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Tiffany Wong

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“Rooms, streets, streets, rooms”:

Seeing One’s Self in the Spaces of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*

by

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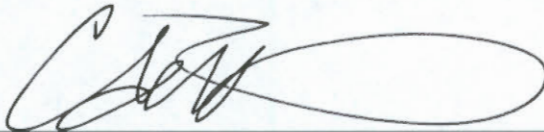
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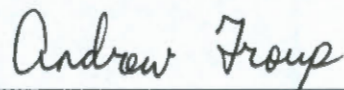
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“Rooms, streets, streets, rooms”:

Seeing One’s Self in the Spaces of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*

## Introduction

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Spurred by an exciting thought, a woman rises from the river bank and hurriedly walks across the university lawn, only to be reverted, by the gaze of a man, to the gravel path.

Returning to the designated pathway, the woman—the unnamed fictional narrator of Virginia Woolf’s well-known essay on women and fiction, published as *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)—concedes:

Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman.

This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 6)

Having instinctively accepted her wrongdoing, the woman notes that she has “audaciously trespass[ed]” and returns to the path already set for her (6). She then heads to the library, only to be turned away again—for she is a lady, and ladies cannot enter unless accompanied by university fellows or introduced, rather, permitted, by letter (8). What, then, is one to do? She posits, “Stroll on the meadows? [S]it by the river?” (8). Illustrating women’s experience of public space after the First World War, Woolf presents this experience of disappointment as the starting point of *A Room of One’s Own*. Indeed, while best remembered for championing women’s access to private spaces, Woolf’s essay also addresses the problem of women’s mobility in public spaces, particularly in academic and professional fields. This question of women’s passage through, and placement within, interwar urban space is a prominent concern of Woolf’s fictions, as well as the works of female writers following Woolf.

With consideration of the argument Woolf makes for women's independence and privacy in *A Room of One's Own*, I will examine the treatment of women's experiences of space in the 1920s and 1930s in two city novels, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). These interwar narratives feature middle-aged female protagonists wandering and passing between the inner and outer spaces of modern cities. Using the stream of consciousness method, Woolf and Rhys reveal the experiences and thoughts of their protagonists, Clarissa Dalloway and Sasha Jansen, showing their movements in the present while revealing their minds to wander to past events and places that have shaped their sense of identity.

In exploring the problems women face in the public and private spaces of the modern city, Woolf and Rhys question how one's class, gender, and nationality shape experience and identity, and in this way rewrite the concept of *flânerie*, a uniquely masculine privilege with origins in late-nineteenth-century literature. Although walking is an activity expressed as pleasurable to Woolf and Rhys's protagonists, it fails to provide the freedom and leisure desired by Clarissa Dalloway and Sasha Jansen. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, as Clarissa Dalloway prepares for her party, she spends much of her day contemplating life (and death) and remembering events from her youth in the countryside at Bourton. Clarissa begins the day with a walk to the florists, but despite her brief adventure, she returns to and remains in the domestic space of her home for the remainder of the narrative. Meanwhile, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, having arrived in Paris, Sasha Jansen attempts to enjoy, or at least survive, a brief holiday but is relentlessly haunted by memories of her former years in the city as she wanders the once-familiar streets and continually retreats to and from her hotel room. Although both novels depict (and are structured by) their characters' walking in the city, the focus of each narrative is on the characters' wandering

internal thoughts rather than their journeys through physical space. Woolf's novel seems to provide an optimistic, multidimensional view of women's partaking of public space. On the other hand, Rhys's novel, while often compared stylistically to Woolf's, can be read as a cynical response to Woolf's claims and representation of women's subjectivity in the modern city.

With Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis and musings on personal, interior space and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias (real but "other" places) in mind, I will follow Clarissa and Sasha's journeys through the cityscape and their movements in and out of rooms and streets. In this way, I will examine their relations to these exterior and interior places, particularly the spaces to which they "belong" or to which they retreat. Specifically, I will consider Clarissa and Sasha's retreats to various spaces in each narrative, as these "room[s] of one's own" function as spaces of the self. Henceforth, I will examine the mirror as a heterotopia, looking into Clarissa and Sasha's perceptions of self in relation to their moods, memories, and associations with "other spaces." In this way, I will examine how the identities of Clarissa and Sasha are constructed and revealed through the fragmented movements and memories experienced throughout the space of the city and throughout each narrative, as well as how these identities are reflected and contrasted through other characters within each narrative.

#### Walking and Writing in the City: From Flânerie to the Self

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Though the flâneur comes from a distinctly masculine background, feminist critics have debated, since the 1980s, the possibility of a female flânerie in modern literature, often citing Virginia Woolf as an example of such a possibility. Artist, writer, detective, spectator, dandy, wanderer—despite being ambiguously identified by these varied terms, the flâneur has been recognized as a uniquely masculine figure of the bourgeois class. Appearing most notably in Charles Baudelaire's writing and Walter Benjamin's critiques of modernity, the flâneur is a

concept that emerged from nineteenth-century Paris. In his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (“Le Peintre de la vie moderne”), Baudelaire considers the flâneur to be not only an artist figure, but also, as his essay suggests, a man of the world, a man of the crowd, and a child (“L’artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant”). Baudelaire bases this description of the flâneur on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd,” published in 1840. A member of the bourgeois class, the artist figure strolls through the city streets in pursuit of his curiosities. An intellectual figure, the flâneur feels most at home in the crowd, which he can explore, observe, and write about. Characterized by his leisurely walk and examination of his surroundings, the flâneur is a solitary figure that cannot truly become “one flesh with the crowd” (9). Though the flâneur may walk in the streets among the crowd, he is separate from it and does not quite belong to it.

