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A Curse on Society: Intoxication and Isolation in Jean Rhys's "Good Morning, Midnight"

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Abstract

Jean Rhys's novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) is a touching investigation of isolation, intoxication, and gendered domination in modernist literature. Through the leading role Sasha Jansen, Rhys constructs a deeply introspective narrative that explores into the themes of isolation, addiction, and social cynicism. The novel, set in 1930s Paris, captures the struggles of a woman grappling with loss, societal neglect, and the cyclical nature of self-destruction through alcoholism. Sasha's dependence on alcohol is both a symptom and a catalyst for her alienation, illustrating the interplay between substance abuse and emotional despair.

The stream-of-consciousness technique employed by Rhys allows readers to immerse themselves in Sasha's fractured psyche, revealing the depths of her loneliness and the coping mechanisms she employs to navigate an uncaring world. The novel critiques societal attitudes toward women and addiction, shedding light on the stigmatization of female intoxication and the broader socio-economic forces that contribute to Sasha's marginalization. The portrayal of Paris as a city of both allure and alienation mirrors Sasha's internal turmoil, reinforcing the modernist themes of dislocation and existential dread.

Literary scholars have analyzed *Good Morning, Midnight* through various critical lenses, including feminist, psychoanalytic, and existential perspectives. Critics highlight how Rhys's depiction of intoxication transcends mere personal affliction, instead serving as a broader commentary on the oppressive structures that shape women's lives. The novel resonates with contemporary discussions on addiction, mental health, and gender dynamics, emphasizing the necessity of empathy over societal condemnation.

Ultimately, Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* remains a timeless exploration of the human condition, capturing the intricacies of identity, trauma, and survival in a world that frequently marginalizes the vulnerable. Through Sasha Jansen's experiences, Rhys exposes the psychological and societal consequences of isolation and addiction, positioning her novel as a vital contribution to modernist literature and feminist discourse.

Keywords: Intoxication, Alienation, Modernist Literature, Feminism, Psychological Despair, Social Critique

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Curse on Society: Intoxication and Isolation in Jean Rhys's "Good Morning, Midnight" **Background Study**

Born Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams in Dominica in 1890, Jean Rhys became a prominent figure in 20th-century literature, popularly known for her sensitive works of female isolation and empirical desolation. Her writings are often noted by its intense emotional depth and its nuanced depiction of women on the peripheries of society. Rhys's personal observations as a Caribbean emigrant in Europe deeply impacted her writings, letting her to vibrantly capture the themes of alienation and self-identity.

"Good Morning, Midnight," was published in 1939, was admired as one of Rhys's the most celebrated works. It is a rich allusive work that criticizes modernist pretensions. *Good Morning, Midnight* commences with an epigraph from Emily Dickinson and concludes with an inscription for James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In ensuing, it relates to John Keats, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Wilde, Anatole France, Colette, and feasibly Virginia Woolf. Sasha Jansen, a middle-aged woman dealing with loss, alienation, and her own shattered sense of self, is the protagonist of the Paris-set book, "Good Morning, Midnight". Rhys studies the themes of obsession, loneliness and search for identity in the mist of modern turmoil through the wonderful character Sasha. Readers are drawn into Sasha's inner turbulence through the novel's stream-of-consciousness narrative style, which mirrors her broken consciousness.

"Good Morning, Midnight" was first published during a period of significant political and social cataclysm just before the World War II broke out. Regardless of its literary merit, the novel did not garner considerable attention upon its publication. The world was disturbed with the looming war, and Rhys's hideous depiction of human misery perchance echoed too closely with the unease of the time. Not until the 1960s, with the renewed consideration in Rhys's novel, that "Good Morning, Midnight" was conceded for its literary value. The novel was republished during this period, fetching Rhys the credit that she had long desired.

Rhys's novel "Good Morning, Midnight" is considered as a classic piece of modernist writing. Her work is the best example of modernism, which is illustrated by a departure from conventional narrative structures and a prominence on the subjective experience. Thought-provoking monologues, non-linear narration, and stream-of-consciousness are all modernist methods employed by authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Readers are induced to face the complex realities about identity and life by Rhys's ability to capture the pure, unfiltered feelings of her central character, Sasha.

Literary critics have emphasized Rhys's distinctive contribution to modernism by highlighting her reputation on the oppressed voices, especially those of women who live on the limitations of society. Rhys's novel "centres the intricacy of female subjectivity and the socio-economic factors that have shaped it," according to literary scholar Elaine Savory (Savory, E. 1998. "Jean Rhys," Cambridge University Press). Rhys provides a stark yet sensitive interpretation on the struggles confronted by women in a male-dominated society through her analysis of the problems like alcoholism, poverty, and mental illness.

