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2013

# Rhys Matters: New Critical Perspectives


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## Recommended Citation

Wilson, Mary; Johnson, Kerry L.; and Flynn, Nicole, "Rhys Matters: New Critical Perspectives" (2013). *English Faculty Books*. 11.  
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*Clockwork Women: Temporality and Form in Jean Rhys's Interwar Novels*

Nicole Flynn

In the middle of the night you wake up. You start to cry. What's happening to me? Oh, my life, oh, my youth...

There's some wine left in the bottle. You drink it. The clock ticks. Sleep...

(GMM 90)

A typical evening for *Good Morning, Midnight's* Sasha Jansen. A hotel room populated by familiar objects; a mind plagued by familiar thoughts. The ticking clock provides the soundtrack for Sasha's life, doling out her moments one by one, measuring the time as it slips away. The clock's mechanical insistence tracks countless moments of misery, exhaustion, and self-abuse. Yet its recurring presence seems to offer some comfort: it lulls Sasha to sleep. This painful contradiction is a familiar aspect of Jean Rhys's interwar novels. Their treatment of quintessentially modernist themes such as internal division, the boundary between internal and external, isolation, and the struggle for control, have long secured Rhys her position as an important modernist writer. But the ubiquitous figure of the clock, presiding over the lives of her protagonists and shaping Rhys's depiction of their experience, has largely gone unnoticed. More than simply a recurring motif or resonant image, clocks offer a valuable point of access to her innovative work with temporality and form in the novel. This essay will investigate the ways Rhys uses clocks to mobilize emerging twentieth century concepts of time and synthesize them into a structuring force. While most modernist authors reject the homogenizing force of clock time and fragment their narrative in order to portray an individualized experience of private time, Rhys embraces both these modes. She is able to harnesses the new symbolic power of the clock and combine it with modernist literary techniques in order to present a simultaneously intimate and distant portrait of the modern subject. It is impossible to discuss modernism without

addressing temporality. It is impossible to fully discuss modernist literature's temporal experimentation without addressing Rhys.

Published within the space of ten years, *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) exhibit a complex relationship to one another and to the author's life. Each novel takes place in London, Paris, or both, and features a female protagonist struggling to survive one tumultuous relationship after another. The proximity between the events in the characters' and the author's lives have often drawn attention away from Rhys's craft and inventiveness.<sup>1</sup> Although Rhys did not explicitly publish these novels as a series, examining them as a unit provides unique access to her formal experimentation.

The protagonists are markedly similar and each book takes up a different period of a woman's life. When *Voyage in the Dark* begins, 19-year old Anna Morgan has recently emigrated from the West Indies to England. She struggles to make a living as a chorus girl until she takes up with an older, wealthy man, Walter Jeffries. Narrated in the first person from Anna's point of view, the novel depicts in painful detail the emotional experience of this naïve young girl who, lacking financial, social, or familial connections, attempts to navigate this minefield of a relationship and survive its tragic aftermath. Anna's thoughts drift from her European present to her Caribbean past and back again, mapping the narrative onto repetitive cycles of memory. This novel demonstrates an internal version of temporality at odds with the painful progression of real time. At its conclusion, in which Rhys originally planned for Anna to die, the doctor, "like a machine that was working smoothly," deems her "ready to start all over again in no time" (187). Echoing this directive the novel concludes with Anna repeating the phrase "starting all over again, all over again..." (188). In the end, Rhys's protagonist submits to the machine-like authority figure and looks forward to a living death of inescapable repetition.

*Quartet*'s protagonist, Marya Zelli, eloped to Paris at a young age. When her husband is sent to jail and she is stranded in a strange city without friends or money, she reluctantly accepts the hospitality of an artistic couple, the Heidlars, and soon after begins an affair with the husband. This novel picks up where the conclusion of *Voyage* left off. In it clocks become explicitly linked with the dominant forces in the characters' lives, forces that torment, alienate, and reject them.

As the title suggests, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* begins at the end of Julia Martin's affair with an older, wealthy man. The novel flashes back and forth from the present and her relationship with Mr. Horsfield, to her relationship with Mackenzie, and further back to her elopement and youthful marriage. When Julia returns from Paris to London to care for her ailing mother, she is haunted by memories of the past, fearful of her future, and terrified that her youth and sanity are quickly slipping away. This novel develops the idea of clock work as a way of functioning in the world. Rhys depicts Julia's attempt to coopt the clock's power to control and her failure to either control or escape its force.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys returns to the first person voice to narrate the experience of Sasha Jansen. Older than the other protagonists, she has lived through trials and traumas like theirs, and more. She is crippled by sadness, poverty, loneliness, and hopelessness. Sweeping, life-altering affairs are in Sasha's past, and while memories of them bleed into her experience of the present, the men in her life now are a creepy *commis voyageur* [traveling salesman] who haunts the landing of her hotel and a Canadian gigolo named René. In this novel, the realm of clockwork expands to include more modern representations of technology. The scale of technology and failure expand concurrently. Here, the clockwork woman emerges fully and terribly.

The above summary of the novels does not follow their dates of publication, but rather the ages of their protagonists from youngest to oldest. Placing the novels in this slightly

unconventional order allows us to trace a narrative arc that emerges beyond the individual texts, an arc that demonstrates Rhys's structural innovation on the level of genre. It also puts in relief the different measures of time that populate these novels. Rhys depicts a woman's struggle to survive in the modern world, against the sadistic power of men, poverty, and society, as a battle against time. The novels' driving force is a journey within the protagonist's mind, one which resists linear chronology, drifts from past to present and back again without clear delineation. As the narrator of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* describes Julia, "Her mind was a confusion of memory and imagination," and this description could just as easily apply to Anna, Marya, and Sasha (12). However, Rhys's work with temporality is not limited to her mode of narration. Her novels respond on many levels to the dramatic overhaul in the conceptualization of time that was taking place around her. As we glimpsed in the beginning of this essay, time and the machines that organize it are important structural components in Rhys's novels. The novels reflect the complicated relationship between temporality and modernity in a uniquely concrete way—they are filled with clocks. Clocks appear on countless walls and mantelpieces, and her prose is saturated with literal references to what time it is (the opening words of *Quartet* are "It was about half-past five..." (5)).<sup>2</sup> Rhys repeatedly deploys clocks, as metaphors, concrete objects, and plot devices throughout these novels. Their striking presence invites us to explore the figure of the clock, to investigate its symbolic function and, most importantly, to recognize its structuring power within modernism in general and Rhys's work in particular. In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern articulates the dominant modernist view of temporality: "The thrust of the age was to affirm the reality of private time against that of a single public time and to define its nature as heterogeneous, fluid, and reversible" (34). Rhys's novels ultimately reject this perspective. Her protagonists' may cry out for heterogeneous, fluid, and reversible time, and her narrative certainly utilizes these modernist methods of portraying personal experience. But, in the end, clock time suppresses any attempts to resist its dominance.

