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# Image and Identity: Effects of the Gaze in Colette's The Vagabond and Jean Rhys's Good Morning, Midnight

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IMAGE AND IDENTITY: EFFECTS OF THE GAZE IN COLETTE'S  
THE VAGABOND AND JEAN RHYS'S GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT  
(TITLE)

BY

JANET A. PUZEY

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2003

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YEAR

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For my husband, Harold—thank you for all your love, patience, and support.

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## Abstract

*Image and Identity: Effects of the Gaze in Colette's The Vagabond and Jean Rhys's Good Morning, Midnight* explains the development of identity, within private and public spaces, of the novels' female protagonists, Renee Nere and Sasha Jensen. Understanding the history of Paris, used as setting in both novels as well as serving as home for both authors, and its historical relationship to the gaze is important.

Using John Berger's and Charles Baudelaire's observations of female presence and the gaze, the thesis analyzes the ways in which Renee and Sasha struggle to form their identities, not only while braving the critical gaze of the public, but also while contemplating an inward assessment seen through the recurring motif of looking glasses.

The results of this analysis show that Renee and Sasha handle the effects of the gaze differently, consistent with their personalities and their occupations. Renee's ability to control the public gaze through her performance on the stage makes her stronger, whereas Sasha's inability to face the gaze of the public in cafes and on Paris streets adversely affects her mental health. While Sasha's inward gaze yields destructive memories, Renee's introspection uncovers a dormant talent, writing. The formation and development of their identity and self-image relates directly to the choices they make in acceptance or denial of both a public and an inward gaze.

## Introduction

What is it about Paris that stirs our imagination? Mention the city and notice what images come to mind: monuments, boulevards, cafes, fashion, lovers, and a sinuous river winding through it all. Paris has long been a city of magic and myth, and for many, memories forged there have a mystical power. Ian Littlewood says that “Paris comes to us second-hand” (1). Like Proust, he suggests that we have anticipated the visit because “our imagination has been there first, worked upon by the imagination of others. It is through the filter of their memories, desire, dreams, descriptions, lies, gossip that we experience the city. What we respond to is an imagined place” (Littlewood 1).

In the early twentieth century, a multitude of artists were drawn to the myth and the truth that is Paris. Among the first was Gabrielle Sidonie Colette, a country girl, who arrived in Paris with her husband, Henry Gauthiers-Villars, prior to World War I. The city and society she faced in the first decade of the century differed from the Paris of the post-war era. After the war, writers such as Jean Rhys, Ernest Hemingway, Robert McAlmon, Kay Boyle, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein spent years working, living, partying and surviving in a city which, indifferent, welcoming, or forbidding, served as a refuge for artists seeking the freedom to experiment with their craft, as well as validation of their work, which they found lacking in other places.

The literature produced between 1914 and 1945 has come to be termed Modernist, and Paris served as setting for much of it, including the work of Colette and Rhys. But prior to this time, there was an earlier modern period—the modernization of Paris. The modernization of Paris, which took place during the mid to late nineteenth century, shaped not only the city’s physical appearance, but also its inhabitants—the men



and women on its streets and in its cafes, rooms, hotels, and homes. This modernization of the city and those who lived and worked there played a part in shaping the modernist novels written a generation later by Colette, and a generation after that by Jean Rhys.

Napoleon III is credited with giving Paris an all-new look. By appointing Baron Georges Haussman Prefect of the Seine in 1853, he set in motion a renewal project that changed not only the face of the city, but also the daily lives of its inhabitants.

“Unprecedented levels of splendour were achieved, not just in fashion and manufactured goods, but in architectural construction” (Thomson 20). Haussman’s plan erased unsightly and bothersome working-class neighborhoods and gave Paris an appearance of “visual harmony” (Thomson 23). The widened boulevards, the parks, and the airy spaces gave a sense of openness to the city. At the same time, the advent of the department store influenced the presence of women in public places, which in turn drew the attention of the observer of the female—the flaneur. Women themselves became “objects for consumption, objects for the gaze of the flaneur...” (Friedberg 35).

When women became consumers of department store riches, they also became public entities. To appear on the street, fashionably turned out, became acceptable and even popular. Women displayed their social position and economic standing through their dress and toilette, which was much noted by their observers—the flaneurs. Baudelaire asks, “Where is the man who... has not... enjoyed a skillfully composed toilette, and has not taken away with him a picture of it which is inseparable from the beauty of her... making thus of two things—the woman and her dress—an indivisible unity?” (31). He also “identified fashion as a locus for the very essence of modernity”

and noted that “modernity lay not just in the outward trappings of fashion and make-up, but in a certain look, gesture, movement” (Thomson 162-3).

The modernization of Paris had a rather paradoxical effect on women. It both liberated them and increased pressure on them to look good. On the one hand, it gave them new freedom to wander and to observe, in essence to become flaneuses. According to Anne Friedberg, *flanerie* can be “a social and textual construct for mobilized visuality” (3), and in the origins of the *flaneuse* is the gendering of that power and visuality in the configurations of modernity (3). In modern Paris, women, then, are both the observed and the observer. They have freedom to look, but also feel a need to conform to the expectations of those who look at them.

Although in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Paris respectable women enjoyed more freedom to appear in public spaces than previously, they still lived under the restraints of a patriarchal society, fulfilling the duties and expectations of husbands and fathers. According to Baudelaire, one of those duties is devoting “herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored” (33). Adorning oneself before appearing in public was a custom well known to female members of the upper class. When in public places, recognition of one’s class or social standing might sometimes be verified only through clothing styles and quality. However, the customs and habits of being properly dressed or behaving appropriately still mattered in private spaces as well.

One private space where women “astonished and charmed” was the salon. The Paris salon in the last decade of the nineteenth century such as the one presided over by Edith Wharton was a conservative, regulated milieu, unlike those to come later hosted by

Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein or Adrienne Monnier. Wharton's Paris salon, which is similar to what Colette first encountered with her husband, Henri Gauthier-Villars, continued the restrictions and constraints placed upon women by a patriarchal society as noted by Shari Benstock:

We try...to imagine what her situation must have been, to feel the pinch of whalebone stays, the weight of brocaded shawls, the strain of buttoned shoes, to know too well the constraints of a fashionable, wealthy American upbringing...Behind iron-grated windows draperies conceal high-ceilinged rooms that ring with music and laughter that hold art objects and precious libraries, that are warmed by fireplaces, friendship, and excellent wines. These are rooms in which lively conversation and the art of gracious living continue to be cultivated like rare flowers, rooms where the cosmopolitan and the intellectual meet on equal footing, where all the forms of *politesse* are carefully preserved against the encroachment of a more modern, vulgar world (37-38).

Colette entered into a similar atmosphere upon her arrival in Paris with Gauthiers-Villars, "well-born Parisian rake and journalist...who signed his salacious novels and amusingly savage music criticism 'Willy.'" (Thurman intro in Colette viii). By marrying, Colette left her country-girl environment for the fashionable Paris world of the *haut-monde*. Benstock explains that she never would have ventured to or been accepted into high society's salon except "as a concession to her husband's charm" (81). Remembered as a wide-eyed silent attendee, Colette accompanied Willy, whose presence was welcomed by hostesses seeking recognition in the press (Benstock 81). Willy and others

like him represented those of the *belle époque* who were not quite so *belle*. Contrasting with Wharton's salon were others where evidence of "drug-induced eroticism...exotic fashions, overstuffed drawing rooms...[and] sexual indulgence" existed (Benstock 82). One salon fitting this category belonged to Natalie Barney whom Colette met in 1900. Colette became a regular at Barney's "for women only" afternoon salon (Benstock 61). Within these two vastly different modern Paris salons, Colette found both oppression and liberation.

Arriving in Paris as an unwilling accomplice to a womanizing, domineering husband, Colette eventually found a hard-earned freedom. Forced to write to order by Willy, Colette began her career as 'ghost writer' for the popular and lucrative Claudine novels. According to Judith Thurman, it was in creating the century's first rebellious, reckless teenage heroine, that Colette learned to become both a person and a woman (Colette ix). Thurman further states that "Writing was the way that a supremely vital and gifted but fragile young woman with a weakness for bondage discovered her true value and disengaged from an exploitive master" (Colette x). It is ironic that one aspect of her bondage—writing—would serve as a means of her liberation.

After leaving Willy in 1905, Colette began her second career as a music-hall performer. Prior to this, in 1902, she had arranged for a private gymnasium to be built including a trapeze and parallel bars. She "had perceived precociously, that the beauty of a woman's muscles is identical with their purpose, which is self-support" (Thurman in Colette x). Often wearing skimpy costumes on the vaudeville stage, Colette became a dancer, an actress, and a performer. In this way, she used her role as object of the male gaze to create herself and her identity. Colette's novel, *The Vagabond*, mirrors her own

experiences as a nomadic performer. Just as Renee Nere becomes realistic concerning love, class, and money, Colette learned the same lessons throughout her marriage, her divorce, and subsequent experiences. In this way, Colette differs from several fellow women writers. A sizable majority of female writers lived and worked in Paris courtesy of family money and/or social position. For example, Natalie Barney inherited fortunes from both her mother and her father, whereas Edith Wharton (one of the first fiscally successful early-twentieth century women authors) earned a considerable living from her writing and took advantage of acquaintances' social position to open and fill her salon. "In 1909, when Wharton, Stein, and Barney took refuge in their Paris apartments, protected from the outside world by the interior world they had created for themselves, Colette was exposed to the public, traveling from one small town in France to another, sleeping in train stations or in hotel rooms with 4 persons to a bed" (Benstock 98), quite a contrast to the fine furniture, soft gas lighting, and genteel company of the salon.