In addition, Rhys's characterization of Paris as a setting features as a carbon copy of the modernist research of urban cynicism. Sasha's inner anguish is reflected in the city, with its busy streets and uncaring dwellers. The contemporary idea of being alone in the crowd is reinforced by this interplay between the setting and the characters. To sum up, "Good Morning, Midnight" is still a prevalent representation of Jean Rhy's literary skill and her literary zeal to demonstrate the complexity of the human condition. The fact that it was eventually acknowledged shows how iconic Rhys's exploration of self-identity, self-alienation, and self-resilience in the face of social neglect is. Rhys cemented her position as a crucial voice in

modernist literature with this wonderful work, facilitating the booklovers with perspectives that still hold sway.

In Jean Rhys's "Good Morning, Midnight," the elements of intoxication and alienation are proficiently embedded together, and the protagonist's dependence on alcohol serves as a means of investigating more general societal concerns. Rhys tells a moving story through Sasha Jansen, in which drinking is both a cause and an escape from the social alienation and the individual despair.

Intoxication as an Alienation Symptom

Sasha Jansen's radical feelings of alienation are reflected in her addiction to alcoholism. Sasha drinks alcohol as a coping mechanism in a society that isolates and marginalizes her. (Savory, E. 1998. "Jean Rhys," Cambridge University Press) Scholar Elaine Savory observes that "Rhys's central characters are often drink as a way to navigate the oppressive landscapes they inhabit, where the alienation is a constant companion." Sasha watches herself in a mirror and observes her emotional state:

"I stayed there, staring at myself in the glass. What do I want to cry about? ... On the contrary, it's when I am quite sane like this, when I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane, that I realize how lucky I am." (Rhy.10)

Sasha's drinking addiction is a sign of her inability to fit in with a society that constantly denies her. This separation is intensified by the Parisian setting of the novel. Sasha's isolation is accentuated by the busy city, which is crowded with the outsiders and the remote faces. Her regular trips to cafes and bars are futile attempts to meet new people, but they frequently.

Intoxication as a Depressant Catalyst

Although it offers a momentary escape, intoxication also serves as a catalyst for Sasha's regression into despair. Every drink makes it harder for her to distinguish between reality and illusion, making her more vulnerable to the emotional upheaval she tries to escape. In this sense, her internal conflicts are both suppressed and aggravated by her intoxication. She warns herself against excessive consumption of alcohol to keep self-control:

"But careful, careful! Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and exalted, don't you? ... Yes.... And then, you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you? Having no staying power.... Yes, exactly.... So, no excitement. This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much drinking, avoidance of certain cafes, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go off beautifully." (Rhy.15)

Through Sasha's philosophical monologues, which highlight the recurrent nature of her alcoholic addiction, Rhys exemplifies this duality. (Emery, M.L. 1990. "Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile"). Critic Mary Lou Emery notes that Rhys "uses the motif of intoxication to highlight the self-destructive cycles that her characters are imprisoned, where every effort to numb their pain only deepens their despair." Readers are drawn in by the novel's stream-of-consciousness style.

Social Consequences

"Good Morning, Midnight" evaluates the way society looks at the alienation and intoxication. Rhys portrays a society in which people like Sasha are isolated to face their obstacles on their own, with little compassion or empathy from others. Sasha's interactions with the other characters, who frequently despise or take the advantage of her vulnerability, perfectly capture this apathy.

Rhys's portrayal of Sasha's experiences suggests a more comprehensive analysis of the social evil of intoxication. Sasha admits that how the society identify her as a woman strives for comfort in intoxication:

“They all know what I am. I’m a woman come in here to get drunk... There’s nothing to be done about it now. I have drunk.” (Rhy.89)

Rhys asks the readers to think about the structural causes of these phases of alcohol addiction and alienation by showing how alcohol can be both a haven and a prison. The novel focusses the destructive consequences of societal neglect and the necessity of empathy and compassion in confronting these difficulties.

In “Good Morning, Midnight,” Jean Rhys profoundly investigates the intricate relationship between alienation and intoxication. Rhys interprets the story of Sasha Jansen to show how alcohol can be a cause as well as a symptom of social alienation and personal misery. The novel is a compelling investigation of the human condition and the social structures that sustain suffering because of its modernist mechanisms and social criticism. As such, Rhys’s writings remain to be a moving and timely critique of society’s curse of intoxication.