As a result of dramatic changes in the frameworks society used to understand and organize time, the clock became a figure newly endowed with symbolic power in the beginning of the twentieth century. Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein were participating in an ongoing, public debate about the concept of time, culminating with their meeting at the Philosophical Society of Paris in 1922, the same year in which Bergson published *Duration and Simultaneity: With Reference to Einstein's Theory*.<sup>3</sup> Both of their work embraced the modernist emphasis on perspective and experience. Bergson's concept of "lived time" or *durée* declared that the personal, subjective experience of time is real time. As Suzanne Guerlac points out in her distillation of Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, "the concept of time we usually rely upon is only adequate to descriptions of the external world...lived time is something quite different" (60). For Einstein, time did not have "real," material existence—only measurements of time truly exist. His relativity occurred within the physical, public world. As a scientist, Einstein rejected the unquantifiable, intuitive experience of time that Bergson privileged. As a philosopher invested in the distinction between time and space, Bergson rejected Einstein's claim that the two could be measured together. From the theories of Bergson and Einstein, a dichotomy of time emerges: between private or lived time and public or clock time. Rhys's interwar novels deftly negotiate this dichotomy.

The physical and philosophical developments in theories of time prompted historical changes that forcefully impacted not only the public discourse, but also the logistics of everyone's day-to-day life. For instance, in 1884, the Prime Meridian Conference established Greenwich Mean Time. Prior to this, time differed from region to region, from one city to the next, which meant that people had no way of measuring the passage of time for them in relation to others. This heterogeneity of time became particularly problematic as train travel became more common. The local time system made it very difficult to create schedules, timetables, to know when to expect a future arrival or departure. Once Greenwich Mean Time was established,

the trains, and everything else, ran on world time. Furthermore, it gave all individuals the implicit directive that they should be moving in sync with everyone else around the globe.

This move evinced the West's consolidation of power over the world, and it is no accident that the standard of world time was located in England, the seat of the British Empire. An explicit exercise of this dimension of power appeared on the home front in 1914 when British Parliament passed the Defence of the Realm Act, a set of laws that increased the government's control over the nation and its resources during the First World War. They understood that their citizens were a primary resource and that power could be wielded over them through the manipulation of time. The Act established British Summer Time, extending the hours of sunlight available for workers and thereby increasing production. In 1915, an addendum to the act attempted to control the sale and consumption of alcohol among civilian populations—it reduced the hours of operation for public houses across the country, thereby curtailing a main source of citizens' recreation. From these few examples, we can see the historical confluence of the shift in philosophical and technological thought regarding time and its logistical ramifications.

It would seem that, the more prominently the new world clock figured in the public imagination, the more cultural figures sought to represent the individual experience of private time. As Kern argues, "The introduction of World Standard Time created greater uniformity of shared public time and in so doing triggered theorizing about a multiplicity of private times that may vary from moment to moment in the individual, from one individual to another according to personality, and among different groups as a function of social organization" (33). Bergson's theories of the dynamic inner experience of time and modernist fiction's experimentation with stream of consciousness narration are prime examples of the opposition posed to homogenous, public time. As they observed the world extending outward, relying more and more on external representations of time, many writers turned inward, focusing on the internal, subjective

experience of time. Rhys's achievement is her ability to straddle these two temporal realms simultaneously. [say more? about multiplicity vs. monolith, how fit w/what said on top of 4?]

While many modernist authors seek to represent their characters' experience by narrating the inner life to the exclusion of the outer world, Rhys offers her readers keen insight into her characters' inner lives by using the quintessential representation of external time as a vehicle for representing subjectivity. The figure of the clock structures her narrative. Just as the hands of the clock keep moving round and round, so each novel depicts the relentless cycles of her characters' experience. These cycles, which primarily align with the protagonists' romantic relationships, are comprised of manic swings followed by bouts of crushing depression.<sup>4</sup> Their repetition imbues the novels with a sense of inevitability. Despite their movement, the cycles within each individual novel demonstrate a kind of stasis, a mechanical repetition from which the protagonists cannot escape, despite their ability to anticipate its events. They provide intimate, individualized portraits by representing the private, unruly, and heterogeneous experience of time. However, as we saw earlier, there is a way in which these four novels work together as a unit. Read together, they form a cycle of novels—a series of unruly, a-chronological records of experience that together provide a progressive trajectory, an overarching narrative of a woman moving through various stages of life.

Rhys once described the “big idea” in *Voyage in the Dark* as “Something to do with time being an illusion...the past exists—side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was—is” (Wyndham and Melly 24). This idea recurs in the other books as well. Within a novel, each cycle of a protagonist's life is contaminated by memories of similar cycles from her past. Likewise the reader's experience with a novel from this cycle will be permeated by any others she has read. This structural parallel, between each novel's cycles and the cycle of novels, provides the reader with a striking mimeticism. The novels depict the frustrating and confusing experience of their protagonists in form as well as in content. Each of Rhys's protagonists feels



that she cannot escape the cycles of experience in her life. If the novels are read together, readers experience this cycle on another level. As a result, they feel even more powerfully the suffocating repetition of hardships that can be anticipated but not avoided and the disorienting blurring of past and present. At the same time, the cycle of novels provide an external measure of the characters' experience. Time passes and the women age. In reality clocks continue to mark temporal progress despite the characters' experience of stasis.

In *Quartet*, Rhys explicitly links a repetitive cycle with the movement of a clock. Midway through the novel, Marya has become obsessed with her lover, Heidler. She is trapped in a love triangle with him and his wife.

The little clock on the table by the bed was ticking so loudly that Marya got up and shut it away in a drawer. But she could still hear it, fussy and persistent. Then a train gave a long piercing shriek and she sighed... The mechanism of her brain got to work with a painful jerk and began to tick in time with the clock.

She made a great effort to stop it and was able to keep her mind blank for, say, ten seconds. Then her obsession gripped her, arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her utterly as the longing for water possesses someone who is dying of thirst. She had made an utter mess of her love affair, and that was that. She had made an utter mess of her existence. And that was that, too. (117)

Marya admits, with off-handed resignation, that her existence, composed of a series of love affairs like this one, is "an utter mess" and there is nothing to be done about it. We see a micro-version of the repetitive cycle in the second paragraph; every ten seconds she thinks of Heidler, keeps her mind blank, then thinks of him again. The inevitability of this cycle persisting seems clear.

What is striking here is not only that the cycle persists, but that it ticks to the rhythm of a clock. Marya draws a parallel between the ticking clock and her nagging obsession with Heidler.