Writing, a vocation Colette neither sought nor wanted, became first her refuge, then her salvation, and finally her life. "For Colette... a first rule of survival is the realization that human beings—and particularly women—are exceedingly resilient" (Eisinger 33). It is this resiliency that allowed her to overcome formidable obstacles (ill health, a domineering first husband, and public censure to name a few) and to succeed as woman and writer. At times, Colette found herself in the position of the 'other woman' while still married to her husband. Gauthiers-Villars blatantly paraded his paramours through Colette's life and even into their home. Surprisingly, Colette made a friend of one such woman—Charlotte Kincler—and subsequently "throughout her life would build major friendships with other women" (Jouve 82). So, although Colette began life in Paris

under extreme oppression, she later found the freedom she needed to survive and eventually flourish. But Colette's example, according to Benstock, is not typical of patterns established by women writers, most of whom began writing for themselves in secret (76-77).

“The occupation of writing is demanding precisely because it requires privacy, solitude, time for reflection, and a place set apart for such special activity” (Benstock 77). Paris provided these requirements in the early twentieth century. Women especially sought a place where they could be released from patriarchal restraints as well as the constraints of required social forms. France, particularly Paris, could offer this freedom to those fortunate enough to settle in the city of light. But freedom did not necessarily mean success. In the period just after World War I, Paris was full of struggling artists, authors, and musicians who invented, practiced, and marketed their craft.

The Paris of notable personalities and writers such as Sylvia Beach, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Janet Flanner, members of the so-called Lost Generation, differed remarkably from that of Wharton, Barney, and Colette. (Stein's era spanned both generations.) Rules were relaxed, but, surprisingly enough, only for expatriates, those from America or England who adopted the city for a few months, a few years, or for the rest of their lives. Their disillusion with the consequences of World War I led them to new ways of expressing anger and making sense of the fragmentation of their lives. Susan Stanford Friedman puts it this way:

The starting of modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth century western culture: loss of faith, experience of fragmentation, and disintegration and shattering of cultural symbols and norms...This kind of

definition of Modernism that emphasizes despair, hopelessness, angst and sense of meaninglessness excludes women. It does not describe their vision, although some experienced the same as the results of effects of post-war conditions (qtd. in Benstock 26: 28).

She has a point. These primarily male ‘literary practitioners’ worked with each other reading, editing, and critiquing their efforts. Women served mostly as benefactors (Benstock 33). Two of the more prominent ones are Sylvia Beach and Harriet Weaver. Without Beach’s unflagging promotional and publishing support and Weaver’s fiscal backing, James Joyce might not have lived to see Ulysses finished and successfully published.

But, on the other hand, several women engaged in writing and were published in magazines, books and newspapers. Some of these authors benefited from ‘sponsorship,’ encouragement, or tutelage of male writers. For example, Ezra Pound published H. D.’s poetry, naming her Imagiste. Although many believe she later outdistanced his tutelage, she did benefit from his promotion. Kay Boyle found encouragement from Robert McAlmon, and Englishwoman Jean Rhys benefited from her relationship with Ford Madox Ford. Unlike Colette, who ultimately seems to have figured out how to make the best of Paris, Rhys remained an unhappy outsider, despite her love for the city.

Through Ford, Rhys “met the prominent figures of the Paris literary world... although she remained on the fringes of this society” (Staley 10). In addition, “he introduced her to modern literature, gave her reading lists, copies of the *transatlantic review*” (Staley 9). Rhys never really became part of the literary café scene. “Rhys’s

world is the underside of the bohemian existence...”(Staley 21-22), and Staley says she looks at the world from the viewpoint of a displaced person (2).

This sense of displacement resulted from Jean Rhys’s upbringing. Born in the West Indies, she didn’t move to England until the age of 16. She lived there during World War I, then married a Dutch poet and spent ten years wandering in Europe, some of those years spent in Paris. Much of that time involved “constant movement from cheap hotel rooms and cafes, and visits to friends for a little money...or shelter for a night or two (Staley 8). In this way Rhys’s work reflects her life, just as Colette’s does. She acknowledged the autobiographical nature of her work saying, “I always start with something I feel or something that happened” (qtd. in Staley 10).

Like Colette, Rhys had poor luck in her relationships with men. Her first husband, Jean Lenglet, a half-French, half-Dutch poet, eventually found work in Paris after their marriage in 1919. This proved to be marginally more stable than their previous life as vagabonds in Vienna, Budapest, and Prague. According to Staley, Rhys suffered during this time:

She felt dislocated, fearful, and above all, isolated—feelings which were later to emerge as major themes in her novels. She sought consolation in drink—to ease the fears and uncertainties she had about other people. She was always shy and felt she did not meet people well. She felt misunderstood and many thought her aloof, but it was her shyness and caution that kept her separated from others, and she felt this loneliness deeply... What made her nomadic life bearable was a keen sense of ironic humour which allowed her a double vision, to laugh at herself and her



surroundings, while feeling, at the same time, nearly overcome with despair. This quality is reflected again in her work, and both relieves and deepens the bitter experiences of her heroines (9).

Staley also believes that these experiences served to reinforce her idea of female dependence and male dominance, and that this female sense of helplessness “accounts in large part for the passivity of her heroines” (7).

Why was Rhys so dislocated? Part of the answer may be that she never found a support group, never had a circle of women friends, nor participated much in gatherings of literary people. Robert McAlmon talks of the intimacy of the cafes and terraces where such people with a literary bent found each other to share an intellectual evening (221). He talks of the “smoky and thick interiors of the customary hangouts” (95). Rhys was more used to Kay Boyle’s description of her and husband Richard Braut’s domicile in France in 1923-1924, a room with the water spigot outside in the alley and a seatless toilet located in the hall (McAlmon 126).

The news and/or rumors about expatriates living hedonistic, dissolute lives were only partly true. Many, including Jean Rhys, carved out a meager existence. She was not even as fortunate as Colette in that she never enjoyed much success in her younger years, not while she lived in Paris. A city which liberated so many women did not provide the same freedom for Jean Rhys.

It is impossible not to relate the personal experiences of Colette and Rhys to their protagonists, Renee and Sasha. They have similar backgrounds, they occupy the same kinds of spaces, and their personalities determine their future. Paris as the setting is the

common denominator of the two novels, as is the theme of woman's struggle for identity and survival.

Renee and Sasha's struggle, taking place in the private spaces of rooms and the public spaces of streets, cafes, shops, and the theatre is revealed to the critical eye of the public gaze as well as the reflective eye of the self-gaze. John Berger argues that woman, living under watchfulness in a limited space, develops a social presence. She learns to watch herself, or rather, an image of herself. She envisages herself in every activity—a continual survey. He argues that her presence depends upon interior values revealed in her gestures, voice and clothes, forming an attitude which defines how she can or cannot be treated (Berger 45-46). These interior values are weighed and considered through both literal and psychological self-reflection. Renee Nere and Sasha Jensen struggle against the power of the gaze and the ways in which it directs the actions of their daily lives.

Paris, as setting, is crucial to the development of identity for Sasha and Renee. The city Baudelaire describes in "The Painter of Modern Life," is one dominated by the flaneur—spectator and observer (14). According to Baudelaire, the flaneur's imagination is aroused by fashion; therefore, it is woman's duty "to astonish and charm" men by decorating herself in order to be admired (33). This constant demand to be properly on display is a reoccurring theme in both novels, although in different manners and with different consequences. A central question to be answered is: Are Renee and Sasha liberated or inhibited, enhanced or destroyed by the survey of the gaze in Paris? In the early twentieth century, Paris played a paradoxical role in the lives of women by appearing to offer them personal freedom, while simultaneously putting them on display.

Colette and Jean Rhys experienced this freedom and repression while writing their novels *The Vagabond* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, and reflect their personal experiences in their writing.

Ernest Hemingway provides a nostalgic view of Paris in his book *A Movable Feast*: “There is never any ending to Paris and the memory of each person who has lived in it differs from that of any other. We always returned to it no matter who we were or how it was changed or with what difficulties, or ease, it could be reached. Paris was always worth it and you received return for whatever you brought to it. But this is how Paris was in the early days when we were very poor and very happy” (211). Within these words can be found both the truth and the myth that is Paris. It was possible to live in poverty and be happy, but for writers Rhys and Colette, poverty translated to drudgery, ill health, and loss of personal freedom. Sasha and Renee face similar obstacles. The magic of the city is often overshadowed by the reality of daily life.