Intrigued by Baudelaire’s flâneur, Walter Benjamin, writing in the early twentieth century, regards the flâneur as a leitmotif of modernity in his extensive writings on modernity. Referring to Baudelaire’s separation of the flâneur from the crowd, Benjamin notes that the flâneur “stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class”—he is at home in neither space (“Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” 10). The flâneur is not simply a pedestrian in the crowd; rather, he is a privileged spectator and, like Poe’s narrator, a detective figure. At the same time, the flâneur tries to hide and disappear among the crowd, using it to conceal his “deep crime” of not being of the crowd. The flâneur thus “seeks refuge in the crowd,” just as the asocial individual hides in the asylum provided by the masses (“Paris, the Capital” 10; “The Paris of the Second Empire” 40). The crowd, Benjamin contends, is a veil “through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape,



now a room” (“Paris, the Capital” 10). In this sense, the crowd—the street—becomes an interior space, providing a sense of privacy and anonymity to the flâneur.<sup>1</sup>

Critics following Benjamin’s footsteps in analyzing the modern city in literature have generally accepted and utilized the gender-specific definition and critique of the flâneur. In nineteenth-century literature, in contrast to the male flâneur, women walking in modern urban spaces are identified often as the “streetwalker” type, often judged for walking alone in public spaces. Public women in the nineteenth century are essentially portrayed as fallen women, as Deborah Epstein Nord finds in her essay, “The Urban Peripatetic: Spectator, Streetwalker, Woman Writer.” Whether the woman in public space is “a projection of the male stroller’s alienation [or] an emblem of social contamination that must be purged,” she is always an object in male discourse (Nord 374).<sup>2</sup> Using the example of the generational difference between Clarissa Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth, Nord points to Woolf as a possible answer to the question of how and when woman’s entry into “a discourse in which she is already figured as object” can be less problematic (374). Similarly, Valerie Fehlbauer, in “Paving the Way for Mrs. Dalloway: The Street-Walking Women of Eliza Lynn Linton, Ella Hepworth Dixon and George

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as a counterpart to the solitary flâneur, the crowd is a powerful force in the urban city, a source of anxiety and fear among the bourgeoisie in late nineteenth-century France.

<sup>2</sup> In examining the streetwalker trope, Nord traces the representations of women in public by nineteenth-century male writers (Wordsworth, De Quincey, Dickens), and then compares such representations to the works of Flora Tristan and Elizabeth Gaskell, concluding that these works “do not resolve the tensions created... but rather [reveal] the problematic nature of woman’s entry into the space and terms of male culture” (374).

Paston,” considers how nineteenth-century women writers’ representations of women and their relation to public space ultimately lead to Woolf. Space, Fehlbau notes, is a prominent concern in Woolf’s works, especially in relation to women in private and public space (149). As Nord and Fehlbau posit, Woolf is a point of departure for women’s writing and women’s relation to space.

While Nord and Fehlbau illustrate “the way” to Woolf, Rachel Bowlby, in her book *Still Crazy After All These Years*, advances the discussion of Woolf’s advancement of women’s writing by considering how Woolf challenges women’s representation in literature. In the chapter “Walking, Women, and Writing: Virginia Woolf as Flâneuse,” Bowlby suggests that Woolf satirizes traditional male writing, which is paralleled by the metaphor of flânerie, through her own portrayal of women, walking, and writing. Through her own writing, Woolf examines the tension women writers face between “access to something regarded as neutral, and subversion of something defined as normative and masculine” (Bowlby, “Walking, Women, and Writing” 4). As Bowlby suggests, Woolf’s question is not so much about walking (the act of flânerie, for instance) as writing as it is about writing as walking—writing as women’s access to public discourse, or writing as a subversion of women’s access to public discourse (8). Using Peter Walsh’s walk away from Clarissa’s home as an example, Bowlby explores Woolf’s satirization of male flânerie, which is contrasted by Clarissa and Elizabeth Dalloway’s walking adventures in the city. She also points out that, while *A Room of One’s Own* addresses women’s need for private, interior spaces, the book also presents Woolf’s evocations of writing as a parallel to walking. For instance, the structure of the book follows the narrator on an imaginary stroll through Oxbridge and London. Through *A Room of One’s Own* and, even more dramatically, the essay “Street Haunting,” Woolf advocates a “female street-walking or street-

writing [which deviates] from any expected routes,” or in other words, female *flânerie* (Bowlby, “Walking, Women, and Writing” 19).

Concerned with the feminist “appropriation” of the *flâneur* motif, Deborah Parsons reassesses the definition of Benjamin’s *flâneur* in her essay “*Flâneur or Flâneuse? Mythologies of Modernity*” (91). Because Benjamin’s interpretation of the *flâneur*—the urban walker-observer—has been translated in theory into a “plethora of incarnations,” Parsons questions whether the term “*flâneuse*” is a functional parallel to the *flâneur*-as-writer metaphor (91). She remarks that Baudelaire’s urban spectators (artists, dandies, prostitutes, etc.) are “drifting, placeless figures ... all socially or morally marginalised figures” — “Male and female, authoritative and marginal, they have in common a lack of place in society and an aura of isolation” (98). Examining inconsistencies in Benjamin’s critique of Baudelaire’s spectator figures, Parsons refers to Benjamin’s interpretation and usage of Baudelaire’s figures as “retrieval and revaluation,” in the sense that Benjamin has “[made] a collage out of fragments of urban myth” (98). The act of *flânerie* is not passive, detached voyeurism, but rather an interactive formulation of the city through its fragments. Moreover, *flânerie* is not exclusive to bourgeois male scopical privilege. Parsons thus proposes applying Benjamin’s framework to women writers’ “expression of their position with regards to the social, historical and psychological construction of urban space” (99). Drawing a comparison between “feminist revisioning” and Benjamin’s interpretation of *flânerie*, Parsons comes to the conclusion that Benjamin’s project “is itself a labyrinth of fragments,” an open site that readers must “pick [their] way through” (99). For this reason, Parsons proposes employing the “rag-picker” as a model for modern women observers and writers, rather than use “*flâneuse*” as a term to identify the female equivalent to the “*flâneur*” (94). Although Parsons finds the use of the term “*flâneuse*” to be a weak metaphor for the

modern woman artist, the walker and writer metaphor still dominates criticism of the city and literature.