She tries to resist both, but the clock and Heidler prevail, highlighting the connection between time and control. Note also the coincidence of the clock with the train whistle. Train time is synonymous with modern time. Likewise, it is evidence of the reorganizing power of time and its capacity for human control. Heidler and the clock represent a force that is trying to control her and she cannot defend herself from their power: she “fought wildly, with tears, futile rages, with extravagant abandon—all bad weapons,” and she therefore “had no chance of victory” (117). Her emotional displays cannot compete with Heidler’s “clever[ness]” and her brain cannot withstand the controlled, mechanical ticking of the clock (118).

The clock’s tick is important for several reasons. First, it is literally the sound of time passing. Marya’s effort to forestall the trajectory and eventual demise of her relationship with Heidler is figured as an effort to pause time, even for, as she says, “ten seconds,” each second of course indicated by a tick of the clock. Second, the sound represents a connection between the mechanical elements of a clock and somatic elements of the body. Our everyday speech recognizes a connection between the clock and the human; the words we use to describe the parts of a clock are “arm,” “hand,” or “face.” In the passage above, Rhys specifically refers to Heidler’s “hard and self-contained” face (118). The tick is another example of this link, “spoken” by the machine and heard by the ear. This aural link recurs in the other novels, delineating critical territory in the protagonists’ struggle with the external, temporal powers that seek to exert control over them.

By framing Marya’s capitulation in terms of her sexual relationship with Heidler, Rhys emphasizes the centrality of gender roles in this power struggle.<sup>5</sup> The narrator says that it “was right and proper” that Marya should lose this battle (117). She needed to be broken down and assimilated into her proper role in society, and Heidler was the man to do it. The sameness Marya fears resurfaces in the form of a stereotype that she reviles and yet fulfills: “he was forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hôtel du Bosphore for the express

purpose of being made love to. A *petite femme*” (118). The following passage is presumably a description of Marya and Heidler’s sexual encounters: “Her lips were dry. Her body ached. He was so heavy. He crushed her. He bore her down” (119). The language Rhys uses here recalls the description of Marya’s obsession above: it “gripped her, arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her utterly” (117). Both of them weigh down on her, overwhelm her senses, which are the only weapons she possesses, and try to eliminate her bodiliness. Marya says that Heidler “wasn’t a good lover, of course”; their sexual relationship was not rooted in Marya’s body, physical intimacy, or an expression of affection, but rather her transformation into something that could be controlled (118). She critiques herself for having “No self-control”—Heidler stepped in and filled that gap (117). The gender dynamic in this relationship and the struggle for control against the clock put the body at the center of a tug of war and we will see the potential danger of this in our discussion of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. Here the struggle against Heidler and the clock that symbolizes him is a struggle to maintain her own humanity, to resist transforming into a non-autonomous machine.

From *Quartet*’s depiction of Marya’s mechanical metamorphosis, we see the power that clocks and clock-like objects can wield over the human mind. Marya’s ability to think and act independently ceases as the ticking takes over: “She never reacted now. She was a thing” (123). Her thoughts and emotions become like clockwork: “Little wheels in her head that turned perpetually. I love him. I want him. I hate her [Heidler’s wife]. And he’s a swine. He’s out to hurt me. What shall I do? I love him. I want him. I hate her” (124). The punchy rhythm of these sentences, the monosyllabic words repeated over and over, mimic the sound of a clock ticking. These wheels in her head turning over and over are like the repetitive cycles in her life, redundant yet overpowering. Despite their repetitive nature, despite her desire to resist, she cannot withstand them.

The desire to resist the clock's power morphs into a desire to prevail over time. A scene from *Voyage in the Dark* suggests Anna's naïve play for this kind of control. On her first date with Walter, Anna recoils from his sexual advances in a moment of panic, and then immediately regrets her reaction: "I thought, 'If it could go back and be just as it was before it happened and then happen differently'" (23). This is Anna's plan for improving her situation—to turn back time. Her plan for escaping the painful monotony of her life in the West Indies was to move to England. After a short time in England, she complains about its undifferentiated landscape and customs: "You were perpetually moving to another place which was perpetually the same" (8). Her plan for escaping England's dreary monotony is to be with Walter. Here, Anna's plan embraces the same-ness she has consistently tried to escape; now she *wants* it to "be just as it was." But by visiting this same moment a second time, she anticipates a different result, "if it could go back...then happen differently." Anna does not simply mention the possibility of a different future; she clings to it as if it were her only chance to survive. She continues: "Soon he'll come in again and kiss me, but differently. He'll be different and so I'll be different. It'll be different. I thought, 'It'll be different, different. It must be different'" (24). Her desperate insistence is unnerving. It demonstrates her frantic desire to be able to alter her circumstances, to control the events of her life. At the same time, it demonstrates her inability to do so. In fact, the way she expresses this frantic desire for difference is by repeating the same word over and over—it creates more sameness. Her concept of time renders her powerless to change her future.

The older protagonists in Rhys's novels accept that it is futile to insist on a different future. They imagine a different kind of difference. In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, Julia Martin, finds herself in a situation nearly identical to Anna's at the end of Part 1 of *Voyage in the Dark*. She has received a letter from her former lover, Mr. Mackenzie, notifying her that the financial support he offered her for a time after he broke off their relationship is ending. She packs up her bags, moves out of her hotel room in Paris, travels back to England, and checks into

another cheap hotel. The narrator describes Julia's new hotel room as "small and very cold" with "torn and very dirty" lace curtains and "a dressing-table with a wad of newspaper stuck into the frame to keep the glass at the required angle" (65). Julia agrees with the narrator's dire assessment of the room: "'My God,' said Julia, 'what a place!'" (65). But while she is in this room, Julia has a surprising change of heart:

A church clock chimed the hour. At once all feeling of strangeness left her. She felt that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined, she had returned to her starting-point, in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before. And even the clock which struck each quarter in that aggressive and melancholy way was the same clock that she used to hear.

Perhaps the last ten years had been a dream; perhaps life, moving on for the rest of the world, had miraculously stood still for her. (67)

Rhys's narrator directly refers to the inevitable cycles of repetition in Julia's life—she feels like she has moved in a circle, returned to her starting point and furthermore, that this return was predestined, cosmically inevitable. Julia observes that sameness and repetitive cycles go hand in hand. The bedrooms are "so exactly like" each other, the clock's chime is "the same" as the one she heard before, despite the ten year gap between the two moments she describes. While sameness incited Anna to desperation, Julia's experience of sameness evokes a kind of mystical pleasure. This reaction is indeed surprising. Julia ran away from home and eloped to escape a room "exactly like" this one and never planned to return again. It would only be natural to characterize her present situation as a depressing return to a painful past, an indication of ten wasted years of struggle and suffering. Why, then, has "all feeling of strangeness" suddenly left her? According to her, it is the clock. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's plan for creating a different situation with Walter was to go back in time. Here, Julia feels like the chiming clock has

miraculously procured this means of escape by essentially sending her back in time and holding her there, suspended, as life proceeds for everyone else. She imagines that the last ten years of her life have been erased and, instead of reliving her future differently, she imagines that her future ceases to exist.