## Renee Nere: Reconfiguring Identity through “Vagabondage”

“I live in a turmoil of thoughts which go round and round unceasingly” thinks Renee Nere in Colette’s *The Vagabond* (208). The tension she faces in resolving the conflicts between her work, her writing, and her love for Maxime Dufferein-Chantel resembles the motion of the windmills revolving outside her train window as she passes through Brittany. Through this novel, *The Vagabond*, we trace her passage as she searches for and struggles with her identity, which is inherently related to her writing, her stage performance, and love or lack thereof. Hope Christiansen calls *The Vagabond* “an exploration of the quandary of the working woman who must balance career and personal life, each of which brings a different kind of satisfaction” (81). But in addition to understanding a woman’s place in society, it is necessary to consider the spaces she occupies. Ann Cothran maintains that “the conditions of her [Renee’s] existence are inextricably bound to the spaces she inhabits: any change in control of space reflects a corresponding change in her existence” (27). Through analysis of the public and private spaces Renee experiences, as well as her responses to the male gaze within these spaces, we can understand how Renee’s identity is shaped.

The space Renee inhabits can be divided into four areas. First, there is her private space within her apartment. Second, there is her private space in her rooms in Max’s presence. The effect of Renee’s room fluctuates according to its occupants; when Max arrives, her perception of it changes. Another space is the stage--it can be a Paris theatre or nightclub, a private home, or a series of small town dance halls. Finally, by linking these literal spaces to “figurative spaces” as suggested by Cothran, we can understand the conditions of Renee’s life which guide her decisions. Regardless of the space Renee

inhabits--public or private, physical or psychological--she experiences the male gaze almost continually in her life. It is only when she abandons the private space of her home for the theatre tour that she reclaims a measure of independence and a renewed identity through a lost portion of her work—writing.

In order to understand Renee's point of view, we must start with her private spaces, particularly her rooms. Early in the novel, Renee speaks of the solitude in her ground-floor flat. Aside from her dog Fossette, there is no one there but herself. Yet there appears a shadow or twin when she faces herself in the mirror. She meets herself there and anticipates "the soliloquy which [she has] a hundred times avoided, accepted, fled from, taken up again and broken off" (11). The mirror image cannot "distract [her] from [herself]" (12). She is forced to take stock of her condition, finding herself alone, aging, and dispirited looking with "that drooping mouth and those slack shoulders, the weight of my whole sad body slumped on one leg!" (12). This self-gaze reveals that not only is she alone, but she is used to solitude; otherwise she "should raise this drooping neck, straighten that slouching hip..." (13). Christiansen says that Renee's "attitude toward her room is deeply ambivalent" (82). Renee questions whether her flat provides "relaxation...relief...or the bitterness of solitude" (10).

Why is her solitude bitter? She is economically independent and in charge of her life. Should she not instead feel empowered? Perhaps she suffers withdrawal from the male gaze when she is alone. After all, at the heart of her work is the ability to capture the gaze. Perhaps her work so enveloped her that in the privacy of her apartment she feels its absence to the point of bitterness. Renee's feelings are so ambivalent at this

point that she is not truly happy either with or without an admirer, at least in the private space of her home.

As well as considering herself and her apartment in the reflection of the mirror, Renee looks anew at her rooms through Max's gaze. He calls her apartment "a charming, cozy nest" (75), while Renee sees "an old spray of holly...the cracked glass of a little plaster...a torn sheet of paper." For her, the entire space emanates "indifference, neglect. Hopelessness..." (76). This difference in perception mirrors the differences present and future between Renee and Max. He sees her happy at home, in her little nest, whereas she suffers from solitude and separation from her writing—"the dusty inkpot, the dry pen..." Christiansen says "there is no 'room' for writing and a man in the same space" (90) which is ironic for Renee. According to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, there are two essential conditions necessary for women writers: a room and money (112). Max can provide both for Renee, yet she resists him: "I cannot see that the fact that my friend is rich has anything to do with me" (143).

At a certain point she realizes that he is not going to fit into her life, that although she likes his physical presence and feels that she belongs to him, she still cannot associate his life with hers (143). What she is feeling is the difference in their *lifestyles*. Renee's lifestyle is related to work; Max's is not. The tension between Renee's drive to work and Max's desire to take care of her is evident in two conversations. First, Renee talks with Hamond about beginning a life after the tour. "Not to think anymore, Hamond, to go to ground somewhere, with him... That's why I want to enjoy, all at the same time, everything I lack: pure air, a generous country where everything is to be found, and my love" (150-51). Then Hammond asks the crucial question, "And then, my child,

afterwards?” In this moment Renee has an apocalyptic vision of her life with Max which has the “most inexplicable and disastrous effect.” She cannot picture herself leading the life she yearns for—a life void of the music-hall and work. This idea is reinforced in the conversation Renee has with Brague prior to their road trip:

“Has he got an office, your friend?”

“An office? No, he hasn’t got an office.”

Well, does he...make motor-cars? I mean, he’s got some sort of business?

“No.”

“He does nothing?”

“Nothing.”

“Absolutely nothing at all?”

“Nothing. That’s to say, he owns some forests” (163).

Maxime Dufferein-Chantal lives a life completely foreign to Renee Nere. He has no employment which makes him the object of Baudelaire’s statement, “Love is the natural occupation of the idle” (27). His lifestyle includes high society, multiple residences, and limitless funds. Yet, he somehow manages to make Renee’s secondhand room into something dear and quaint. To her “the whole place gives an impression of indifference, neglect, hopelessness...”(76). But Max declares his affection for it, saying it brings him to tears to think that he will not see “this old divan, the armchair where you sit to read, and your portraits...”(169) until she returns from her tour. These contrasting points of view between the very rich and the very poor are another source of tension. As much as he enjoys her room, Max intends to remove her from it. Christiansen points out that “Max offers his own conception of what she needs in terms of space and what she

will become as a result” (92). Max writes to Renee that “the whole world shall be yours, until you come to love nothing but a little corner of our own where you will no longer be Renee Nere but My Lady Wife” (191). Christiansen explains that by using the word corner (*coin*) as he also did earlier in the novel, “he effectively destroyed its privileged quality as her private space. The repetition of the word is indicative of the struggle between Renee and Max to define her space” (92). Renee responds by asking, “am I not to be consulted? What do I become in all that?” (191). And at this point she considers his ominous words, “She [his mother] has always done what I’ve wanted” (191).

Renee’s final decision to leave Max is reflective of Cothran’s statement that “all significant literal spaces of the novel become the arena in which the attempt to dominate Renee’s existence originates and persists” (29). The two dominant spaces for Renee are the apartment and the music hall. In this second space, a very public stage, Renee is exposed to the gaze of the public. In fact, Max cannot understand “how she could live privately the way she does and yet choose to appear on stage” (Miller 243). Nancy Miller explains that this “is a problem of *vision* that will be given its full weight at the end of the novel, in Renee’s refusal to see the world reflected in a lover’s gaze” (243). But Renee, in fact, feels safe on the stage “protected from the whole world by the barrier of light” (32). When she and Blague give a private performance she misses the “barrier of light” that protects her not from the spectator’s gaze, but from her view of *them*. This relates to John Berger’s observations on seeing. Berger says, “Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world” (9). Under most circumstances, Renee is not concerned with being seen; after all, performance is her



metier. However, she is reluctant to see the audience, to recognize witnesses and acquaintances of her former life. When Renee performs in a private home, as Miller explains, her “vulnerability to the spectator’s gaze is aggravated by the ambiguous intimacy of the setting” (242). In a splendid house, Brague wishes for “a small row of footlights” which might help deflect or at least filter not only the gaze of the spectators but also Renee’s recognition of them. Miller suggests that even though Renee tries to “render spectators imaginary,” she is real for them “by the logic of the gaze that thinks it possesses what it sees” (242). When Max sees Renee, he determines to possess her, most probably because of the image she presents on stage to his gaze and that of the entire audience. Baudelaire’s observations of women fit well with Max’s pursuit of Renee when he first sees her on stage and imagines an “invitation to happiness” (Baudelaire 30). Baudelaire wrote in “The Painter of Modern Life” that woman is “the source of the liveliest and even...of the most lasting delights.” He names her many things: a graceful animal, a pleasure and a pain, a divinity, a star, “a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance” (Baudelaire 30). We can imagine that Max perceives a “gentle harmony, not only in her bearing and the way in which she moves and walks, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of stuff in which she envelops herself” (Baudelaire 30). The question Baudelaire asks, “What poet, in sitting down to paint the pleasure caused by the sight of a beautiful woman, would venture to separate her from her costume?” (31) can be interpreted as the crux of the problem between Renee and Max. Whereas Max has fallen in love with an image of who he thinks Renee is, Renee is uncertain of her identity and who she is or wants to be. One thing she does know is that

she likes the gaze of the spectator, especially Max's: "Could I sincerely declare that, for a few weeks past, I have not taken pleasure in the attention of this passionate spectator?" (112). As her friend Margot tells her, "One has to get terribly old before one can give up the vanity of living in the presence of someone else" (111). But, ultimately, Renee will choose to disallow its (the gaze's and therefore Max's) possession.