The rag-picker model Parsons suggests as a metaphor for women writers seems to reflect Michel de Certeau's alternative description to walker-writers and urban spaces in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In the chapter "Walking in the City," Certeau highlights the role of consumers or ordinary, "common people" in producing mass culture by using the walking metaphor. While Benjamin describes the flâneur as the artist figure or poet who reads and writes of the modern city, Certeau positions the "ordinary practitioners of the city . . . walkers, Wandersmänner" as the writers of the city (93). In this sense, the walker is part of the crowd, rather than at a distance as the voyeur is. Walking "manipulates spatial organizations . . . creates shadows and ambiguities within them" (101). Similar to the fragmented collage-making of Parson's rag-picker model, Certeau's walker "inserts its multitudinous references and citations into [spatial organizations]" and is "like a peddler" (101). Although his notion of "writing" the urban "text" is concerned with practices rather than representations (for instance, the experience of the city as opposed to a depiction of that experience), Certeau also addresses the importance of "signifying practices [legends, fictions] . . . as practices that invent spaces" (107). Certeau compares walking to the speech act (as well as writing), noting that it has a triple "enunciative" function: Like the speaker of language, the walker appropriates, acts out, and verbalizes the spaces through which he passes (97-98). In this sense, walking is an individual's contribution to the discourse of the city space. While Certeau does address the act of walking in relation to memory, Gaston Bachelard more closely explores the experience of space with regards to memory, imagination, and writing.

Through topoanalysis, the "systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives," Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space* [*La Poétique de l'Espace*] (1958), examines the

experience of space in relation to the imagination and literature (8). He begins with the significance of the house, which is experienced “[not] from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story,” but also through dreams (5). For Bachelard, the house allows for imagination and memory; its main purpose is to shelter daydreaming, protect the dreamer, and allow one to dream in peace (6). In daydreams, past, present, and future can merge—interfere, oppose, stimulate each other (6). A place of comfort, the house is essential to Being, as it is where life begins, before one is “cast into the world” (7). Looking closely at spaces within the house, Bachelard compares phenomenological fears in the attic and the cellar, spaces that are explored in Woolf and Rhys’s novels. He remarks that the attic is an always-comforting place (10). The attic, Bachelard suggests, is a safe place, where fears are “easily ‘rationalized’” (19). What’s more, the attic is a site for ascension, as “we always go up” to “a more tranquil solitude” (26). In contrast, the cellar is always a mysterious, threatening space where “darkness prevails both day and night” (19). Bachelard further examines the emphasis on solitude in writing, as “We are hypnotized by solitude, hypnotized by the gaze of the solitary house” (36).

The need for solitude, particularly for women, is expressed in Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf argues for women to have spaces for being creative and writing—“a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 4). With independence and privacy, women’s genius can flourish. As noted earlier, Woolf also suggests that women need independence and freedom in public spaces, as her narrator finds herself barred from places like the library, unless she is accompanied or permitted by a male authority (8). For example, the lack of public independence—or as Woolf says, the “narrowness of life”—is the only setback that Jane Austen’s writing suffered in Austen’s circumstances: “It

was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself” (68). Woolf remarks that Austen’s talent and circumstances were nonetheless perfectly matched, in this way emphasizing again the importance for women to have personal interior spaces for creativity.

Indeed, the scrutiny of women’s space is a prominent concern in Woolf’s works that critics have found to be as problematic as it is pioneering. Lenora Penna Smith, in “Spaces, Places, Houses, Rooms: A Feminist Perspective,” remarks that women’s escape from the “hegemony of the family” and their “access to the outside world” is more difficult than Woolf purports in *A Room of One’s Own* (218). Smith finds Woolf’s insistence of living “in the presence of reality” to be a problem because it implies the room is a “necessary private space in which the writer will assimilate the lessons of ‘an invigorating life’ and transform them into history, poetry, or fiction” (218). While women in Woolf’s works do have private spaces of their own, these spaces are rooms within the patriarch-dominated family home or are funded by income supplied, either directly or indirectly, by male figures. Smith notes that these rooms contradictorily “[embody] a culturally constructed feminine self” and, conversely, “[provide] a private space in which this self can transcend cultural construction” (219). Citing Clarissa Dalloway’s attic room as an example, Smith remarks that dominance over such a space of refuge or retreat is granted conditionally through the woman’s hegemonic position in her marriage and family (220). Moreover, in these spaces, Woolf’s women internalize social and cultural codes of femininity, becoming “the principle of [her] own subjection” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*,

qtd. in Smith 221). In this way, these rooms fail to be private spaces in which women can define themselves in their own terms (222).<sup>3</sup>

Although Smith finds readings of private spaces in Woolf's works as liberating to be problematic, the attic can still function as a counter-site or heterotopia, a real but "other" space. Introduced by Michel Foucault in his lecture/essay "Of Other Spaces" ("Des Autres Espaces"), heterotopias, like utopias, are linked with all other spaces but also contradict these sites, as they "suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). While utopias are essentially unreal places, "sites with no real place," heterotopias are real, existing places (24). In other works of criticism, variations of the heterotopic "other" spaces include liminal spaces, threshold spaces, and in-between spaces. However, acknowledging that Bachelard's studies concern primarily internal space, Foucault seeks to examine external space and define his concept in social and cultural contexts.

Foucault uses six principles to describe heterotopic space. First, heterotopias exist in most, if not all, cultures, but there is no absolute, universal form. Crisis heterotopias are privileged, sacred, or forbidden places for individuals who are in a "state of crisis" in their societies or environments (24). In Foucault's time, these heterotopias (for example, prisons and senior homes) are gradually replaced by heterotopias of deviation, which are designated for individuals who deviate from the required means or norms of their society. Foucault's second

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<sup>3</sup> According to Smith, the "most successful" room in Woolf's fiction is that of Mary Datchet in *Night and Day*: Mary's room can function as a place for the feminine to be reformulated because in this space, Mary is able to imagine "a self ... not imbricated in notions either of a transcendental, essential individuality or of a self-sacrificing domesticity" (224).

principle maintains that a society can redefine an existing heterotopia's function. That is, each heterotopia in a society has a specific, determined function, but it can have another function at another point in time. The third principle states that heterotopias can be composed of several spaces in a single, real place. According to the fourth principle, heterotopias are usually associated with time, with some accumulating time indefinitely. On the other hand, some heterotopias are absolutely temporal. Foucault remarks in the fifth principle, heterotopias assume "a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (26). In other words, they are not freely accessible public places. Individuals enter either by obligation or by permission through adherence to certain gestures or rules. Lastly, the sixth principle maintains that heterotopias function in relation to all other spaces, creating spaces either to "[expose] every real space" (illusory, like brothels) or to be "other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (compensatory, like colonies) (27).