The clock is the mechanism that enables Julia to make sense of her experiences over the past ten years, to acclimate herself to the present moment, and to escape a feeling of strangeness, even if only for a moment. Central to this epiphanic moment is Julia's attempt to measure her experience of time and align her experience of it with clock time. She seeks to put her experience in relation to others. Historically, clocks, especially church clocks like this one, served to connect the lives of anyone who could hear its chime. Each day, time would pass in increments marked by the clock's chime. The clock would chime to alert townspeople that it was time for a church service or public meeting to begin, to tell them when to wake up and when to go to sleep. Even before clocks were technologically advanced enough to chime on their own, sextons would be hired, often by wealthy townsmen, to manually chronicle the hours passing. Historian E.P. Thompson documents the words of a seventeenth century man who donated funds to ensure the clock would ring in the morning and evening: ““that as many as might live within the sound might be thereby induced to a timely going to rest in the evening, and early arising in the morning to the labours and duties of their several callings...” (63). From this statement we see the fine line between coordinating and controlling the lives of the townspeople and how early this confluence began to be institutionalized.

The concept that time could connect, even synchronize, disparate entities took on new and powerful dimensions at the turn of the twentieth century. The London clock that Julia hears rings out world standard time, synchronizing not only the inhabitants within the sound of its chime, but anyone near any clock around the globe. The church clock extends the regulation of individual communities to universal state control. Rhys's depiction of individuals under the

control of a symbolic representation of modern time is not merely the stuff of fiction. In 1919, an article in the *Times* announced that all of London would stand still for two minutes at 11:11am, “a complete suspension of all our normal activities,” to commemorate the first anniversary of Armistice Day.<sup>6</sup> This article demonstrates clocks’ power to mediate between normal, progressive activity and a kind of mythical suspension in the same way that Rhys describes Julia’s epiphany. This decree could not have been imposed unless there was a world clock to which citizens could synchronize their watches and a government that understood the power inherent in that synchronization.<sup>7</sup>

Big Ben in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a useful counterpoint to the church clock in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. Woolf introduces Big Ben at the very beginning of the novel and the reader turns the pages of her book to the rhythm of this clock striking off the hours of the day. Clarissa Dalloway describes her experience of this presence in her life:

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. (4)

Big Ben creates continuity in her life. For over twenty years, she has been able to count on a particular sensation in anticipation of its chime, no matter where in the city she happens to be, no matter what the time of day or night. Variations on this description of its sound (“First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air”) recur throughout the novel, underscoring its dependability and reiterability. She believes not only that she feels this way, but that “one feels” this way—it unites her to the rest of the people in Westminster in a common experience, what she describes as a sacred moment of suspense before the clock strikes.

There are ways in which this depiction aligns with Rhys's, but the overall effect is radically different. Although Julia finds the clock's chime familiar, its striking is an isolated event in Rhys's novel. The (unfortunate) continuity in Julia's life derives from another source, one that is far less reassuring and far less orderly: a debilitating pattern of abusive relationships and mental illness. Both scenes describe the sensation of suspense. In Woolf, the almost prayerful pause comes in anticipation of Big Ben's chime. In Rhys, Julia's sacred moment of suspense follows the church clock's chime. Her experience is belated. Although Clarissa's reveries dally in her past she still feels her life moving forward, into the future. Julia cannot face her future. Her fantasy freezes her experience of time.

Despite Julia's *experience* of time standing still, in reality, time continues to pass. This split parallels the division we saw earlier, between public and private time, between the cycles within individual novels and the cycle of novels, between the ticking in Marya's head and the ticking of the clock. In this way, Rhys enables us to compare two different measurements of time. Later in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf introduces a second clock that offers a remarkable image of two systems put in relation with each other. Two paragraphs into Clarissa's musings on love and religion, a single line announces: "Big Ben struck the half-hour" (127). She continues without being diverted for another full paragraph, and then a clock derails her train of thought:

Love—but here the other clock, the clock which always struck two minutes after Big Ben, came shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends, which it dumped down as if Big Ben were all very well with his majesty laying down the law, so solemn, so just, but she must remember all sorts of little things besides—Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices—all sorts of little things came flooding and lapping and dancing in on the wake of that solemn stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea. Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices. She must telephone now at once. (128)



Woolf has used Big Ben to literally *time* Clarissa's thoughts. She has created a scaffolding in her novel that allows her to offer a quantitative measure of Clarissa's subjective experience, at least in terms of duration. The reader knows that, within the world of the novel, it took Clarissa two minutes to think through this paragraph because the second clock strikes two minutes after Big Ben. In other words, the clock's presence in the novel is not purely metaphoric.

This passage does more than compare two clocks; the "other clock" stands in for Clarissa. Ultimately, Woolf puts Clarissa's experience of time in relation to an unmoving, unchangeable measure of public time. Clarissa identifies with the other clock. Grammatically, the female pronoun "she" refers to the clock, but as the passage expands on what "she must remember," it slips into a description of Clarissa. The she-clock does not occupy the urban space where majestic and solemn lawmaking occurs and, by extension, does not occupy the place of prominence held by Big Ben any more than Julia does; it merely comes "shuffling in" in response. Likewise, Clarissa's work, unlike her husband's, takes place within the domestic sphere. She must take care of all the "odds and ends," the little, things like "glasses for ices," that make her parties a success. Although her activities may always be relational, even secondary to the realm of Big Ben, she creates meaning for herself and her life upon hearing this clock. At the end of this paragraph she breaks out of her metaphoric reverie and moves to action—she will telephone at once.

The clock in Rhys offers no such solace to Julia. It does not secure a place for her within society, but permanently excises her from it. It does not lead her thoughts to action, but rather to stasis. That clock's "aggressive and melancholy" tone excludes Julia from its world without suggesting a real alternative. In her imagination, it puts her activities in relation to the rest of the world, but in this scenario, the rest of the world moves forward and lives while she stands still. Rhys's clock triggers pure fantasy and the delusion that the fantasy is both real and for the better. The novel continues to track this painful break from reality in terms of clocks.