Before making that decision to remove Max and his gaze from her life, Renee considers the advantages and disadvantages of marriage:

Renee expresses her ambivalence toward marriage in terms of space: her choices are bound up on a literal level with her work as a music hall dancer. She describes herself as cloistered, however in the most unusual of places, the music-hall dressing room, a space in some senses associated (at that time) more with the emancipation of women than their subjugation. (Southworth 265)

On the one hand Renee talks of developing a relationship with Max while almost simultaneously rejecting and denying the arrangement. This theme of the "tragic incompatibility of men and women" (Thurman in Colette xvi) torments Renee and promotes the tension not only between her and Max, but also within her own mind and heart. Judith Thurman says that Renee "examines her addictions to men with amused detachment, and flirts alternately with abstinence and temptation" (Colette xi). Thurman further posits the following questions: "Is there love without complete submission and loss of identity? Is freedom really worth the loneliness that pays for it?" (Colette xi). In deciding the answer to these questions, Renee must also answer the question: *Where* is freedom found? In what *spaces* can Renee find it?

At the beginning of the novel, Renee's identity is connected to the stage. She is solitary and unhappy. In Part Two, she meets Max and acquires a partner who makes her both happy and nervous. She begins to question her work and her position in her relationship with him. A further shift takes place when she begins to write letters to Max from her tour on the road. She begins to contemplate happiness in connection to solitude. Previously, writing had been a pleasure and a luxury; she was once "a woman of letters" but who has now "turned out badly" (14). Her description of the ability to write makes it clear that writing is tied to having time in which to do it: "To write is the joy and torment of the idle" (14):

To write, to be able to write... means spending long hours dreaming before a white page, scribbling unconsciously, letting your pen play round a blot of ink and nibble at a half-formed word... To write is to sit and stare hypnotized, at the reflection of the window... It also means idle hours curled up in the hollow of the divan... (14).

As a working woman, Renee Nere does not have idle hours. She maintains that "it takes too much time to write" (15). The constant interruptions afforded by tradesmen, telephones, and summonses are all signifiers of her place in the world as a woman without a room or money to avoid these conflicts. That Renee needs such a place is reflected in her statement, "I am no Balzac!" meaning she can neither attend to nor succeed at multiple tasks as he did (15). Southworth states that "a change of place and a reconfiguration of boundaries... [is] accompanied by a return to writing..." (275). By establishing a new space, the music-hall tour, Renee can explore a new form of expression, a return to writing (Southworth 275). In Part One, Renee is a working

woman with space—a room of her own, in fact—but with no time to write. Her job requires not only time, but also energy. She is emphatic about earning her living, about “bartering my gestures, my dances and the sound of my voice for hard cash” (28). But it doesn’t come easy. She is beginning to find fatigue bothersome. She knows “the value of health and the misery of losing it” (60). The fatigue Renee talks of is not only physical; mentally and emotionally she is under severe strain. Sleep, at times, no longer renews her; she faces forty days of haggling among the stagehands, not to mention the tug of war in her head concerning her relationship with Max. It follows that her room is not a place to write, but a place to recover. Christiansen says it is ironic that “being able to keep the physical space to write implies depriving herself of the very time and energy necessary to write” (85). By abandoning her room, changing comfortable boundaries and well-known spaces, Renee also changes her outlook, which in turn dramatically affects her identity.

In Part Two, Renee begins to feel the pressure of Max’s presence in both her professional and her personal life. This stress is due not only to his physical presence, but also to his psychological pursuit. Cothran’s discussion of the representation and function of female space in Colette’s work divides Renee’s spaces into two areas, literal and figurative. Cothran explains that literal spaces such as Renee’s rooms, the music-hall, the dressing room, and several parks are “the important arenas of Renee’s physical existence” (27). Equally important is the function of figurative spaces which “describe the *conditions* of Renee’s existence” (28 emphasis added). Using Cothran’s construct, we see that figurative space elements such as invasion, pursuit and captivity all relate to Max’s pursuit of Renee and his efforts to confine her within *his* personal space. As

mentioned earlier, Max's invasion into Renee's living space sparks several reactions. She sees things through his eyes and her space is no longer her own. He forces an invasion of her memories, "to remember, too often, the existence of desire... and to remember that I am alone, healthy, still young, and rejuvenated by my long, moral convalescence" (62). Renee sees with terror in her eyes Max advancing toward her. She fears his invasive power over her long-dormant desire. At times it seems that it is not just Max's presence that she dislikes, but that of any man. Her previous disastrous marriage to Taillandy has made her wary, so much so that she assures Hamond that "never again will I love anyone, anyone, anyone!" (86).

Max's pursuit of Renee often appears insidious. From the outset his objectives are clear: to meet, subdue, and then capture Renee. His bumbling entrance into her dressing room during her performance in *The Pursuit* (aptly named) has to it a hint of calculation. After he bows, he does not leave but "remains where he is, craning forward, his free hand hanging down with the fist clenched... awkward and almost menacing" (21). Although Renee cannot see his expression, she knows he desires her. "He does not want my well-being, this man, he merely wants me" (22). Up to now, her admirers have not been over-persistent, but she, perhaps presciently, recalls men such as "those hunters who pursue a woman until she physically does not know which way to turn" (23). After sending her flowers, Max contrives to meet her on the street in front of her house, and is not at all put off by her rudeness, due to her discomfort in being unprepared and casually dressed. Hamond tells her that Max has ordered a collar for Fossette, a seemingly harmless invasion of her privacy and control over her life. When Max begins to make regular visits, Renee begins to clean up her rooms, if not her person. Renee finds it odd

that he doesn't try to get to know her: "How is it that he who is in love with me, is not in the least disturbed that he knows me so little? He clearly never gives that a thought, and his one idea is first to reassure me and afterwards to conquer me" (78). Again, this reflects Baudelaire's comments concerning man's appreciation of women. Max has no desire to understand her; rather he wants to acquire her, possess her, and flaunt her. In their second kiss, Renee recognizes that Max's eyes are trying "to subjugate and extinguish mine" (126). At this point in their relationship, Renee admits that Max has swept her off her feet and prevents her from thinking: "I surrender to him not only my liberty but my pride too..." (130). Her acceptance of his pursuit is reflected in her mirror which "frames a pointed face with the defiant smile of a friendly fox" (132). Renee's acceptance of Max's pursuit begins to shift at the end of Part Two. When he utters his wish, "But, darling, you no longer need the music hall now that I am there..." (145), she becomes "agitated and almost terrified." This is the turning point, or rather a wake-up call for Renee, and she realizes that she "cannot manage to fit him in to my future in the way he would like" (143). Max's pursuit and capture of Renee is doomed.

Renee does not expect happiness with Max. In her conversation with Hamond, she is truly perplexed by the idea that her relationship with Max should lead to happiness. Her instincts are true and ahead of her reason when she claims that she doesn't want to be his wife. In defining what marriage means to women, Renee begins to make her decision. In her mind, "marriage for a woman means accepting a painful and humiliating domesticity" (148). Cothran says it is at this point that Renee is no longer in control of her life; she is "figuratively speaking, a prisoner. In order to regain control of her existence, she will have to free herself from possessed spaces and find new ones"

(Cothran 32). This she does by leaving Max behind when the music-hall tour leaves Paris.

According to Cothran, this is the point where the “restitution code shows the process through which the self is restored to wholeness within female space” (29). She explains that the three stages of restitution involve evasion, infusion and shelter (Cothran 28). For Renee, evasion means leaving Paris and Max during the approach of springtime, a season of rebirth. Southworth puts it this way: “Rather than occupy a static, closed room, the dimensions of which are prescribed by the husband, by tradition, the female protagonists of her novels, like Colette, elect to remain on the move” (276). Although at first Renee is unhappy, she comes to realize that writing letters to Max is something she should spend her whole time on; in fact, she says, “I believe I find it easier to write than to talk to you” (182). Miller says that “at a first level, then, feminist writing articulates as and in a discourse a self-consciousness about woman’s identity” (8). In writing, Renee rediscovers her identity, not as a possession held captive by man, but as “a woman of letters” who will, perhaps, not turn out so badly. By reconfiguring her space, Renee begins to resolve the conflicts of work, love, and space.

While on tour, Renee begins to regard and reflect upon her surroundings. She understands that through writing her true feeling to Max, she has discovered her ability to notice, appreciate and capture the “beauty of the natural world” (Christiansen 93). Although the parks, countryside, and natural beauty of the rural areas Renee observes may appear to be public spaces, she experiences them privately, drawing nourishment from them to feed a dormant desire—writing. During this time “Renee’s conception of her room seems to have no limitations; it is the expansive space... of the *vagabonde*”

(Christiansen 93). According to Christiansen, it is the opposite of all that Max intends to offer her—"it has taken Max's persistent invasion of her now-abandoned room—her dressing room, her apartment—to make Renee realize just how broad and open her spatial horizons truly need to be" (93).

In the end Renee finds herself more at home and freer away from her room, her "haunted furniture" and Max. "'*Chez moi*' is no longer defined as an apartment, nor a dressing room, but rather... wherever Renee can write authentically" (Christiansen 94). Working at unsteady tables, in messy dressing rooms, at windows and in gardens, Renee writes "with a fullness and a freedom difficult to explain" (209).