Since heterotopias function as counter-sites and places of otherness, the concept can be applied to the spaces represented in Woolf and Rhys's texts, including that of the mirror space. Foucault explains that the mirror is a utopia and heterotopia—a "mixed, joint experience" (24). Because it is a "placeless place," the mirror is a utopia. On the other hand, because it exists in reality, the mirror is also a heterotopia. As a heterotopia, the mirror can make occupied place (that is, the real, physical space in which an individual exists) "at once absolutely real ... and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (24). In this way, the mirror is a crucial space to examine in regards to the understanding of self in Woolf and Rhys's texts.



“This Way—This Way—This Way to the Exhibition . . .”

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Much has been said of how Woolf and Rhys’s works—novels, characters, spaces—engage in their historical, social, political, and cultural contexts. Like their Modernist contemporaries, Woolf and Rhys exhibit a concern with the individual’s place and space after the First World War. Both writers illustrate the complications of female agency and feminine identity in post-war London and Paris, responding to the post-war expectations for women to return to their traditional places in interior domestic space.<sup>4</sup> Although some women maintained active roles in public discourse, they faced the scrutiny of their peers as well as a sense of internalized inferiority. Woolf speaks of women’s sense of inferiority in *A Room of One’s Own*, citing the opinions of men like Oscar Browning, whose declaration that “the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man” consequently influenced the “enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 54). Woolf remarks that any girl, whether or not her father vocalizes Browning’s opinions, would be able to read such opinions herself: “There would always have

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<sup>4</sup> As Jessica Gildersleeve notes, women in post-war British society were stuck “in a no-place, unable to move forward and unwilling to move back” (Gildersleeve 228). Although the war had opened opportunities for women in social mobility, employment and politics, its end brought about the reemergence of the “cult of domesticity” and further conflicts as working women were seen as a threat to men’s employment and bourgeois English manliness (Holden). Women were then expected to return to the domestic sphere and play their proper roles in British society, following the social and cultural codes of femininity. Women’s hopes and expectations for emancipation subsided in the 1920s as many women returned to the domestic space of the home.

been that assertion—you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that—to protest against, to overcome” (54). As Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, describing the woman writer reaching literary autonomy:

[The woman] must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her “inconstancy” and—by identifying her with the “eternal types” they have themselves invented—to possess her more thoroughly. . . [A] woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of “angel” and “monster” which male authors have generated for her. (970-975)

Indeed, the female protagonists in Woolf and Rhys’s fiction find themselves unable to identify with one extreme or another, despite how they may be characterized by society. Woolf and Rhys’s protagonists must overcome preconceived ideas about English femininity and resist the assertion of doing *this* or *that*. Still, at the same time, the protagonists must engage in self-reflection and come to terms with their selves as they are in the present, here and now.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, Clarissa and Sasha’s consciousnesses are haunted by masculine dominance, which limits the geographical, spatial paths these female characters take within the frame of each narrative. Like Mary Seton, Clarissa and Sasha are confined to predetermined paths, created by men and regulated by society and themselves. The physical journeys of Clarissa and Sasha are paralleled by their inward journeys toward an understanding of the self. The women protagonists attempt to locate their selves within society, navigating geographical and social spaces within the city.

That is to say, the women of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are haunted not only by masculine authority and internalized social and cultural codes but also the notion of

being classified—doing *this* and/or *that* and being *this* and/or *that*. In their narratives, Clarissa and Sasha strive to affirm their individualism, as demonstrated by their thoughts, especially when they confront reflections of themselves in public and private spaces. Yet, at the same time, they attempt to fit into their designated social and cultural roles. Furthermore, they struggle to separate the past and present, illustrated by the changes in time and place in their narratives.

Critics have characterized *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, among other works by Woolf and Rhys, as feminine or failed bildungsromans because female agency in these novels is limited by the expectations of women's abilities. Certainly, these works deal with the formation of feminine identity and follow the progression of the protagonists' understanding of themselves in the world. Indeed, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are walking narratives that trace their characters' movements through the modern cityscape. Yet, while these narratives can be described as flâneur novels in form and open with the possibility of women's self-defined entry into public discourse, their female protagonists never quite become flâneurs (nor can they identify as flâneuses<sup>5</sup>) and struggle to emerge as authors of their own lives. Women in these novels are aware of their (social) place in the world but search for a proper place, a space for one's "self," where one can preserve the integrity of the self and identity. Their sense of identity is formed out of their locations in geographical space and in society.

Given the traditional definition of the flâneur, there is a considerable amount of critical writing focused on twentieth-century female flânerie and streetwalking, particularly in regards to

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of flâneuse is ambiguous and unstable among critics. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, characters are spectators and subjects as much as they are spectacles and objects

whether Woolf and other women writers do (or do not) participate in or illustrate female flânerie in their texts. While Woolf is considered the point of departure for modern women's writing, Rhys offers an alternative perspective of female urban experience that mocks the optimism and possibilities presented by Woolf. As Bowlby notes, Rhys situates her protagonists in "social and psychological places that are oppressively constant and claustrophobic" (Bowlby, "The Impasse" 34). Clarissa and Sasha, like Mary Seton, navigate paths that are narrow and limiting, defined by post-war patriarchal society. They are placed into and contained by the negative spaces, non-places, of society.

Whereas the thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway often move upward and outward, reaching out to others in society, the thoughts of Sasha Jansen tend to move downward and inward, retreating toward an emotional center, withdrawing from the world. Yet, interestingly, both women attempt to synthesize mind and body: Clarissa expresses a desire for her ability to think and feel to be recognized; Sasha desires recognition as a *cérébrale*, having a mind of her own. Moreover, their attempts at synthesis are suggested by the motifs of reading and writing found within their narratives. Writing as walking appears in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the character of Lady Bruton, whereas walking as writing is embodied by Peter Walsh; these characters' means of writing-walking contribute to understanding Clarissa's practice of social space. On the other hand, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha engages in both walking and writing but struggles to persist against expectations of her character.