After this passage in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, clockwork begins to falter—as mechanical images begin to proliferate, so do instances of mechanical failure. While Julia is still in London, her Uncle Griffiths sees her walking down the street:

As she walked she jerked herself from side to side, in the manner of a woman who is tired and no longer young walking on very high heels. People turned round to look at her.

Uncle Griffiths thought: "Now what will become of her, I wonder?" And, with decision, he crossed over to the other side of the street." (139)

To the outside observer, Julia does not appear to be in control of her body. She jerks from side to side like a malfunctioning machine. This malfunction is clearly linked to her position as an aging female, a woman without the resources of youth or money to make her attractive to others. Note the stipulation “in the manner of”; while it is likely that Julia is literally tired, no longer young, and wearing high heels, the language of this passage implies that there is not an exact equivalence. In other words, there is a figurative level to her jerking from side to side. She is going through the motions of her day in a mechanical manner, like clockwork, but there is evidence that her clock is winding down. Julia imagines that she has derailed the progress of time; she does not recognize her break from reality. Rhys uses images of failing clocks to simultaneously depict Julia’s internal experience and external reality.

The evidence of Julia’s malfunction may be clear to Uncle Griffiths and others on the street, even to the reader, but Julia herself feels quite differently. Uncle Griffiths poses the rhetorical question “Now what will become of her, I wonder?” but his decision to cross the street implies that he anticipates disaster. Julia, however, has moved even further out of sync with the rest of the world. The narrator tells us that, “As she walked, Julia felt peaceful and purified, as though she were a child. Because she could not imagine a future, time stood still” (140). It is striking that Rhys uses this mental movement into the past to indicate Julia’s psychic break.

Rhys's word "purified" recalls a passage from Bergson's *Matter and Memory* in which he envisions how a psychologist might treat a patient like Julia: "Our perceptions are undoubtedly interlaced with memories, and, inversely, a memory...only becomes actual by borrowing the body of some perception into which it slips. These two acts, perception and recollection, always interpenetrate each other, are always exchanging something of their substance as by a process of endosmosis. The proper office of psychologists would be to dissociate them, to give back to each its natural purity" (67). Of course, the purity that Julia imagines is not one of psychic clarity. When Julia hears the church clock chime and imagines that time stood still for her, she retreats further into the past, into childhood. It is not the chance for a different future that brings her comfort, as it did for Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, rather it is the elimination of any future at all. A perpetual, non-durational present; living in limbo. Paradoxically, the consequence of her imagined temporal stasis seems to be the experience of having moved further into the past. Childhood becomes yet another framework for ceding control and responsibility for her life. Despite her stated desire to break away from the forces controlling her life, such male power figures, her fantasy of living as a child nonetheless submits her to the jurisdiction of those power figures even as it imagines itself free of them.

Julia does not feel on the brink of doom, as Uncle Griffiths supposes, but rather exempt from any future, menacing or otherwise. She reacts to the people on the street as a child would, "not suspiciously or timidly, as was usual with her, but with a gentle and confident expression" (140). This idyllic point of view, however, underscores her lack of synchronicity with the rest of the world. Readers know that she is not a child, but a middle-aged woman, and just because she cannot imagine a future, does not mean that time is standing still. The more she clings to the clock as the mechanism for escape from the world's temporality, the more her disjunction from reality grows. Rhys's clock figures become more extreme and their failure more exaggerated to illustrate this widening gap.

In the next chapter, Rhys offers the most explicit depiction of Julia's faulty clockwork. After a dinner date with her latest lover, Mr. Horsfield, they end up, much to his chagrin, at a dance hall. As he watches her on the dance floor, he observes:

Her body looked abandoned when she danced, but not voluptuously so. It was the abandonment of fatigue.

Mr. Horsfield lowered his eyes moodily, so that as Julia and her partner passed his table he saw only her legs, appearing rather too plump in flesh-coloured stockings. She seemed to him to be moving stiffly and rather jerkily. It was like watching a clockwork toy that has nearly run down. (148)

A reference to childhood recurs here, but instead of a joyful image, we see a neglected toy. With this image, Rhys depicts Julia's experience of reverting to childhood and how the logic of that notion breaks down. Horsfield observes the same exhaustion and jerkiness that Griffiths saw. He even notices how Julia's body seems to be at odds with her clothing—for Griffiths it was shoes whose heels were too high and here it is stockings that appear too tight. Furthermore, like Griffiths, he believes Julia to be at the end of something, nearly out of time.

Unhappy with his malfunctioning date, Horsfield claims to need cigarettes and, as she begins to dance again, he runs off to find "an automatic machine" (148). After all the references to clockwork mechanics throughout the preceding pages, and particularly after the image of Julia as a clockwork toy that needs to be wound up, it is striking that Horsfield runs from her in search of an *automatic* machine. Horsfield's instinct upon encountering Julia's faulty equipment, much like Uncle Griffiths's, is to run away. He goes in search of a machine that does not require his assistance, one that functions automatically. Rhys offers another example of the protagonist's lover moving on, into the future, where he will find another lover, a newer model. Eventually, however, Horsfield does return to Julia at the dance hall. When he approaches her and indicates that he is ready to leave, "she laughed so hysterically that he was taken aback" (148). Her

inappropriate laughter further indicates that something is breaking down; she is becoming more and more out of sync. Horsfield worries that her outburst will draw unwanted attention and Rhys interjects an oblique but striking clockwork reference to articulate his reaction: ““The tick!”” thought Mr. Horsfield” (148). This vague exclamation could be an insult geared toward one of the sneering onlookers, but it aptly portrays Julia’s laughter. The sound emanating from her body is mechanistic, a tick. Within the context of Horsfield’s earlier description, it is the sound of her clockwork running down with each second that passes. It could also be read as a tic, as in a motor tic, an involuntary, jerking movement, a glitch in her programming. Failure is a systemic part of Rhys’s narrative and her cycle of novels are charting the demise of their own internal mechanism.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the final novel in the interwar cycle, Rhys introduces a new term to characterize the clockwork figure, one that does not appear in any of her preceding novels. This novel’s protagonist, Sasha Jansen, describes herself as an automaton: “Never mind, here I am, sane and dry, with my place to hide in. What more do I want... I’m a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely—dry, cold and sane” (10, original ellipses). The history of automatons and clocks are intricately connected. In *Sublime Dreams of Living Machine: The Automaton in the European Imagination*, Minsoo Kang highlights this connection as he defines the term:

Most modern dictionaries provide three definitions of “automaton”—the older and more general of any self-moving machine (including my wristwatch and any other device run by clockwork mechanism); the newer and narrower one of a self-moving machine built specifically to mimic a living creature; and a person who acts like a machine in some way. The last meaning is of complex significance since... a person who is called an automaton is often one which is easily manipulated due to the lack of individual will or thought. This, in a sense,

contradicts the first two definitions of the word (i.e., a machine *capable* of independent motion versus a person *incapable* of independent action or thought).