Traveling by rail is one of the means by which Renee discovers a part of the world which she had, if not forgotten, not considered in some time—nature and the "exuberant irresistible spring of the South..." (186). This infusion stage renews her. Nature inspires her and the change is evident in her letters as she writes more and more about the countryside she passes through. It is as if the powers of nature are infusing her with the power to write, to resist, and to reclaim her lost, hidden, or repressed writing talent. As she feels a renewal, she also urges Max to "feel the same disturbance as the spring which has thrust its way out of the earth and is burning itself up with its own haste" (187). Renee lets herself be "taken by surprise, carried away and conquered" (188) by the colorful, refreshed earth. In this last section of the novel, Renee appears receptive to change, her writing suddenly full of sensual description. Her figure of speech resembles Coleridge's language in "Kubla Khan" when she notes that Max "offers me marriage as if he were offering me a sunny enclosure, bounded by solid walls" (190-91). Renee feels the need to beware of Max and his efforts to imprison her in a 'pleasure



dome.’ In Nîmes, in the Gardens of the Fountain, Renee’s Elysian refuge, she is at last able to overcome the final obstacle to her separation from Max: the fear of solitude. She realizes that she is her “own worst enemy...afraid...of night, solitude, illness and death...” (203). When she refuses to summon him, it is her “first victory” (203). As the rain drops on the corner of her mouth it is “warm and sweetened with a dust that tastes of jonquils” (203). Thus, Renee finds her refuge in herself, in newly discovered private places of nature and solitude, and regains control of her existence.

Christiansen concludes that “writing and work come to co-exist peacefully in the new room—the space of travel, of *vagabondage*...” (91). Renee begins to write of open spaces—fields and parks-- reflecting her new “room”. Miller states that Renee, in resisting the power of Max’s gaze, has retrieved “the power of her own [gaze] through a return to childhood visions” (245), renewed visions of nature and the countryside. At one point, Renee suddenly realizes that she has forgotten Max. “Max suddenly becomes brutally subordinated to another desire” (Miller 250): “to seek for words, words to express how yellow the sun is, how blue the sea, and how brilliant the salt like a fringe of white jet... Yes, forgotten him, as if the only urgent thing in the world were my desire to possess through my eyes the marvels of the earth” (207). Renee concludes that she has “forgotten him as though I had never know his gaze” (207). Yet, there is a new gaze she becomes familiar with, one of introspection—a self-gaze. This interior self-image begins to define her identity.

What Renee ponders in the beginning of the novel is evident at the end. She fears isolation as “a remedy which may kill” (31). But in isolating herself from Max and in leaving the confines of her room she rediscovers her metier—writing. It wasn’t easy. As

she says, “it is only in pain that a woman is capable of rising above mediocrity” (31).

Facing the pain of separation from Max as well as avoiding his efforts to pursue, capture, and imprison her, Renee Nere eventually creates a personal, private space in which to control her existence. And she does it not by avoiding the gaze, but by controlling it, by keeping in place the barrier of the footlights so that the only gaze available to her is a reflective, inward assessment. The mirror, which, in the opening pages, could not distract her from herself, has proven an ally in her rebirth; her identity is reformed by the renewal of an inward gaze.

## Sasha Jensen: Forming Self-Image under the Gaze

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jensen struggles to withstand a continual public survey fought within both her mind and body against the obstacles of memory and society's expectations. Her main issue is not only a question of identity, of who she is; it is also a question of self-image, both an interior image of self-assessment and an exterior image assessed by the public. This self-image, which is by no means stable, and which is formed by two major elements, the gaze and memory, is in a large part responsible for her anxieties and her behavior. So, unlike Renee Nere who deliberately attracts the gaze and is strengthened by self-examination, Sasha Jensen desires invisibility and finds no relief in introspection.

Although Sasha appears "dependent and passive" (Castro 16), she does understand the ways of the world, especially the ways in which her poverty and behavior make her vulnerable to the gaze. According to Jack Byrne, Sasha's story is "as much about money as it is about sex, unrequited love, failed marriage, drugs, booze, melancholia, cheap food, cheap hotels, passivity, indifference, despair, and exile" (151). Sasha's mental balance is directly related to the poverty whose constraints define her spaces and reveal her vulnerable self. Thus, Sasha Jensen's identity is formed by her response to both the public gaze and her internalized version of that gaze—a version influenced by her own painful memories and impoverished past.

Sasha lives in spaces both private and public. Her primary private space is her room or living quarters. As is the case with Renee Nere, her private space is often invaded by others as well as by her own memories. At times like these, her perception of herself changes. But Sasha is much more of a recluse than Renee. The primary reason

for this is that she has no occupation, no focus, no daily agenda except that which she makes up for herself. Therefore, her room is not only a refuge but also a prison; it becomes both the place to escape the gaze and the place which prevents her from confronting and overcoming her fears of the gaze. In fact, the privacy of her room may be an illusion—it may be a refuge from the present gaze, but it is filled with hurtful memories and reminders of a continual poverty. Re-experiencing the gaze of others as well as seeing the reflection of her own gaze in mirrors, affects her self-image and impedes her recovery.

The gaze is relevant throughout the novel and affects Sasha in private as well as in public spaces. In public, she gazes at people and feels their gaze upon her, and in Sasha's interpretation of the spectator's gaze she finds much of her self-image. For this reason, she feels tremendous anxiety toward public places and is fearful of them. The public spaces Sasha inhabits include cafes, restaurants, streets, shops, and parks. She is on display each time she leaves her room for one of these locations. How she experiences the gaze depends upon the location and, in a large part, upon her memories.

An important factor affecting her reaction to the gaze is poverty. Through flashback we see that when Sasha is poor but has no bad memories to resurrect (in her younger years before the baby), it seems that her suffering is mostly physical. But when painful memories intrude upon her in her most penurious state, her suffering becomes more oppressive. Throughout the novel, Sasha faces straitened economic circumstances of varying degrees. In the opening, we find her living on a fixed income of two pounds, ten shillings a week, or approximately one hundred thirty pounds a year. While the amount of money is not large, it is enough to buy her a room, food and drinks, and the

occasional 'extra' like a new hat and newly-dyed hair. This contrasts remarkably to earlier times when she was forced to sell her clothes or when she went hungry for three days. Poverty, then, is key to her actions and reactions so much so that the manner in which she forms her identity and adapts her self-image depends upon it as well as the spaces she inhabits, both private and public.

Sasha's private spaces—her rooms—are also connected to her economic circumstances and are all permeable to her memories and her awareness of how others see her. In private Sasha is not exposed to the public. But she is exposed to her own reflection in the looking glass and to her memories of how others saw her in the past. All of the rooms in which Sasha lives are described in detail which tells us that she is acutely aware of her surroundings. For example, in the opening pages she speaks of arranging her "little life" (9). "I put the light on. The bottle of Evian on the bed table, the tube of luminal, the two books, the clock ticking on the ledge, the red curtains..." (12). This indicates to us the level of her existence, her present status quo. Sasha later searches for a different room, perhaps not realizing until later that it is not a different room she is seeking, but a refuge from a dissatisfying life and identity. She finally concludes, however, that "All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet. *A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is*" (38 emphasis added). At this point she realizes that changing her room will not change the fact that she is hiding and avoiding the public and its ever-critical gaze. She does, in fact, refer to one of her rooms as a hiding place: "I crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang" (43). At the same time that she is in her room hiding, she leaves herself vulnerable to memories.

A stream of consciousness leads her to painful reflection brought on by contemplation of a room (in this case, the artist's studio she visited with the Russian): "This damned room—it's saturated with the past... It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms..." (109).

Although some of her rooms have been awful (bugs crawling on the wall), and some have been perfectly adequate (it all depends upon her economic circumstances and the memories she has to deal with), one thing they have in common with each other as well as with several public spaces is the presence of mirrors. Within these mirrors, Sasha measures her physical appearance both privately and publicly. She faces herself in private moments in her room or in the lavabo and also in public moments in a bar or café where she endures the public gaze and self-gaze simultaneously. Indeed, charting Sasha's formation of identity involves a multiplicity of elements: rooms, cafes, mirrors, and memories.

In Amsterdam, Sasha and Enno have a very clean room with "rose-patterned wallpaper." Enno tells her, "You musn't worry about money... Money's a stupid thing to worry about... I can always get some" (116-17). At this point, she doesn't worry about it; she is in love and "tuned up to top pitch." Everything is "tender and melancholy—as life is sometimes, just for one moment..." (117). "When we get to Paris" becomes their mantra for good times ahead. But before they arrive in Paris, they go to Brussels, where they sell most of their clothes, an action which has a tremendous effect on her self-image. Although Enno says he can get money, it is Sasha who acquires the money courtesy of Mr. Lawson. Questioned by Enno, she lies, saying she got the money from a Miss

Cavell. Becoming emotional under his query, she begins to cry, attributing her emotional state to her dress: “I feel so awful. I feel so dirty, I want to have a bath... I fell so awful. I feel so dirty.” (120). When he leaves to get food, she lies there, “Happy, forgetting everything” and begins to laugh (120). Her laughter turns to tears at the station when she is sick and fearful of being pregnant. She sees the physical effects of poverty in her reflection in the mirror at the waiter’s house. Enno is trying to borrow money, and as Sasha sits there waiting for the host to mix the dressing, she sees two reflections, one in the mirror and one in her mind. The mirror reveals a thin, dirty and haggard girl “with that expression you get in your eyes when you are very tired and everything is like a dream and you are starting to know what things are like underneath what people say they are” (121). She reflects, “I didn’t think it would be like this—shabby clothes, worn-out shoes, circles under your eyes, your hair getting straight and lanky, the way people look at you. I didn’t think it would be like this” (121). The impact of poverty on her physical appearance negatively affects her self-image. At this point, Sasha is depressed, weak, and dispirited, but she does not appear nearly as vulnerable to the public gaze as she does later. Although she dislikes the way people look at her, it doesn’t incapacitate her; it does not yet make her hide. It is her self-gaze that she pays most attention to.

