylipaino tai tupakointi (Cacioppo ja Patrick 2008, 93). Yksinäisyys ja masennus esiintyvät usein yhdessä, mutta tutkimuksissa on todettu yksinäisyyden lisäävän masennuksen esiintyvyyttä, mutta päinvastaista vaikutusta ei ole havaittu (Hawkley ja Cacioppo 2010, 219). Yksinäisyys muuttaa aivojen rakennetta ja toimintaa ja lisää muun muassa päihteiden käytön ja uniongelmien mahdollisuutta (Hawkley ja Cacioppo 2010, 220; Bartzokis 2005, 55). Yksinäisillä on suurempi todennäköisyys tuntea itsetuhoisia ajatuksia ja päätyä itsemurhaan (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010, 219). Sasha kärsii yksinäisyyden seurauksena masennuksesta ja uniongelmistä. Lisäksi hän on alkoholin ja unilääkkeiden väärinkäyttäjäksi, joka on jo vuosia harkinnut itsemurhaa. Sosiaalinen kanssakäyminen ei myöskään enää tuota hänelle mielihyvää.

Identiteetin muodostumisella paikoilla ja erityisesti kodilla on todettu olevan suuri merkitys (Easterlin 2016, 231). Tiettyyn paikkaan liittyvillä ihmisillä on merkittävä vaikutus koettuun mielipiteeseen kyseisestä paikasta ja etenkin kotia kohtaan tunnetut negatiiviset tunteet ovat yhteydessä juurettomuuteen ja negatiiviseen minäkuvaan (Easterlin 2016, 231). Sasha elää elämäänsä vaihtuvissa vuokrahuoneissa ilman pysyvää kotia. Erittäin etäinen suhde perheeseen ja negatiiviset ajatukset kodista, selittävät osaltaan Sashan juurettomuutta ja negatiivista minäkuvaan. Sashalle vaihtuvat huoneet toisaalta korostavat hänen yksinäisyyttään, mutta toisaalta ne myös tarjoavat turvapaikan maailmalta, jonka sosiaalisia suhteita hän haluaa paeta.

Huomenta, keskiyö – Rhysin erilainen romaani

Rhysin naishahmojen on sanottu olevan sama nainen eri elämäntilanteissa (Savory, 2009,9). Romaanien päähenkilöissä onkin runsaasti yhtäläisyyksiä, mutta Sasha Jensen ja hänen tarinansa poikkeavat merkittävästi muiden romaanien päähenkilöistä. Sasha ei ole taloudellisesti riippuvainen miehistä, eikä myöskään käytä naiseuttaan ja seksuaalisuuttaan taloudellisen hyödyn tai turvan tavoitteluun, kuten muut Rhysin naishahmot. *Keskiyössä* tämä asetelma on itse asiassa käännetty pääläelleen ja romaanissa mies, gigolo René on se, joka pyrkii tienaamaan seksillä.

Kansallinen identiteetti ei tässä romaanissa ole samalla tavoin tarinan keskiössä kuten muissa Rhysin teoksissa, joissa päähenkilöiden tausta on samankaltainen Rhysin oman taustan kanssa. Lisäksi *Keskiyössä* on erittäin rajallinen juoni jopa Rhysin romaaniksi. Tapahtumat

etenevät pääasiassa Sashan sisäisen puheen avulla ja varsinaiset tapahtumat koostuvat lähinnä Pariisin kaduilla kävelyistä ja ravintoloissa ja elokuvissa käymisestä. Myös romaanin monitulkintainen loppu poikkeaa muista Rhysin romaaneista, joiden lopussa päähenkilön tulevaisuuden suunta on melko selkeästi nähtävissä.

Kuolema

Kuolema on vahvasti läsnä romaanissa heti sen ensimmäisistä sivuista lähtien. Romaanin nimi tulee Emily Dickinsonin (1830-1886) runosta. Runon ensimmäinen osa on myös painettu romaanin ensi lehdille. Runo 425, kuten Dickinsonin runot usein, käsittelee kuolemaa. Kuolemaan viitataan romaanissa muutenkin usein, muun muassa aikansa suosituilla lauluilla. Tärkeä, kuoleman teemaa näkyvästi läpi romaanin ylläpitävä hahmo, on Sashan naapurihuoneen ”kauppamatkustaja”, jonka kuvauksessa toistuvat viikatemiestä kuvaavat yksityiskohdat. Miestä kuvaillaan myös haamun kaltaiseksi. Romaanin viimeisillä sivuilla naapurihuoneen mies saapuu Sashan huoneeseen valkoisessa yöpaidassaan kuin noutamaan Sashaa mukaansa tuonpuoleiseen.

Romaanin lopussa on osuvasti kuvattu tuntemuksia ja toimintaa, jotka sopivat tutkimusten antamaan kuvaan Sashan käyttämien Luminal-unilääkeiden ja alkoholin yliannostuksen oireisiin (Suddock and Cain 2018, n.pag). Luminal on fenobarbitaali, jonka tiedetään aiheuttavan riippuvuutta ja tiedetään käytetyn itsemurhissa (López-Muñoz, Ucha-Ubabe ja Alamo 2005, n.pag).. Itsemurhatapauksissa lääke usein otetaan yhdessä alkoholin kanssa, kuten Sasha kirjan lopussa tekee ennen antautumistaan viereisen huoneen miehen kuolettavaan syleilyyn.

Johtopäätökset

Sashan kohtaloa on usein käsitelty ulkoisten tekijöiden aiheuttamaksi. Yksinäisyys romaanissa on myös poikkeuksetta nähty seurauksena eikä syynä. Biokulttuurisen lähestymistavan ansiosta on, ajankohtaista tieteellistä tutkimusnäyttöä hyödyntämällä, voitiin osoittaa, miten Sashan tunteet ja käytös sopivat yhteen yksinäisyydestä johtuvien käytösmallien kanssa.

Biokulttuurinen lähestymistapa avaa mahdollisuuden ymmärtää paremmin romaanin päähenkilön käytöstä ja sen vaikutusta tapahtumien kulkuun ja Sashan kohtaloon. Yhdistämällä eri tutkimusalojen vahvuusalueiden tarjoamaa tietoa, on mahdollista luoda huomattavasti laajempi käsitys tekojen motiiveista. Ilman biokulttuurisen näkökulman tarjoamia mahdollisuuksia yksinäisyyttä ja sen seurausten ensiarvoisen tärkeää merkitystä

Sashan kohtaloon olisi hyvin vaikea havaita.

Kuoleman viittausten havaitseminen läpi koko romaanin on avainasemassa tulkittaessa romaanin monitulkintaista loppua. Biokulttuurinen näkemys helpottaa selittämällä Sashan käyttämien lääkkeiden vaikutusta ja yliannostuksen oireita, jotka romaanin viimeisillä sivuilla ovat selkeästi nähtävissä Sashan olemuksessa ja toiminnassa.

Biokulttuurisen näkökulman käyttö kirjallisuustutkimuksessa avaa uusia mahdollisuuksia lisätä ja syventää ymmärrystä kirjan henkilöiden tunteiden ja käytöksen taustoista.