(7-8)

Just as there is a historical connection between clockwork and automatons, there is an explicit connection between clockwork in Rhys's earlier novels, and the figure of the automaton in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Picking up on Kang's third and contradictory definition of automaton, it is also worth noting the connection between the word automaton and autonomous—both derived from the Greek *αὐτόνομος*, meaning independent or living by your own laws. This third definition mirrors the contradiction we noted earlier between Julia's desire to remain in the present and retreat into the past, to be free and be a child. Again Rhys uses a clockwork figure to illustrate her protagonists' social liminality and their struggle for control and independence. The introduction of the automaton follows from the tug of war over the body that we witnessed between Marya and the bedside clock in *Quartet*. For Sasha, imagining that her body has been transformed into a machine that simulates a human allows her to maintain her sanity. Rishona Zimring reads a parallel defense mechanism in Sasha's (and the other female protagonists') cosmetic practice. She compares the women's "cosmetic mask" to Georg Simmel's "intelligence" or Freud's stimulus shield: "A kind of dulling head-over-heart stance with which the urban dweller protects himself from his overly stimulating, even violent, surroundings... a protection against and an assimilation of the shocks of modernization; it signals a technologization, which is a hardening, of the body" (230). I observe an even more literal version of Zimring's technologization. Sasha imagines that she extracted her emotions, the weapons that failed Marya, and replaced them with unnatural, mechanical elements. In a desperate attempt at self-preservation, Sasha aligns herself with the cold, controlling clock that Marya struggled to resist.

Sasha becomes a clock alongside her own life—both the experience and the measure of it—a dangerously insular configuration. Rhys uses first person point of view for this novel, creating a more insular narrative. Despite her claim that being an automaton enables her to function in the world, the novel clearly demonstrates an anxiety about the dangers of technology, an internal tension between whatever is left of her will and the external forces that try to control her, forces she claims to have internalized voluntarily. After being fired from yet another job, Sasha wanders back to her hotel and the bleak future that she foresees. “Now, quiet, quiet... This is going to be a nice sane fortnight. ‘Quiet, quiet,’ I say to the clock when I am winding it up, and it makes a noise between a belch and a giggle” (33, original ellipses). She tries to quiet the voices in her head that are feeling desperate, panicky, insane. She picks up the clock and winds it, another attempt to exert control. Winding the clock literally enables her to control tomorrow’s schedule, to ensure that her measure of the moments passing is regulated, accurate. Figuratively, the clock stands in for her; winding it is the equivalent of her command to be quiet. She repeats the same imperative, “quiet, quiet,” but now the words appear in quotation marks indicating that she speaks them aloud. She tells the reader that she is speaking to the clock. Her own words underscore the equivalence between herself and the clock—she wants both to obey her instructions and to remain in control. In response to her command, however, the clock, “makes a noise between a belch and a giggle.” The sounds it makes are human, bodily, and involuntary. It cannot contain itself; it cannot be quiet. It cannot clearly articulate thought or emotion. Its response is nonverbal and confused, not purely somatic like a belch, nor hyper-emotional like a giggle, but somewhere in between. Like Julia’s inappropriate, hysterical laughter in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, this clock displays an unexpected tick.

It seems that Sasha, while recognizing the benefit of being a clockwork automaton, also recognizes its inherent danger. Rhys explores this tension throughout the novel by thematizing an anxiety about technology and the future. While all four novels depict a fear of the future, in

*Good Morning, Midnight* that fear becomes historically specific. Rhys made an uncharacteristic choice to set this novel in a specific, identifiable year: 1937. This is the year that the *International Exposition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life* took place in Paris. This event, which Rhys dubs the Exhibition, is a prominent feature of the novel.<sup>8</sup> The Exposition is famous for the image of the Eiffel Tower flanked by the Soviet and Nazi pavilions which symbolized the dangerous potential of new technology and foreshadowed the impending World War. This danger would have undoubtedly felt even more acute in 1939, the year in which the novel was published. The fear of technology grows as the future of technology in modern life aligns with global military conflict.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the desire for autonomy in the face of masculine and/or mechanical machinations, as we observed on a personal, individual level in *Quartet*, expands to a global scale. The controlling clock that symbolized Heidler's weapons against Marya now represents modern weapons that threaten entire nations. Rhys portrays Sasha's anxiety about a malevolent, techno-centric future with two dream sequences that bookend the novel. It is significant that Rhys stages this anxiety in Sasha's dreams. While, on the one hand, the public realm of technology expands, on the other hand, the personal realm turns inward. Vicki Mahaffey notices a similar trend earlier in the novel: "What has happened on a global scale is being repeated in the private realm of individual consciousness: the dominant conception of human nature has changed" (188). This move parallels growing distance between the public and private dimensions of time. Rhys's use of dreams indicates that repetition takes place in a realm even more private than individual consciousness. The external moves further outward and the internal further within. In Sasha's dream, the type of interaction she had between herself and her clock is submerged to the level of the unconscious. As Rhys maps the public and private spheres onto more extreme territory, the gap between Sasha and the world becomes dangerously wide.



Sasha's dreams transport her to a futurist(ic) landscape populated by steel monsters and technology gone awry.<sup>9</sup> The first dream sequence appears in the beginning of the novel. Sasha takes some luminal and falls asleep to the "clock ticking on the ledge" (12). The narrator offers this account of her dream in which she tries to exit a crowded Underground station in London.

Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition—I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This Way to the Exhibition... I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me. I say: "I want the way out." But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. (13, original ellipses)

Everyone is going to this Exhibition, moving toward the future, a future that Sasha wants to escape. She is being forced into the modern world in which technology is ubiquitous and celebrated. She is being directed to this future and there is no alternative route, no exit sign, no escape. The dream reenacts her waking anxiety about sameness and directionlessness; later in the novel she claims "North, south, east, west—they have no meaning for me" (30).<sup>10</sup> The word "passages" creates a direct link between the space in the dream and the pages of Rhys's novels. As Rhys directs the reader through the space of Sasha's unconscious, she foreshadows that Sasha will be unable to escape the future she is approaching.

It is striking that the figure pointing her to this future has a hand made of steel, like the hand of a clock. Remember, it was a "clock ticking on the ledge" that ushered in Sasha's dream. Again, the protagonist's future is controlled by the motion of a clock, marked by its ticking sound. And once again, she is out of sync with the rest of the world. But this externality does not bring Sasha comfort, as it did for Julia. The clock no longer offers escape from the future—rather it leads her inescapably towards it, both within and without of the dream. The dream continues,

“I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: ‘Just like me – always wanting to be different from other people’” (13). In her waking life, Sasha embraces separation from the world as a survival technique, but her dream demonstrates discomfort with this separation.