Getting to Paris is the beginning of some economic relief, but not before Sasha is forced to wait alone for three and a half hours with only a single cup of coffee, facing fatigue and hunger. When Enno finds a benefactor and they go to La Napolitaine for ravioli, Sasha is once again content, “I’ve never been so happy in my life. I’m alive, eating ravioli and drinking wine. I’ve escaped. A door has opened and let me out into the sun. What more do I want?” (124). These remarks tell us two things: one, an escape

from poverty, including hunger and thirst, however temporary, is a great relief which brings joy, and two, Sasha's emotions are fragile and easily swayed from one extreme to another. Castro says this is typical in Rhys's fiction of those characters who, after some "cheap wine on an empty stomach... see the world rather differently" (20).

In another remembered incident, poverty appears even more oppressive. Before the baby's arrival, when both Enno and Sasha are working, Sasha feels pretty again, looking in the mirror to see that her hair "is curly again and the corners of [her] mouth turn up" (137). She admits she never thinks of money. But when they return from the birth and death of their child, their "luck has changed and the lights are red" (140). Sasha says it "was only after that that I began to go to pieces." (143). Of course, we know that the foundation had already been laid. This is the time when poverty of an extreme nature as well as emotional stress escalates. After the baby is born, all Sasha can think about is money, "money...for my son: money, money..." (38). Her fear is that "they will crush him because we have no money." (59).

The opening pages of the novel describe Sasha as she is after Enno has left her, after the baby's death, and after five years away in England. Because of these destructive memories, her poverty, which is not nearly as severe as in past times, still adversely affects her. Sasha's vulnerability is caused not only by her meager means, but also by society's critical eye, real or imagined. Our recognition of this fragility makes it all the more puzzling to find her working as a mannequin. We see this in the scene at the fashion house where she works. First, she is afraid of the boss from England, afraid that he will see her: "Don't let him notice me, don't let him look at me. Isn't there something you can do so that nobody looks at you or sees you? Of course, you must make your



mind vacant, neutral, then your face also becomes vacant, neutral—you are invisible” (19). She is nearly paralyzed with fright, so much so that her thought processes are slowed to a crawl. When he asks her a simple question about how long she worked as a mannequin, everything is a blank in her head. After a stilted conversation, she is relieved, thinking he’ll never notice her again, but she is wrong. When he asks her to take an envelope to the cashier, she doesn’t understand because he mispronounces the word, *caisse*. She panics. “My hands are shaking, my heart is thumping, my hands are cold” (25). A simple misunderstanding totally overwhelms her. She wants to escape: “fly, fly, run from these atrocious voices, these abominable eyes...” (25). In her effort not to appear stupid by asking for clarification, she does in fact appear inept. Her self-consciousness rests like a heavy blanket over her efforts to act and respond. After recovering from tears, she considers the situation and is able to shift the blame from herself to society and its expectations:

Well, let’s argue this out, Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That’s my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there’s no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. We can’t all be happy, we can’t all be right, we can’t all be lucky—and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn’t it so, Mr. Blank? There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours. Some must cry so that the others may be able to laugh the more heartily.

Sacrifices are necessary... You must be able to despise the people you exploit (29).

Castro maintains that this “interior monologue directed toward her employer, the aptly named Mr. Blank, reveals the terror of failure in an economy predicated upon inequality” (35). Sasha has been alienated, which according to R. D. Laing “is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings” (qtd. in Hagley 115). Along the same lines, Staley observes that “Sasha recognizes those forces in society which turn her into a weak and helpless figure who simply cannot get on” (86). Moreover, he also notes that this is “Sasha’s essential view of life in a world in which all her actions and reactions seem attempts to master the threats that such a world imposes” (Staley 85). One critic of the novel says that Sasha’s story “provides a prescient critique of the ever-growing European fascism” and that “Sasha is one of the outcasts, unable to fit into a society that requires of its members utter conformity; a hard, attractive, competent surface that, in Rhys’s works, provides only a superficial mask of the inhumanity beneath” (Castro 35). A good illustration is what happened to Sasha when she returned to England five years earlier. The “old devil” (perhaps society?) asks why she didn’t drown herself. Sasha says, “These phrases run trippingly off the tongue of the extremely respectable... And that’s what terrifies you about them. It isn’t their cruelty, it isn’t even their shrewdness—it’s their extraordinary naivete” (42). However, she can learn to deal with this if she decides to adopt the Russian’s (Nicolas Delmar) point of view. He believes that most things that happen are not his will, but so what? Take life as it comes because “you are not one of the guilty ones. When you aren’t rich or strong or powerful, you are not a guilty one. And you have the right to take life just as it comes

and to be as happy as you can” (64-5). Sasha could have used this piece of advice earlier when she fixates on how others perceive her. Her self-image is weak and her self-esteem shaky at best. Her attitude fluctuates from confidence to indifference to anxiety to fear to paralysis. In this way she is dramatically different from Renee Nere. As the following illustrates, the lack of structure in her life, such as the routine demanded by a job, leaves her floundering, brushed to and fro by a real and imagined public gaze. She practices avoidance, conformity, and defiance in a desperate effort to withstand public judgement.

“The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no ‘Here this happened, here that happened.’ Above all no crying in public, no arguing at all if I can help it” (15). With these words, Sasha attempts to exert some control over her life. Some aspects of her personality make it hard for readers to sympathize with her. It is ironic that she seeks out situations where she will be seen, but then can’t deal with the consequences. She works as a mannequin in a city of voyeurs—an appealing job in a risky location. Her over-sensitivity to public scrutiny may be understandable, but her, at times, deliberate and willful pursuit of it is puzzling. Castro suggests that there is “little forgiveness, little redemption” to Sasha (16). She also points out that Rhys’s characters are “passive, lack agency that makes sympathising with their suffering difficult. When faced with poverty, emotional betrayal and the commodification of their bodies, [the characters] respond by letting themselves drift, spiraling more and more into degradation” (Castro 19). It is this passivity and aimlessness Sasha tries to overcome by having a programme, a schedule. Throughout the novel, but seen first in the opening pages, Sasha is drifting in a very fragile state. In order to recover some semblance of

control she practices avoidance—of all those people and places which confound and terrorize her. This includes both private and public spaces. “My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don’t, streets that are friendly, streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don’t, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won’t, and so on.” (46). Sasha gravitates to places where she has a “perfectly clean slate” (39). She makes a tremendous effort to assimilate, but often ends up explaining or apologizing for herself. Cafes are particularly tricky places for her. Often she has “a cringing desire to explain [her] presence in the place” (106).

Another mantra becomes “faites comme les autres—that’s been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you” (106). Her paralyzing self-consciousness is deeply imbedded, and she recognizes that her attitude to life has been one of supplication:

Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don’t succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn’t every word I’ve said, every thought I’ve thought, everything I’ve done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And, mind you, I know that with all this I don’t succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well... But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think—and have a bit of pity (106).

Sasha's attempts at conformity and behaving like everyone else are her way of handling the exterior gaze.

Leaving her room and going out at all is difficult. Sometimes she just gives herself orders to follow as if she is beginning a prescribed march, "Get up, get up. Eat, drink, walk, march..." (56). We see, in an interior monologue when she faces Mr. Blank at the fashion house, her orders to herself concerning her behavior:

Come on, stand straight, keep your head up, smile...No, don't smile. If you smile, he'll think you're trying to get off with him. I know this type. He won't give me the benefit of a shadow of a doubt. Don't smile then, but look eager, alert, attentive...Run out of the door and get away...You fool, stand straight, look eager, alert, attentive.... (24).

But, occasionally she tires of all the worry and is "sick of being laughed at—sick, sick, sick..." (151) at which time she becomes defiant. At one point she reminds herself that she "will not grimace and posture before these people any longer" (153). Challenging conformity, she decides one day not to wear stockings because that would mean giving weight to others' opinions. She admonishes herself to have a little dignity; after all "the agitation is only on the surface. Underneath I'm indifferent. Underneath there is always stagnant water, calm, indifferent—" (153). This pretense seldom works because Sasha is too preoccupied with her image, not primarily in a vain way, but in a self-destructive, critical way. She projects the impact her image and her presence have on the public, especially on people in cafes, in shops and on the streets.