The first section of the paper “Intoxication and Alienation in Jean Rhys’s ‘Good Morning, Midnight’: A Curse on Society” introduces the author and her novel, emphasizing its significance in her frame of the literary piece. It presents the idea that the novel uncovers how the intoxication is both a sign and a cause of societal alienation and personal desperation. The current study examines how the intoxication signifies Sasha Jansen’s inner agony and alienation. It explores the intoxication as both a means of escape and entrapment, and contextualizes the novel within 1930s Parisian society, acutely its gender norms and attitudes towards intoxication. The paper studies how Sasha’s alcohol addiction spreads a cycle of misery and self-destruction. It also studies Rhys’s relevance of stream-of-consciousness to picture Sasha’s shattered ego and relates her experiences with the other literary characters, emphasizing comprehensive social consequences of intoxication.

Further, the study reviews the societal mindsets regarding intoxication, illuminating how vanity intensifies Sasha’s alienation. It explores key interactions that reveal the destructive consequences of intoxication and engages with various critical perspectives on Rhys’s manifestation of social issues, highlighting her contribution to the modern literature.

Finally, the paper sums up the central influences and discusses the broader implications of Rhys’s interpretation of intoxication, contemplating on its lasting significance in contemporary considerations about the addiction. It concludes with the remarks on Rhys’s major contributions to literature and social criticism, reinforced by primary and secondary sources.

Intoxication as an Alienation Symptom

Analysis of Sasha Jansen’s Character

The central character Sasha Jansen of Jean Rhys’s “Good Morning, Midnight,” is a composite character whose intoxication emotionally implies her internal conflicts and sense of alienation. Sasha’s life is characterized throughout the novel by a deep detachment from the outside world. Her alcohol addiction is more than just a habit; it’s a way for her to control the overwhelming sense of loneliness and hopelessness she experiences. Sasha recounts her attempt to escape her troubles through alcohol:

“It was then that I had the bright idea of drinking myself to death..... I did try it too.....Drink, drink, drink....As soon as I sober up I start again.” (Rhy.37)

She encounters the dual nature of intoxication in her life as she makes her way through Paris, where drunkenness tends as both a soothing aura and a destructive force.

Rhys depicts Sasha’s addiction to alcohol as a way to escape and numb her emotional suffering. Readers may experience Sasha’s confused thoughts and feelings thanks to the novel’s stream-of-consciousness style, which captures the uncertainty and turmoil that intoxication both alleviates and aggravates. Literary critic Mary Lou Emery claims that Rhys’s characters frequently turn to intoxication to help them deal with “the marginalized world they inhabit,

where alienation is a constant companion” (Emery, M.L. 1990. “Jean Rhys at ‘World’s End’: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile”).

Symbolism of Alcohol in the Novel

Alcohol in “Good Morning, Midnight” symbolizes both choice and incarceration, perfectly capturing the contradictory aspects of Sasha’s life. On the one hand, it provides her with a short escape from society’s constant inquiry and conviction. However, it puts her trapped in a vicious cycle of reliance and hopelessness, which deteriorates her loneliness and feelings of failure. Scenes when Sasha takes solace in drinking but also acknowledges the emptiness it brings are clear examples of this paradox. She expresses a desire to freeze her feelings and memories with alcohol:

“Now I no longer wish to be loved, beautiful, happy or successful. I want one thing and one thing only—to be left alone. No more pawings, no more prying—leave me alone... I’ve had enough of thinking, enough of remembering. Now whiskey, rum, gin, sherry...” (Rhy.43)

Sasha reflecting on her life in a cafe, enclosed by strangers and wrapped in the secret that drink grants her, is one of the crucial sequences that most exemplifies this symbolism. Consumption of alcohol turns into forgetfulness and a means of obliterating the margins of her reality and they temporarily escape the choking weight of her isolation. However, as the effects of alcohol fade, Sasha is deserted with an increased understanding of her alienation, emphasizing the novel’s investigation of intoxication as both a refuge and a prison.

Cultural and Historical Context

The novel takes place in 1930s in Paris, a city famous for its lively yet chaotic social environment. The cultural and historical background of this period significantly influenced the themes of “Good Morning, Midnight”. During this period, Paris assisted as a centre for artistic and intellectual pursuits, drawing in expatriates and avant-grade thinkers. Nevertheless, it was also a site of stark disparities, where the city’s charm often masked deep-rooted social tensions and inequalities.