For Woolf and Rhys's heroines, survival depends on coming to terms with the post-Victorian social self and one's real self. Clarissa and Sasha endeavor to live through or survive the present moment, and they struggle to identify with their place in post-war society. Though the narrative structure of both novels emphasizes the present, Clarissa and Sasha are

overwhelmed by memories of their pasts and by the expectations set by society, even as they move forward in time. Clarissa seems to be able to persist, being pulled back into the world by the end of her narrative as she “must go back [. . . and] must assemble” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 182). Sasha, on the other hand, often fails and self-destructs, showing Rhys’s cynicism toward Woolf’s representation of women’s subjectivity in the modern city.

Rather than focus on this question of flânerie and labeling of writers, resisting a definition of *this* or *that*, I seek to follow Clarissa and Sasha on their journeys—upward and downward, outward and inward—focusing instead on how these characters identify themselves and are contrasted by other characters who reflect their desires to be connected to the world. Thus, the path my study will take will retreat to the inside, refocusing the discussion on interior, private spaces, and the characters’ self-identity and perception.

## Chapter 1: Composing Clarissa's Identity in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf constructs a vivid image of London following the end of the First World War. She brings together and unites the parts of the British Empire, approaching a complete or whole picture of London and more significantly, of Clarissa Dalloway. In exploring the thoughts of her characters, Woolf outlines the limits and bounds of Clarissa's world, shows where Clarissa belongs in her society, and unravels the "threads" that form Clarissa's life. Even as Clarissa, the novel's title character, disappears from the forefront of the narrative, her presence lingers as the narrative dives into the consciousnesses of characters whose paths parallel or intersect with Clarissa's. Through comparisons to other characters, particularly Lady Bruton and Peter Walsh, who embody characteristics Clarissa lacks, and Clarissa's moments of self-reflection, Woolf forms a complex portrait of Clarissa Dalloway.

### Clarissa Dalloway: This, Here, Now

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In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa admits, while comparing herself to her husband Richard's individualism, "half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew . . . for no one was ever for a second taken in" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 10).<sup>6</sup> Still, in spite of being aware of the pretenses, Clarissa accordingly performs to English social and cultural codes. Throughout the day, Clarissa exhibits a conflicted sense of identity, as her stream of consciousness displays the discord between her sense of social

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<sup>6</sup> As Bonnie Kime Scott notes, the early Clarissa Dalloway of *The Voyage Out* gives Rachel Vinrace her copy of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (Introduction xxxviii). In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliott is persuaded against marrying Frederick Wentworth but ultimately, many years later, chooses to marry him, a decision she makes for herself.

belonging and her sense of self, showing ambivalence toward defining and revealing her “true” self. As she moves between external and internal spaces, Clarissa reveals the many contradictions and characteristics of her self identity. Clarissa’s avoidance of being classified as specifically one thing or another is notably expressed in her stream of consciousness as she approaches the Park and is overwhelmed by the liveliness of the street and embraces this sense of being in the world:

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. [. . .] and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that. (8)

Clarissa takes in all that is occurring around her, having contradictory feelings as she progresses toward her destination. Just as these impressions illustrate Clarissa being in and a part of this world, that of “London; this moment of June,” they also point to Clarissa’s vulnerabilities and her separation from the world, adrift and apart from all that is happening (4). While Clarissa has noted she “[does] things” to make people think this or that, she is less willing to classify others as *this* or *that*. While Clarissa avoids defining others by *this* or *that*, she also embraces *this* as a deictic word to indicate her existence in the present moment, among all the elements of the cityscape, “all this” (8). At the same time that Clarissa feels part of everything she sees, she is also outside of it—looking in as the flâneur does with the crowd. As Francis Gillen notes, in “not

say[ing] of herself, I am this, I am that,” Clarissa’s thoughts “can be taken in a favorable sense to indicate Clarissa’s openness, but [they] can also indicate Clarissa’s lack of a sense of personal identity” (486). Clarissa’s sense of personal identity is not absent, however, but is rather conflicted by what she is expected to be and what she *is*.

Clarissa’s contradictory feelings suggest her openness in this moment to be a performance or a projection of how she desires or believes herself to be understood. Rather that she *could* “not say of any one in the world,” she simply *would* not—at least not *now*, in the present moment as she walks toward Bond Street. That Clarissa *would not* implicates her agency in choosing whether she will voice her opinion. Likewise, her agency here echoes her subjectivity as demonstrated by the first line of the novel, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3).

To add to Clarissa’s indication of openness is her claim to intuitively understanding others: “Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on” (8). This claim is tested as Clarissa resists self-definition and is instead partially defined by the insights provided by characters associated with her. Though she *now*, as she takes her cathartic walk, avoids fixing definitions and labels on herself and others, Clarissa’s critical thoughts come to light when she returns to the containment of her home and encounters characters that contradict her claim against saying *this* or *that* of anyone in the world.

Later, in her stream of consciousness, in which she is the deictic center, Clarissa *does* say of others, especially Peter, that they are *this* and *that*. Lady Bruton, for instance, sees Clarissa as always “cutting people up . . . cutting them up and sticking them together again” (101). Such is the case when Peter arrives, as Clarissa assesses him: “Exactly the same . . . the same queer look; the same check suit” (39). Anticipating Peter’s disparagement of her life, Clarissa prepares to



defend herself, noting that Peter is “very well dressed . . . yet he always criticises *me*” (40). She addresses the familiarity of Peter’s appearance, yet reminds herself of his critical views, later recalling his cleverness but also his poor taste in women. Clarissa remarks, “But look at the women he loved—vulgar, trivial, commonplace” (124). Indeed, Clarissa seems most critical of characters that threaten the significance of her existence in the eyes of those she loves most, showing jealousy toward not only Peter and his women but also of Lady Bruton, who takes up a share of Clarissa’s dear Richard’s time, and Miss Kilman, who “had taken her daughter from her!” (122). Miss Kilman, for example, is in Clarissa’s eyes a clumsy monster—“Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace” (122-3).