This is particularly evident in a scene that takes place in Theodore's restaurant. Sasha breaks her own rule when visiting this café because this is a place where she might

be recognized, which is significant because she admits that on this day “I have left my armour at home.” Soon she feels bombarded: “These people all fling themselves at me. Because I am uneasy and sad, they all fling themselves at me larger than life” (49-50). As she eats, her feeling of panic mushrooms and then catastrophe strikes. One of the patrons turns to stare at her saying, “Oh, my God!” At once, “all eyes in the room are fixed on me” (30). Sasha feels that she is paradoxically both the center of attention and ostracized. Later she imagines the patrons’ commentary, “What is she doing here? The stranger, the alien, the old one?” And she admits, “I have seen that in people’s eyes all my life” (54).

What else does Sasha see in their eyes and what does she see in her own? At times it seems like her reflection in the mirror, especially in the lavabo, is an alter ego making a judgement on her present state of affairs. In her last meeting with Rene, when she feels uncomfortable that they have shared memories in common (concerning the rich woman writer in the south of France), she excuses herself to go to the lavatory with which she is acquainted as “another of the well-known mirrors” (170). The mirror speaks to her saying “the last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren’t you?” (170). It says that it keeps track of all the faces it sees and throws them back “lightly, like an echo.” But this particular visit is not so traumatic as other ones for Sasha because “This is the interval when drink makes you look nice, before it makes you look awful” (170). The mirror, especially one in a public place, acts as a sort of gauge by which she measures her present circumstances. Fortunately, at this point, she is not completely overwhelmed as is the mulatto woman who “would do anything not to see people” (96), meaning that she doesn’t want people to see *her*. (How reminiscent this is of Renee and

her fervent desire for footlights.) Sasha gives her a piece of advice that she (Sasha) struggles to follow every day: “Don’t let yourself get hysterical because if you do that it’s the end” (96).

The recurring motif of mirrors and looking glasses underscores the importance of image and the gaze to Sasha. In the café, she faces a triple threat: the gaze of the employees and patrons, her reflection in the long glass of the bar, and the mirror image in the lavatory. Sasha works at self-effacement to avoid the consequences of emotional upheaval caused by the gaze. Worrying about Mr. Blank at the fashion house, she says: “Don’t let him notice me, don’t let him look at me. Isn’t there something you can do so that nobody looks at you or sees you? Of course, you must make your mind vacant, neutral, then your face also becomes vacant, neutral—you are invisible” (19). Often her preoccupation with being observed focuses on the aspect of the eyes. During the first appearance of the man in the white dressing-gown from next door, Sasha focuses on his “sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing” (14). Mr. Blank’s eyes have a chilling effect that makes Sasah want to run. She describes him as “plat du jour—boiled eyes, served cold” (29). Sasha thinks that most human beings have cruel eyes (97). The repetitive description of eyes has a unifying effect on the novel, seen especially at the end when the white-robed neighbor looks down at her with “his mean eyes flickering” (190). Whereupon, Sasha recounts, “I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time” (190).

Although not frequent, there are a few moments when Sasha feels the power of her own gaze directed at someone else. For example, her friend takes her to the Halles where clients pay for the right to sleep. He asks if she wouldn’t like to take a look at

them, but she resists this opportunity to play voyeur. Much later, with Rene, she glances at him sideways as if reluctant to subject him to a direct gaze. One last example is the moment she notices a girl at an open window opposite to hers. "The street is so narrow that we are face to face, so to speak. I can see socks, stockings and underclothes drying on a line in her room. She averts her eyes, her expression hardens. I realize that if I watch her making up she will retaliate by staring at me when I do the same thing" (34). Perhaps it is Sasha's discomfort and inexperience at gazing at others that directs her feelings about being the recipient of the gaze herself.

In Paris, during one of her calmer moments, Sasha again tries to stick to the programme. She walks to the Luxembourg Gardens and sits awhile. After some troubling thoughts about the recent events in Theodore's café, she turns her back to the pond to look at the "slender straight trunks of trees." She tries very hard to relax but memories intrude, including more thoughts of what happened in the café. Just as she relaxes again, watching people pass and a little girl playing, just as she convinces herself that she is all right, that she is not unhappy, she starts thinking about a kitten. This moment when she cannot avoid recurring memories provides one key to Sasha's inability to recover. To her credit, Sasha tries desperately to live in the present. Bianca Tarozzi explains:

The beautiful dress, the glamorous room she cannot have, the hat and the cheap cosmetics she buys are essentially the means through which Sasha tries to escape from the destructive core of her personality; they are screening devices and, at the same time, a sort of survival kit. That is why the entire ritual of buying a hat or having one's hair dyed is so important and so minutely described. Take the blond



cendre hair dye, for example. Sasha hangs on that thought ‘as you hang on to something when you are drowning’ (8).

As well as helping her get through the hours of the day, Sasha uses her “programme” to shape and control others’ perception of her. By buying the correct hat and by having her hair dyed in the most popular although difficult-to-achieve color, Sasha attempts to invite a positive, non-threatening gaze from the public. An acceptable glance or no glance at all also prevents her from reminiscing about past tragedies.

And when she does achieve some success in repressing the bad times, Rene is there as a catalyst, forcing her to realize that “her sense of darkness and futility well up inside her into a realization which excludes the possibility of hope: ‘You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That’s the past—or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same’” (172). Brought to this point by an accumulation of memories, Sasha acknowledges her fears—fear of man, of woman, and of the whole human race. Staley believes that “at last, spent, she sees her ‘illusion’ crushed by the whole image of her life, past and present” (94). He also confirms that the ending dialogue between Sasha’s two selves, “brings to the surface Sasha’s deepest longings and fears as well as all of the defenses time and experience have taught her” (96).

How are these longings and fears resolved? In the end, Sasha accepts as surrogate lover for Rene the very man whose sunken, glassy eyes she tried so hard to avoid earlier. By this time, the turmoil Sasha has been facing concerning her identity has reached fever pitch. She envisions herself as two people: “Who is this crying the same one who

laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other—how do I know who the other is? She isn't me" (184). Her emotions swing wildly and widely from despair to euphoria to resignation to acceptance. She despairs when Rene treats her roughly, then rejoices at the discovery of the money he refuses to take. She is resigned to being drunk and hallucinates about the "enormous machine, made of white steel" (187). The imagined machine reflects several elements of Sasha's life: the coldness and impersonality of society, the gaze of many eyes, especially feminine ones, her movement from room to room, and the passage of time. In any event, the vision of this cold, white machine of many eyes is followed closely by the entrance of a white dressing-gowned, mean-eyed man whom Sasha embraces.

With this capitulation and an exclamation of "Yes—yes—yes...", Sasha cries out an acceptance of her circumstances. Her cry, rather than an affirmation of life, is more an acknowledgement of her situation as a woman beset with destructive memories, which prevent a full recovery of mind and body. She cannot despise *him* because she recognizes her own failings and accepts them. Thus, within the confines of her room, during one more of her mood swings, Sasha Jensen exposes herself to one more gaze. What she struggled to avoid by hiding in a private space is revealed—she is a vulnerable woman with fears and painful memories, one whose instability causes her to invite and perhaps deserve that which she despises.

## Conclusion

Why is Paris important as the setting for the stories of Renee Nere and Sasha Jensen, two women struggling with their identity? Paris is synonymous with *flanerie*, and the prevalence of the ubiquitous gaze, present since the modernization of Paris, strongly affects the lives of these two women. However, at some point, both Sasha and Renee return the gaze; they experiment as *flaneuses*. In addition to giving and receiving the gaze, they develop a self-gaze—a reflection inward, a self-examination and perception. Both Sasha and Renee observe themselves in looking glasses and as they do so, they carry on an interior dialogue with themselves which is continued in other venues. This self-examination results in taking action: for Renee it means going on tour, for Sasha it means going shopping.

Major differences in how the two women handle the gaze depend upon both their personalities and their occupations. Renee radiates self-confidence; Sasha radiates helplessness. Renee is independent; Sasha is dependent. Renee is psychologically sound; Sasha is psychologically unstable. Renee is gainfully employed; Sasha is often unemployed and has only a meager income.

Renee's self-confidence has an economic root. In a patriarchal society, she has loosed the bonds of matrimony and conformity to become an independent woman. Earning her way is extremely important. It is not just the income she values, but the satisfaction that comes from labor, noted when she says, "I feel myself joyfully seized once more with an active passion, a real need to work, a mysterious and undefined need which I could satisfy equally well by dancing, writing, running, acting, or pulling a hand-cart" (91). Renee is adamant about earning her living and becomes a "tough little

business woman. The least gifted of women soon learns how to be that when her life and liberty depend upon it” (28). Renee’s independence, which she has purchased by means of her work, is reinforced and strengthened by her attitude toward solitude. She is unafraid to be alone. In her dressing room, in the beginning of the novel, when she comes face to face with “that painted mentor who gazes at me from the other side of the looking-glass” (5), she is alone, but does not despair because “Chance, my master and my friend will, I feel sure, deign once again to send me the spirits of his unruly kingdom” (6). Two things are evident in this statement: one, Renee is tolerant of solitude and two, she reasons with herself through the reflection of the mirror.