In the final pages of the novel, Rhys offers a different vision of the future with the second dream sequence. It recalls Sasha’s dream about the Tube and the Exhibition, but in this vision the world and all of human culture are replaced by a planetary machine:

All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes—others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me... And the arms wave to an accompaniment of music and of song. Like this: “Hotcha – hotcha – hotcha...” And I know the music; I can sing the song... (187, original ellipses)

In the first dream, a man orders her to go to the Exhibition, despite her desire to do otherwise. This man’s human hand is replaced with a steel one and he uses it to point to the Exhibition of Technology, to the future. In that dream, he is the automaton, not Sasha, and she feels guilty about being different. Sasha’s relationship to the automaton-figure in the second dream is more complex and so is the figure itself. This machine cannot be mistaken for a man. It also has arms made of steel, reminiscent of the hands of a clock—but not just two, rather a countless number, with eyes or lights at the end instead of hands. Like the famous clockwork automata of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, this figure moves in time to music. But the music here is decidedly twentieth century, indicated by the slangy, jazz sound “hotcha.” The machine has feminine traits such as thin arms and thick mascara, but it is not explicitly gendered. There is an image of a darkening

sky that instills fear in Sasha. But there is also an image of light that she finds very beautiful. It seems that she is not entirely surrounded by darkness. The beginning of this passage, once again, places Sasha in a position of externality. This machine is “all that is left in the world,” yet she is separate from it, observing it from the outside. At the end of the passage, there seems to be a possibility of connection. The arms move in sync with the music. Sasha says she knows this music, she can sing this song, and she demonstrates the way that they move: “like this.” Rhys puts ‘Hotcha – hotcha – hotcha...’ in quotation marks—Sasha is performing this piece out loud, with her voice and with her body.

This dream seems infused with a modicum of hope. Perhaps Sasha will find a place where she belongs, a being with which she has something in common. However, Sasha’s identification with the machine is possible because the dream takes place outside of time. In a letter about the last chapters of this novel, Rhys wrote, “I wanted Sasha to enter the No time region there” (Wyndham and Melly 138). The world has ended and everything has been reduced to this enormous machine—it both is and is not a clockwork automaton; it both is and is not her. In other words, her identification with the machine is merely a dream. At the end of this cycle of novels we see the logical conclusion of the relationship to time that Rhys initiated with the previous novels. When Julia imagines that she will have no future, she feels peaceful, purified, childlike. Here, Sasha dreams about the end of time for the rest of the world too, and her elation is even more ecstatic. Like Julia after her epiphany with the church clock, when Sasha awakens from this dream, she acts in waking life as though the relationship to time established in her dream were real. In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, Rhys used failing clockwork to depict Julia’s break(down), to synthesize her imaginary experience with external observation. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys transforms the clockwork figure into the automaton, submerges private time into the unconscious mind, and transfers public time to the world stage. The gap between internal and external, public and private, has expanded to its breaking point.

The delusion that follows Sasha's dream is rooted in the traumatic experience that immediately precedes it. René, her companion throughout the novel, sexually assaults her. The possibility of redemption is often mistakenly read onto the novel's conclusion. Barbara Claire Freeman comments on this tendency: "[Critics] are in accord in their assessment of its conclusion, a concordance that is particularly surprising given that the end of the novel has produced more commentary than any other event in the Rhysian canon. Even while noting Sasha's humiliation in taking into her bed a man who has verbally and physically abused her, they are anxious to offer a redemptive reading of it" (100). Sasha herself begins her final encounter with René on a hopeful note: "I have my arms round him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy...Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing—love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I had lost" (177). She feels redeemed, in control, everything she wanted within her grasp. However, at the conclusion of this scene, Rhys depicts a delusional, hopeless, potentially suicidal, and certainly self-destructive woman.

After René leaves Sasha's hotel room, the narration reveals an irrevocable split in her consciousness that Rhys literally assigns to two different voices, I and She. After this psychic break, Sasha becomes drunk. These are the circumstances that induce her hallucination of the enormous steel machine. She awakens from this dream to an even more desperate vision of false hope, a distressing exaggeration of Anna's plea to go back in time in *Voyage in the Dark*, a painful reiteration of Sasha's imaginary conversation with the clock earlier in this novel. Rhys sets off Sasha's final waking vision with temporal language: "It isn't such a long time since he left. Put your coat on and go after him. It isn't too late, it isn't too late. For the last time, for the last time..." (187, original ellipses). As she lies in bed, Sasha imagines that she chases after René and convinces him to come back to her room. She convinces herself that this is true enough to leave her door open for him, to undress, and to get in bed in anticipation of his arrival. She has also convinced herself that their recent encounter was a harmless misunderstanding rather than a

violent, abusive attack that left her bruised and bleeding. But there is a third level to this fantasy. The man she welcomes into her bed at the end of this novel is not the imaginary, loving René that her fantasy created. It is not René at all—indeed, it is worse. It is the *commis voyageur*, a man for whom she has repeatedly expressed fear and disgust. She describes him elsewhere in the novel as “thin as a skeleton” with a “bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes” who looks like “the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion” in his white robe (14, 35). She states unequivocally, “I don’t like this damned man” (14). Earlier in the novel, he came to her room and tried to induce her to sleep with him. She literally pushed him out the door, but the incident left her “Frightened as hell. A nightmare feeling...” (35, original ellipsis). Rhys claims Sasha’s ultimate destruction could not be avoided and “...the Man in the Dressing gown appeared from Heaven knows where to supply the inevitable end” (Wyndham and Melly 138). In the book’s final lines, the inevitable end unfolds:

I don’t need to look. I know.

I think: “Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one? That’s very important. I must find that out—it’s very important.”

I take my arm away from my eyes. It is the white dressing-gown.

He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering.

He doesn’t say anything. Thank God, he doesn’t say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time...

Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying:

“Yes—yes—yes...” (190, original ellipses)

Rhys depicts the simultaneous existence of Sasha’s delusion and awareness. She sees the creepy *commis voyageur*; in fact, she reiterates that it is very important to verify his presence with her

own eyes. He looks down at her with “mean eyes flickering” and she “despises” him. The repetition of “for the last time” confirms that the end of something, her psychological life if not her physical one, is near. Yet she follows this morbid announcement with “Yes—yes—yes.” These lines are, of course, reminiscent of the end of Molly’s monologue in the last episode of *Ulysses*: “I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes” (644). Rhys’s novel has skipped over Joyce’s elaborate build up to Molly’s orgasmic conclusion, fast forwarded to the end of an extensive, detailed reminiscence, and thereby created a problematic temporal gap. By echoing Joyce’s famous conclusion, Rhys underscores that her novel ends with a false affirmation. After Sasha’s dream, where time has ceased to exist, Sasha’s psychic break is even more marked than the previous protagonists’. She cannot imagine a life without a future, nor can she imagine a new future for herself into existence. Her attempt to do so “for the last time” leads to her destruction.