Rhys adeptly navigates this intricacy by placing Sasha’s narrative within the wide social standards and anticipations relating to gender and drinking. During the 1930s, women who challenged conventional roles or participated in activities like alcohol consumption frequently faced stigmatization and exclusion. Sasha’s travel mirrors the obstacles encountered by women striving to claim their independence in male-dominated society. As a literary critic Elaine Savory observes, Rhys’s works “highlight the intricacy of female identity and the socio-economic elements have influenced it” (Savory, E. 1998. “Jean Rhys,” Cambridge University Press). Through Sasha’s odyssey, Rhys denounces the societal frameworks that provoke her alienation, emphasizing how intoxication serves as both a manifestation and a trigger of her disconnection. By setting up of the novel within the cultural and historical landscape of 1930s Paris, Rhys provides a coated scrutiny of the relationship between personal combats and social dynamics, interpreting “Good Morning, Midnight” a poignant reflection on the affliction of intoxication in a realm ensnared by alienation and hopelessness.

Intoxication as a Depressant Catalyst

Cycle of Addiction and Despair

Sasha Jansen’s addiction to alcohol is a key factor in “Good Morning, Midnight,” as it pushes her into a relentless spiral of self-destruction. Her drinking addiction serves as both a contributing factor to and a sign of her nihilism, indicating how intoxication can exacerbate depressive symptoms. Sasha tries to escape reality with every drink, but it simply deepens her sense of hopelessness and reinforces the boundaries between her and the outside world. This cycle of despair is symbolic of addiction, in which the transient solace provided by the intoxication results in additional imprisonment in a condition of mental and emotional flux.

Intoxication has a significant psychological effect on Sasha's mental health. Intoxication makes it difficult to distinguish between reality and delusion, which makes her feel even more confounded and alienated. According to Mary Lou Emery, a literary critic, "Rhys employs the theme of intoxication to highlight the self-destructive cycles that her characters are entombed in, where each attempt to numb their pain only deepens their despair" (Emery, Mary Lou, 1990, "Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile"). Sasha's alcohol addiction exposes the destructive nature of addiction and reflect her inner turbulence.

Stream-of-Consciousness and Narrative Techniques

Employing the stream-of-consciousness approach, Jean Rhys vividly depicts Sasha's drunken state of mind and her fractured psyche. Readers can immerse themselves in Sasha's thoughts and emotions thanks to this narrative approach, sharing in her bewilderment and misery. The chaotic and shattered nature of Sasha's mental state is described by the stream-of-consciousness technique, which also shows how intoxication influences her reality perception. With this stream-of-consciousness approach, Rhys carries the readers to Sasha's inner world and lets them see how drunkenness affects her awareness. Sasha's vulnerabilities and the psychological effects of her addiction are exposed by the narrative's variability, which reflects the ups and downs of her thinking. Literary researcher Elaine Savory describes that Rhys's narrative technique "centres around the socio-economic complexity and the complexity of female subjectivity" (Savory, E. 1998. "Jean Rhys," Cambridge University Press).

Comparative Study

Other fictional characters that employed intoxication as a coping method can be related to Sasha's experiences with intoxication. Characters like Sebastian Flyte in Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited" and Jake Barnes in Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises" likewise grapple with alcohol's dual nature as a source of solace and despair. These parallels focus how alcohol addiction affects society more broadly and how people turn to intoxication for comfort when they feel isolated.

The exploration of such characters highlights how prevalent alcohol addiction is and the social conditions that fuel it. Sasha's difficulties in Rhys's book are representative of the hitches encountered by those who are intoxicated to cope with a society that frequently seems uncaring and hostile. Rhys offers a moving commentary on the menace of intoxication and its impact on both the individual and the society well-being by delving into these subjects. Summing up the novel, "Good Morning, Midnight" observes the intricate relationship between addiction, hopelessness, and alienation through the concept of intoxication. Rhys depicts a potent critique of cultural perceptions of alcohol addiction and the structural elements that support self-destructive cycles via Sasha Jansen's journey. The novel's narrative techniques and the thematic intensity make it a compelling evaluation of the human disorder and the social forces that silhouette it.

Social Reflections and Criticism

Perceptions of Intoxication in Society

"Good Morning, Midnight" by Jean Rhys deals with a inducing criticism of how society views alcohol addiction and the alienation it causes. The protagonist of the book, Sasha Jensen, is portrayed as a severely ostracized person whose addiction of alcohol is a coping strategy as well as a way to further alienate herself from society. Sasha's treatment, which ranges from casual rejection to downright ridicule, mirrors the society's prevalent apathy for intoxication. Her isolation is made dreadful by this detachment, which supports the novel's main themes of indifference to individuals who fights against addiction.