Moreover, even as Clarissa evades the language of definitiveness—the deictic words denoting her location in time and space (i.e., *this* and *that*, *here* and *there*, *then* and *now*)—she must use the same language to define and make claims about herself in relation to the world. In contrast to its use in Clarissa’s thoughts as she approaches the Park, the demonstrative pronoun *this*, for instance, is what brings Clarissa closer in proximity to the world as she leaves her residence:

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. . . . For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same . . . : they love life. In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge;

in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some airplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (4)

Every step Clarissa takes from her home toward Bond Street brings her closer to sensing the “life” others experience in the city. Indeed, “life” is defined by spaces rather than objects, as indicated by the preposition *in*: “In people’s eyes, in the swing . . . in the triumph and the jingle . . . was what [Clarissa] loved” (4). *Within* all these spaces, life exists; Clarissa cannot express the present moment through specific objects, instead attempting to embrace—but not necessarily contain—the entirety of the moment. “There!”—as Big Ben strikes, Clarissa steps off the curb, crosses Victoria Street, and enters the city into “what she loved; life; London; this moment of June” (4).

The *there* of London becomes *here* for Clarissa, as the “leaden circles dissolv[e] in the air” and close the distance between Clarissa and the city. The particular stillness Clarissa senses before the clock strikes is likened to the strange pauses between her heartbeats, much like the stillness in the moment between life and death. Just as others, including, as Clarissa observes, the most shabby and miserable of society, *love life*, Clarissa too can *love life* in the present moment. Clarissa’s embrace of this moment, however, is also characterized by passivity as she is swept up by the movement and sounds of the city. Clarissa’s identification with this moment continues as she advances toward Bond Street:

But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must

go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (9)

Clarissa exists in the present moment—*this, here, now*—yet she also recognizes *this* will continue without her. She recognizes that time continues, as life also continues in other spaces, not just *here* that Clarissa experiences but in all the other streets of London—“on the ebb and flow of things” (9). Even as Clarissa exists in this particular moment, she understands that life continues everywhere. She wants to live in the moment but also observe it from her outside perspective, walking through the city as a pedestrian and observing it as an “all-seeing” author (Certeau 92).<sup>7</sup> Just as Clarissa is passively swept into the whirlwind of the city, her thoughts drift outward, extending like tree branches and mist. We are reminded of the opposition in Clarissa’s feelings as she first crossed Victoria Street: “being out, out, far out to sea,” and at the same time living in the moment, “very, very dangerous[ly]” (4). The multiplicities in Clarissa’s feelings convey the complexity and fullness of her sense of being. Clarissa’s sense of self cannot be defined by one thing or another, *this* or *that*, nor can it rely simply on the present moment.

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<sup>7</sup> Certeau associates the “pleasure of ‘seeing the whole’” with the voyeur, an identity that is merged with the author and spectator identities (92).

Henceforth, Clarissa thinks of “being part ... of the trees at home ... being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist” (9). Rather than be a tree amongst other trees, Clarissa is likened to the mist that floats amidst the trees. In this way, she is implied to be part of the world but in an ethereal, otherworldly way. Again, Clarissa is depicted as being part of the scene but also separate from it, reflecting Baudelaire’s sentiments on the flâneur figure, for whom “it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world” (Baudelaire 9). Thus, Clarissa speaks of her survival—“here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other”—as time continues (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 9). Clarissa exists not only in the present moment but also in the memories and thoughts of other characters, which occur in the past, present, and future.

Indeed, the narrative allows for a complex portrait of Clarissa Dalloway, not meant to define her but rather show the many facets of her character. Clarissa feels liberated by her walk but also is absorbed by the feeling of living in the moment. Her desire to be part of “life” but also separate from it is comparable to Lady Bruton and Peter Walsh, who mirror Clarissa’s attempts at feeling connected to the world. Clarissa’s sense of identity is contrasted by that of Lady Bruton and Peter Walsh, as they demonstrate different forms of access to social space, or practices of space that allow one to be part of society.

#### Writing as Walking: Lady Bruton’s Difficulty in Direction

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Clarissa’s desire to be connected to the world is mirrored by Lady Bruton’s attempt to make political changes, as the writing as walking metaphor is illustrated through Lady Bruton,

who has difficulty writing a letter to the *Times*' editor. Lady Bruton attempts to practice social space by way of her letter, but she cannot write the letter herself. Within the narrative, Lady Bruton never takes a walk but instead attempts to demonstrate her power from the comforts of her family home, where she only has to nod or turn her head to have her servants submit to her authority.

Lady Bruton is first mentioned as a woman who has asked Richard (but not Clarissa) to lunch, and is initially revealed in Clarissa's mind to have "lunch parties [that] were said to be extraordinarily amusing" (29). She wishes to write a letter on a project she has passionately contemplated and made "that fibre which was the ramrod of her soul" (106). Despite her power, position, and wealth, Lady Bruton is overwhelmed by the thought of putting her thoughts to paper. Although she has a strong opinion on the subject of emigration, Lady Bruton cannot help but wonder if she is overstepping the boundaries of her position, thinking "perhaps [she had] lost her sense of proportion" (106). Writing, she reveals, is more difficult than her usual duties, "cost[ing] her more than to organise an expedition to South Africa" (106). For this reason, feeling the "futility of her own womanhood," Lady Bruton invites Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread to luncheon for the purpose of "reduc[ing her] tangles to sense, to grammar such as the editor of the *Times* ... must respect" (106-107). In this way, Lady Bruton exhibits the internalization of social and cultural codes, demonstrating her anxiety of public expression, as she "often suspended judgement upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe; knew how to put things; knew what she said; so that if Richard advised her, and Hugh wrote for her, she was sure of being somehow right" (107). Rather than simply write what she believes, Lady Bruton must rely on Richard's support and Hugh's articulation to communicate her opinion. Moreover, Lady Bruton is not mentioned to

have gone to any committees or participate in governmental meetings despite her connections and interest in politics and diplomacy. Rather, it is Richard who acts as the intermediary between Lady Bruton and the government, as “[his] first duty was to his country” (108). What’s more, Richard is among numerous civil servants who carry out favors for Lady Bruton, as Lady Bruton “had her toadies, minor officials in Government offices who ran about putting through little jobs on her behalf, in return for which she gave them luncheon” (169). While Lady Bruton is a respected woman of status and power, having come from a long line of military men—men of action—she cannot write or partake in politics without male advice and assistance.