The world has changed: technology is at its center and global time is an inescapable force. It is futile to try to stop a clock, or imagine that stopping it will affect time itself. Yet, in each of the novels we have examined, this is precisely what the protagonists attempt to do. And modernist writers, fearful of modernity’s homogenizing force, often followed a comparable path. In an attempt to resist this force, their writing retreats from the outside world. Their novels cling to the realm of subjectivity as a bastion from the sinister side of modern progress and their narrative structure derives exclusively from their characters’ personal experience, in particular, the personal experience of time. Rhys embraces this method of accessing and depicting private time. She participates in modernist experimentation with narrative point of view, drawing the reader further into the depths of her characters’ psyche, revealing in painful detail their experiences of fear, suffering, desolation, and, most importantly, time. This experience is fragmented, unruly, and chaotic even as it follows a predictable cycle that repeats again and

again. However, in addition to these intimate and subjective portraits, Rhys simultaneously depicts public time. She not only acknowledges the clock-like structures of power that threaten her characters' survival, she co-opts their power to structure her cycle of novels, leveraging their irresistible and insidious repetition, thereby adding a new dimension of representative potential to modernist fiction.

The cycles of experience in her characters' lives derive from the powerful figures who control them: the older male lovers and the social structures that exclude them, from the families that reject them to the shops that will not hire them, from the restaurants that will not serve them to the hotels that will not house them. Rhys aligns these entities with the clock and depicts her characters' desire to control their lives through their fantasies about getting outside of time. She reimagines their struggle to remain young in view of the desolation that their old age inevitably holds as a literal battle against the clock. As the protagonists' lives tick by within this cycle of novels, the women morph into the mechanism that they seek to resist. From the ticking in Marya's head to Julia's run down clockwork toy, we see the protagonists' liminal space in society transformed into a liminal space between human and machine. Sasha fantasizes about completing that transformation and becoming an automaton—a creature that resembles a human, functions automatically, yet lives without emotion, free will, or independent thought. And, like the automaton figure in modern society, she elicits feelings of curiosity, suspicion, and repulsion. Yet her dream of mechanical metamorphosis remains unrealized. As the novel depicts the growing importance and acceptance of technology within society, and as Sasha fails to acclimate to this trend, her alienation increases exponentially. Ultimately, despite the persistence of her humanity, there is no place for her within the human race. Rhys concludes that the modern subject must keep private time in sync with public time in order to survive. The depiction of her characters' failure to align these two dimensions is undoubtedly Rhys's triumph.

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<sup>1</sup> In his 1979 critical study Thomas Staley coined the term “the Rhys woman” to describe “the paradigmatic Rhys heroine, a figure who with only slight transmutation will appear in all her fiction of the 1930s” (37). He launched what Annette Gilson calls “the old school of Rhys criticism,” a tradition of that oversimplified the relationship between Rhys’s biography and her fiction (638). In the words of Helen Carr, “Like Sylvia Plath, Jean Rhys has suffered from having her life and work read against one another, fused into a myth of feminine distress. It is a myth which has obscured much of the significance and complexity of her writing” (1). But, later in the book, Carr admits, “an autobiographical writer is of course what she is” (21). Although this essay will not explore the connections between Rhys’s life experience and her protagonists’ experience, this conflicted history is striking and holds rich potential for critical examination.

<sup>2</sup> Beyond the many actual clocks that we encounter throughout the novels and the constant references to the time, clocks appear in other surprising ways. For instance, Anna buys two pairs of stockings “with clocks up the sides” and Sasha buys her wine “on tick” (*VD* 11, *GMM* 87).

<sup>3</sup> David Scott discusses Bergson’s remarks and Einstein’s response to them during this meeting in “The ‘Concept of Time’ and the ‘Being of the Clock’: Bergson, Einstein, Heidegger, and the Interrogation of the Temporality of Modernism.” While Bergson is generally considered the eventual loser in this debate, Timothy S. Murphy refutes that assumption in “Beneath Relativity: Bergson and Bohm on Absolute Time.” For more on the Bergson-Einstein debate see Robin Durie’s, “The Strange Nature of the Instant,” Ilya Prigogine’s “Irreversibility and Space-Time Structure,” and Jimena Canales, “Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment That Failed: Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations.”

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed investigation of the traumatic pasts and mental illness of Rhys’s protagonists see Elizabeth Abel’s “Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys” or Maren Linett’s reading of Rhys’s characters’ PTSD in “‘New Words, New Everything’: Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys.”

<sup>5</sup> Many critics have used Rhys’s novels to address issues surrounding gender or femininity. Within this admittedly reductive category there is a great diversity of approach. For recent and innovative examples,

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see Ayako Muneuchi's "The Hotel in Fiction: The woman in Public in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight*"; Kristin Czarnecki's "'Altered and Cut to an Echo': Marriage and Modernism in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*"; Rishona Zimring's "The Make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction"; Richard E. Zeikowitz's "Writing a Feminine Paris in Jean Rhys's *Quartet*"; and Katherine Streip's "'Just a Cérébrale': Jean Rhys, Women's Humor, and Ressentiment."

<sup>6</sup> On Friday, November 7, 1919 the leading article on Page 12 of the *London Times* began "The Glorious Dead. Kings's Call to his People. Armistice Day Observance. Two Minutes' Pause From Work. The King invites all his people to join in a special celebration of the anniversary of the cessation of war, as set forth in the following message."

<sup>7</sup> The fact that, as Randall Stevenson observes in *Modernist Fiction*, the same page of the *London Times* that announced the 11:11 moment of silence also announced Einstein's discovery of the Theory of Relativity only underscores the seismic shift that was occurring in the world's perception of time (125).

<sup>8</sup> Christina Britzolakis discusses in detail the historical significance of the Exhibition in her article, "This Way to the Exhibition': Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction."

<sup>9</sup> The images we will see in Sasha's dreams evoke the images and designs of Futurism, another strain of modernism that reconceptualized temporality. Futurism's art, film, and architecture were deeply invested in representations of simultaneity and the subjective experience of time. Its connection with Fascism underscores the anxiety surrounding the Exhibition and the steel figures that recur in Sasha's dreams.

<sup>10</sup> Anna expresses an almost identical anxiety that "the streets going north, east, south, west,[are] all exactly the same" (VD 103.)