Jean Rhys's depiction of Sasha's hopelessness implies that a cycle of indifference is sustained by society's denial to address the root causes of intoxication. Sasha frequently encounters the

criticism rather than understanding or support, which only serves to increase her sense of despair. Sasha considers her perceived inefficiency and society's judgment:

"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." (Rhy.25)

By showing how Sasha's alcohol addiction is a sign of a greater cultural indifference to pain rather than just a personal weakness, the book challenges this systemic contempt. According to scholars like Maud Ellmann (2000), Rhys's works reveal how modern literature grapple with the themes of dislocation and separation, especially as they relate to gender and class.

Reflections with the Other Characters

Key reflections throughout the novel illuminate the destructive effects of intoxication. Sasha's interactions with a variety of men whether they were opportunistic predators, uncaring bartenders, or past lovers—highlight how drunk women are frequently perceived as vulnerable and simple targets. She expresses a sense of hopelessness and entrapment:

"I try, but they always see through me. The passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut. I know." (Rhy.31)

These connections' transactional and occasionally predatory character reveals society's bigger indifference to women in susceptible roles.

An illustration of how alcohol-fuelled interactions frequently result in greater emotional and physical deprivation is Sasha's interaction with the unnamed gigolo toward the novel's conclusion. These interactions reinforce Sasha's vulnerability and the sense of alienation rather than providing comfort. According to critics like Mary Lou Emery (1990), Rhys's portrayal of intoxication is closely correlated with feminine disempowerment, implying that society perceptions of addiction are especially negative when the addict is a woman. Thus, the narrative emphasizes how gender, alcohol addiction, and social neglect are intertwined.

The Interpretations and Literary Criticism

From the feminist readings to the existential and psychoanalytic interpretations, critics have examined "Good Morning, Midnight" from a variety of perspectives. The novel's portrayal of intoxication has been studied as a metaphor for exile and alienation in general as well as a literal representation of alcoholic addiction.

Rhys's focus on marginalized voices, especially those of women who live on the periphery of society, is what makes her a unique impact to modern literature. Rhys describes the issues of alienation in the real experiences of deprived women, in contrast to many of her modernist antecedents who frequently attempted related themes from a more abstract or cerebral position. The reader can feel Sasha's hostility on a visceral level because of her shattered narrative style, which is frequently confused and cyclical and reflects the effects of intoxication and despair. The writings of Jean Rhys have been reviewed by critics as an essential contribution to feminist and modernist literature. Critics like Elaine Savory (1998) insists that by highlighting experiences of instability, intoxication, and social neglect, Rhys's depiction of female subjectivity undermines the conventional literary narratives. In "Good Morning, Midnight", Rhys criticizes both how literature itself frequently ignores the experiences of its most vulnerable people and how the society fails to provide for them.

Conclusion

Key Points

The novel "Good Morning, Midnight" by Jean Rhys presents a moving examination of intoxication—literal and symbolic—as a coping method for Sasha Jensen, its protagonist. The novel depicts intoxication as a way of escape, self-destructive behaviour, and momentary relief from existential misery. Rhys skilfully depicts the psychological and societal consequences of

substance abuse through Sasha's broken consciousness and unreliable narration. The investigation of her intoxication experiences reveals deeper themes of isolation, gender oppression, and emotional anguish, placing Rhys' work in the context of both modernist literary traditions and feminist critiques of societal limits on women.

Relevance and Implications

The way that Rhys portrays intoxication presents the key insights into how society views substance abuse, especially as it relates to gender and mental health. The novel emphasizes how trauma, marginalization, and the need for identity are frequently linked to intoxication. Sasha's addiction is a reflection of a society that marginalizes and alienates women, particularly those who don't fit into traditional roles, rather than just a personal shortcoming. By promoting a more sympathetic perspective of substance usage as a complicated socio-psychological problem rather than a moral failing, this portrayal undermines stigmatized conceptions of intoxication.

Furthermore, *Good Morning, Midnight* is still relevant in the contemporary conversations concerning the intoxication and the society. In an age when substance abuse is increasingly conceded as a public health concern rather than a criminal one, Rhys' work provides a historical lens through which we can view current arguments about addiction, mental illness, and social alienation. The work is consistent with the modern storylines that strive to humanize rather than vilify persons battling with substance abuse, underlining the importance of structural and compassionate approaches to the addiction therapy.

Concluding Observations

In addition to its literary achievements, Jean Rhys's work is remarkable for its profound social critique. Rhys subverts popular conceptions of addiction by presenting intoxication as both a symptom and a symbol of Sasha's marginalisation, providing a complex and greatly human depiction of suffering in the process. Her writings continue to stimulate conversations on addiction, mental health, and gender, proving the timeless ability of literature to both reflect and critique social reality. In the end, Rhys's literary brilliance and her unwavering examination of the intricacies of the human condition are demonstrated in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

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