Characterized as “a strong martial woman, well nourished, well descended, of direct impulses, downright feelings, and little introspective power,” Millicent Bruton, as her name suggests, represents strength, and hard work, and tradition (106). Despite such a resilient description, Lady Bruton is also given diamond-like characteristics, becoming “inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking glass, half precious stone; now carefully hidden in case people should sneer at it; now proudly displayed” (106). This imagery recalls, of course, Woolf’s depiction of Clarissa looking at herself in the glass—“pointed; dartlike; definite . . . one centre, one diamond, one woman” (36). Lady Bruton, “who seldom did a graceful thing,” is portrayed as the antithesis of Clarissa, and the two women have a mutual indifference toward one another, disliking one another’s apparent weaknesses (108). Where Lady Bruton is described as sharp and angular, Clarissa is portrayed as delicate and soft with her “narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird’s” (102; 36; 10). Clarissa embodies all that Lady Bruton finds weak and useless. As she attempts to socialize with Lady Bruton at her party, Clarissa recalls that she “detested illness in the wives of politicians” and answers optimistically about her well being

(175). Lady Bruton wishes Clarissa could be less charming and more useful in Richard's work, as she dislikes wives "who often got in their husbands' way" (175; 103).

Thus, the irony in Clarissa's thinking of Lady Bruton as a woman "whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing" is revealed when Lady Bruton's luncheon turns out to be strictly business and not at all a social affair. When Richard and Hugh arrive at lunch, Lady Bruton admits, "There was nobody else coming . . . She had got them there on false pretenses, to help her out with a difficulty" (101). Although Clarissa is upset she has not been invited to lunch, having felt "the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her," she would have been bored by the gathering anyway (29). After all, Clarissa "cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians . . . no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians?" (117). Still, Clarissa feels as though she is somehow missing out—if not of Lady Bruton's lunchtime gathering, then of Richard's time. Likewise, Lady Bruton attends Clarissa's evening party because she is expected to take part in the social affair.

Lady Bruton is defined by her political interests, having the "reputation of being more interested in politics than people," delegating duties and extending the reach of her thin threads. On the other hand, Clarissa is defined by her social interests, bringing people together at her parties, reeling in rather than extending her threads. Where politics are nonsense to Clarissa, parties are silliness to Lady Bruton. Thus, whereas Clarissa is likened to the mist spread among the trees, Lady Bruton is described as spider-like, with her web extending outward into the city as her guests leave her home "being attached to her by a thin thread . . . which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London" (109). Nonetheless, these women acknowledge the singular bond of "some female comradeship" (103-104). Both women, as complex and multifaceted as their characters may be, are reduced to their social positions.

Indeed, just as Clarissa is known for her parties and being a hostess, “Emigration had become, in short, largely Lady Bruton” (102). Richard Dalloway, for instance, thinks of Lady Bruton simply as a woman “of pedigree” and respects her for her status and family history, as he tries to recall her ancestry, of which he means to write a history: “Which was she now, the General’s great-grand-daughter? great-great-grand-daughter?” (106; 108). He even admits to himself that he “didn’t care a straw what became of Emigration; about that letter” because he is simply happy to serve someone of Lady Bruton’s rank (111).

Thus, when Richard addresses Lady Bruton as a guest of Clarissa’s party, asking her, “We shall see you at our party to-night?” Lady Bruton is able to “[resume] the magnificent which letter-writing had shattered” (108). At this particular moment, Lady Bruton is no longer a woman with an interest in politics, a woman who must rely on two male acquaintances to write a letter for her. She resumes her authority as *Lady Bruton* to go (or not go) to the Dalloways’ party. Like Clarissa, Lady Bruton wants to be involved in the world; both women act as centers of their social circles, but their social power is limited to the confines of their homes.

#### Walking as Writing: Peter Walsh’s Failed Flânerie

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While Lady Bruton is presented as a contrast to Clarissa Dalloway, the character that reveals the most about Clarissa is perhaps Peter Walsh, her childhood friend. Peter’s stroll through London reflects the act of walking as a means of writing or practicing public discourse. The novel begins with Clarissa Dalloway embarking on a walk in the city, but the flâneur figure appears through Peter rather than through Clarissa. While the narrative itself meanders through the streets of London and the minds of its inhabitants, the figure of the flâneur is embodied by Peter Walsh, self-described as an adventurer and buccaneer—the solitary traveller (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 52; 55). Peter appears frequently in Clarissa’s thoughts, first mentioned in her thoughts



as she leaves her house: “‘Musing among the vegetables?’—was that it?—‘I prefer men to cauliflowers’—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on the terrace—Peter Walsh” (3). From the first page of the novel, the first moments of the narrative, Peter remains on Clarissa’s mind. His relationship with Clarissa is frequently expressed as a battle, with Peter repeatedly shielded by his pocket knife and Clarissa protected by her scissors and sewing needles (39-40). Having arrived from India after five years away, Peter comes to Clarissa’s home, where he and Clarissa “[sit] side by side on the blue sofa, challeng[ing] each other” (43). Indeed, Peter and Clarissa challenge one another, constantly forcing each other to reflect on their sense of identity, especially with regards to that “final scene, the terrible scene” in which Clarissa refused Peter at Bourton (62). Through their battle, Peter and Clarissa reflect on their choices and their positions in life. Leaving Clarissa’s home, Peter finds himself in between spaces and not quite part of London society.

Like Benjamin’s flâneur, Peter stands on the threshold of the city and of the middle class (Benjamin, “Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris” 40). The flâneur figure does not belong to a city or a class, as he at home in neither (40). Indeed, having returned from India after nearly 30 years abroad, Peter is an outsider to London and to his former circle of friends and acquaintances. Despite his upper class origins, he had chosen to spend his adult years traveling and living abroad instead of settling into London society as his friends have done. Whereas Clarissa married Richard Dalloway and has resided in the same house in Westminster for over 20 years, Peter has lived abroad with no specific home cited—his freewheeling life began with a marriage to a woman “met on the boat going to India,” and now at the age of 52, he is about to marry again (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4; 8). He has only returned to London to settle his fiancée’s divorce and to seek, possibly, a new job in the city. After his brief visit with Clarissa in her

home, Peter wanders aimlessly through Regent's Park before heading to his hotel, as he has nowhere else to go before Clarissa's party in the evening.