Actually Renee is more than tolerant of solitude and finds it in a strange place—the stage. Even though Renee is a stronger person than Sasha, she does have fears and doubts. The difference is that they don’t overwhelm her and render her helpless. Rather they make her angry. She admits a “stupid fear of man, of men, and of women too”, but along with that goes a “savage defiance, a disgust for the milieu where I had lived and suffered” (32). Admitting the necessity of ignoring what bothers her, Renee comes to realize that “only on the stage was I really alone and safe from my fellow-creatures, protected from the whole world by the barrier of light” (32).

On stage, Renee is prey to the gaze, but for her it is a controlled gaze, especially if the “barrier of lights” is present. On stage, she controls who sees her, when, and under what circumstances. On stage, she is prepared for it because it is her job to attract it. As a performer, Renee concerns herself with make-up on and off stage. The first description of her physical presence is vivid: “deep-set eyes under lids smeared with purplish grease-paint. Her cheekbones are as brightly coloured as garden phlox and her blackish-red lips

gleam as though they were varnished” (5). This garish depiction of make-up is natural to her and echoes throughout the novel, both in public and in private spaces. But even in private places she pays attention to how she looks, especially if Max is present. “I leave him, to go and encircle my eyes again with the blue outline which makes them velvety and shining” (159). Whenever she worries about her age, there is some reference to make-up, as if she is admitting that make-up is a mask meant to disguise the real Renee. In writing to Max, she asks “are not the things you love in me the things which change me and deceive you, my curls clustering thick as leaves, my eyes which the blue kohl lengthens and suffuses, the artificial smoothness of my powdered skin?” (176). She realizes that as a woman of a certain age, her allure for Max may wane and, by this description of make-up, she reminds him.

Both Renee and Sasha show a preoccupation with aging, although it appears Renee is more aware of age than Sasha. Renee calls herself an old maid, bemoans “the blemishes of a face which is losing the habit of being looked at in daylight” (115), is more easily fatigued, and bursts into tears when her friend Margo says she’s got older. She begins to notice the “strong neck that is beginning to lose the smooth suppleness of its youthful flesh and admits that she is a “full-blown rose” with “the sad crease that smiling has engraved” on her cheek (199). It is not the gaze of the public that an aging Renee fears, but Max’s gaze, especially in comparing her to younger women. It is not even Max’s actual gaze, but an imagined one, the idea of which is fueled by Renee’s concerns about their future. Thus, Renee is more comfortable on the stage, under the gaze of an audience where her performance, make-up, and costumes shape the audience’s access and reaction to her.

When Renee is the instigator of the gaze, she is sometimes uncomfortable. During the performance in a private home, she detests being able to see the audience—she doesn't want to recognize anyone. Also, she observes Max in her room when she knows he cannot see her and is shocked to realize that she doesn't know him at all. At one point, she peeks at the audience from backstage and sees Max: "By a curious transposition, he it is who becomes the spectacle for me" (95). This is the moment when the "painful idea is set in motion..."(95), that Max will be looking at younger girls. Soon after, Renee decides to go on tour, which is the catalyst for further introspection or self-gazing.

Helen Southworth writes that "rather than occupy a static, closed room, the dimensions of which are prescribed by the husband, by tradition, [Renee elects] to remain on the move" (276). Among the reasons for Renee's decision to tour are Max's possessiveness, her own insecurities about aging relating to being the focus of the gaze, and a desire for independence. For her, the decision is life-altering because she reawakens a dormant desire—the ability and need to write. Renee's writing, which can be seen as an interior monologue, is cathartic. Gazing inward, she comes to realize all that she has not experienced, namely nature's beauty. In facing and experiencing nature, Renee questions her feelings. Ultimately she realizes "the earth belongs to anyone who stops for a moment, gazes and goes on his way" (202). Traveling away from Paris and Max and his gaze, Renee experienced happiness speeding past "grass glittering with salt, and sleeping villas" (206). Suddenly she realizes that this perfect moment of happiness is without Max. She has forgotten him as though she "had never known his gaze" (207), and at her return, vows to avoid him and the power of his gaze.

The power of the public gaze is entirely different for Sasha Jensen. It nearly paralyzes her, so intimidated is she by its critical aspect. The difference between her and Renee's reaction to the gaze begins with their occupations and economic circumstances. Renee is constantly in the public eye by choice, whereas Sasha would rather be anywhere else than on display. When she is employed, she wishes for a kind of invisibility to the gaze of her boss. Her insecurities make her incapable of withstanding public scrutiny. Later, while living on a meager stipend, she practices avoidance of those places where she might be recognized. Rather than controlling the gaze as Renee does with her performance, Sasha allows the gaze to control her. She becomes vulnerable in all public spaces.

Although she abhors the gaze, Sasha does attempt to shape it through efforts at conformity. Staley says that, "the feminine psyche must find accommodation in the world itself" (99). Sasha attempts to mold herself into what the world expects through fashion and routine, although these efforts are hampered by her economic circumstances. Sasha's lack of employment throughout much of the novel translates to a poverty that restricts her movement. Her limited means dictate her living arrangements and, to a certain extent, her movement about the city. As important as dearth of funds, though, is the absence of routine. Sasha understands the necessity of a *programme*, not necessarily a job, but a focus for her life. Without a plan, she has too much idle time, time when bad memories return to debilitate her. Moreover, unlike Renee, she has no passionate vocation—it is not that she doesn't want to work, it is more that she is incapable of the sustained effort necessary to hold a job, plus she is not interested enough in anything other than herself to put forth the effort. Her job as mannequin, during which

she suffered so much under her boss's gaze, was no more important to her than that of ghost writing. This lack of focus is a major cause of Sasha's inability to cope. She says, "I try, but they always see through me" (31). An additional factor affecting her difficulties with daily life is the lack of companionship. She is solitary; even when married, Sasha is abandoned frequently. And, unlike Renee who has theatre friends as well as a good friend in Margo, Sasha has formed no lasting relationships to sustain or comfort her.

When Sasha does manage to conform to behavior expected of women, her concerns are more about deportment than appearance. Renee's concerns about aging and make-up are only lightly reflected in Sasha. Sasha is startled and dismayed when she is called *la vieille*, forcing her to reevaluate her condition. But she doesn't dwell on it, considering it over and over as Renee does. The shopping she engages in is a chore for her. She sees buying a hat and getting her hair colored as behavior expected by society. She participates in order to be accepted, not out of a desire to look beautiful or younger. Even her gazes into various mirrors are only obliquely about her looks—they relate more to her state of mind, which fluctuates according to her perception of how she appears to others.

As Renee did, Sasha has occasion to observe others, to direct her gaze outward rather than inward. And like Renee, she does so with some discomfort or reluctance. At the Halles, she refuses to watch the sleeping people, saying, "Not for anything on earth" (40). Once walking with Renee, she looks at him "sideways," as if afraid to allow herself the freedom of a full gaze. Another time, though, in a café, she returns the stare of a young man until he turns away, and she concludes he was not French because he seemed



so unaccustomed to gazing. This serves as a reminder to us of the strangeness of returning to a place (Paris) where her memories linger and she is exposed to the gaze. That Renee knows its power is evident when she declines to watch the young lady making up; she is uncomfortable and uncertain both as instigator and as recipient of the gaze.

Although Sasha's method of escaping her troubles is to have a routine such as going shopping, this doesn't prevent her from introspection. Staley says that "a dialogue between the two selves brings to surface Sasha's deepest longings and fears as well as all the defenses time and experience have taught her" (96). Indeed, the structure of the novel is a clue to how often Sasha reminisces and reflects: near the end of the story her mind jumps from past to present more frequently. For example, she talks of snow falling and reading *Lady Windemere's Fan* with the Russian, then she shifts to memories of returning to her room after the baby died, then on to an evening with friends and champagne, to the moment Enno left, then back to the present when she decides to visit the Galeries Lafayette to buy something cheap. These memories form a kaleidoscope inside her head which she tries to steady by routine. Buying gloves, scent, and lipstick is not important. She says, it is "Just the sensation of spending, that's the point. I'll look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette-cases, jewelled tortoisés... And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow" (145).

But even though Sasha despairs in painful degrees throughout the novel, she still says "I believe in survival after death. I've had personal proof of it" (168). After the gigolo leaves her at the end, she sums up her existence saying, "And I'll look back at him

because I shan't be able to help it, remembering about being young, and about being made love to and making love, about pain and dancing and not being afraid of death, about all the music I've ever loved, and every time I've been happy" (185). As painful as most of her memories are, she will continue to look back. Sasha's inward gaze is unrelenting.

"Paris was always worth it," Hemingway said, "you received return for whatever you brought to it" (211). Renee Nere and Sasha Jensen face both happy and desperate moments in Paris. The attitude they bring to the obstacles life throws at them determines their destiny. Renee is the stronger and in return for that strength to leave Paris, she finds happiness within herself, solitary but strong. Sasha brought to Paris the baggage of poor self-esteem and painful memories. She is not as lucky as Renee in finding a happy ending; her helplessness at forming a stable identity denies her success. Paris, then, plays a paradoxical role in the lives of these two women under the survey of the gaze.

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