Peter is the wandering artist figure—homeless, critical, judging. Among the major characters in Woolf's novel, Peter is one without purpose, without a definitive role in society. Other characters in the novel even contemplate Peter's purpose. Peter sees himself as apart from the others, but they also see him as an outsider. Peter's walk through London is an act of passing time; it is a leisurely walk, unlike Clarissa's, and in this way, it is also a purposeless walk. Peter has nowhere to go, no duties, no job, and no family, although he is to be married soon, once he obtains a divorce for Daisy (and even so, he admits to Clarissa, "the lawyers and solicitors . . . they were going to do it") (45). Peter remains disconnected from society throughout the narrative, as his primary association with London is in the past; moreover, he feels little connection with London anyway, as he thinks more often of being in the countryside, at Bourton, with Clarissa.

Although Peter thinks of himself as reckless, daring, "careless of all these damned proprieties," he contemplates his independence from bourgeois life in order to justify his failures (52). He tells himself he is not old, nor a failure, because "the future of civilization lies . . . in the hands of men like that; of young men such as he was, thirty years ago" (49). However, other characters think of him as a failure, but will try to help him find work, despite his inclination to not follow through: Lady Bruton, Hugh, and Richard "remembered the same thing—how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things" (104). Even they know finding Peter a job would be fruitless, as nothing would be "permanent, because of his character" (105). Clarissa in particular thinks of Peter's faults, reminding herself why she had rejected him: "What a waste! What a folly! All his life long Peter

had been fooled like that; first getting sent down from Oxford; next marrying the girl on the boat going out to India; now the wife of a Major in the Indian Army—thank Heaven she had refused to marry him!” (45). Despite Peter’s insistence of his happiness, Clarissa believes “he had never done a thing that they talked of; his whole life had been a failure” (8).

Peter’s walk through the park further exemplifies his *flânerie*. As the *flâneur*, Peter takes refuge in the crowd; furthermore, “far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment” of Peter’s thoughts (Benjamin “Baudelaire” 40; “The Flâneur” 419). Strolling through the streets, Peter feels “the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 52). Interestingly, he feels young again—as though he has escaped “from being precisely what he was”—in the very city he had fled years ago (51). Though Peter’s sensation of freedom and excitement in the city is typical of the *flâneur*, it also suggests his unhappiness in life and his inability to find true satisfaction. Peter does not clarify what version of himself, *what he was*, he has supposedly escaped; his sudden feeling of youth and freedom seems to contradict the notion that he supposedly has been enjoying his freethinking and independent lifestyle abroad.

Even as Peter considers himself adventurous and daring, he too fails as a traditional *flâneur*. In “Walking, Women, and Writing: Virginia Woolf as Flâneuse” Rachel Bowlby asserts that Woolf uses Peter, particularly in his departure from Clarissa’s home, as a satirization of the *flâneur* (13). Indeed, Peter’s wandering of London is depicted with some comic effect. Peter’s *flânerie* borders on “parodic literary stereotype” when Peter begins following a young woman (Bowlby, “Walking, Women, and Writing” 14):

But she’s extraordinarily attractive, he thought, as, walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, came a young woman who, as she

passed Gordon's statue, seemed, Peter Walsh thought (susceptible as he was), to shed veil after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet; black, but enchanting. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 51)

Bowlby remarks that Woolf uses "clichéd attributes of a certain version of ideal femininity" in this passage to parody the flâneur ("Walking, Women, and Writing" 13-14). Because Peter prides himself in his dissimilarity from men such as Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway, his pursuit of the woman shows that he is "as predictable as the dull masculinity he is consciously refusing" (15).

What's more, Peter's privilege as the masculine flâneur is subverted by the female figure he follows. Speaking of the flânerie of nineteenth century French writers, Bowlby explains that the female, though disqualified from flânerie, is still necessary as the male flâneur's counterpart—rather, the object of his wandering gaze (6).<sup>8</sup> However, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the young woman is not only the object of Peter's gaze but also of his imagination. Peter sees the young woman, but his observation quickly shifts to imagination and desire; he even admits it was just fun, "half made up... as one makes up the better part of life" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 53). Peter fancies that the woman will "answer, perfectly simple, 'Oh yes'" if he asks her to join him,

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<sup>8</sup> Bowlby refers to the female object as *une passante*, borrowing from Charles Baudelaire's poem "A une passsante"—the classical representation of the passante as *any* woman, *une femme*, who at the same time may be noble (*Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse*) and lowly (*fugitive beauté*, which Bowlby interprets as one who lives *dans la maison de passe*) ("Walking, Women, and Writing" 9-10).

and “makes the mistake of actually pursuing a passing woman” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 12; Bowlby, “Walking, Women, and Writing” 12). In his attempt to catch up with his *passante*, Peter is confronted with the reality that the woman is not simply an object of his gaze nor of his romantic fantasy. For the young woman, symbolically inserting her key in the door, turns and glances “in his direction, but not at him, one look that bade farewell, summed up the whole situation and dismissed it triumphantly, for ever” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 53). While Peter imagines his chase as a playful game, even picturing her with “mockery in her eyes,” the woman does not seem to acknowledge his presence (52). She glances back with a sense of nonchalance; perhaps she has been oblivious to Peter’s pursuit all along. Like Clarissa, whose “Remember my party!” haunts Peter at this moment, the young woman refuses to play the role Peter had in mind. Peter recalls Clarissa’s reminder, realizing his “fun” is over. He has no future with the girl, just as he had no future with Clarissa.

Indeed, just as Clarissa has Peter on her mind throughout the day, Peter cannot stop thinking of Clarissa as he strolls through the Regent’s Park: “[O]dd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me—the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought” (54). Peter blames his recurring childhood memories on having seen Clarissa, yet he is the one who lives “much more in the past” than Clarissa, as his memory of her refusal of him becomes “clearer[:] the scene, the room, the past he had been dreaming of” (57). Although Clarissa does ponder what her life could have been like if she had married Peter, she is able to rationalize her decision to instead marry Richard Dalloway, “still making out that she had been right . . . not to marry [Peter],” for Peter would not have granted her “a little licence, a little independence” (7). Nonetheless, in Peter’s opinion, the friendship between Peter and Clarissa has remained strong throughout the years even though

their meetings have been “[brief], broken, [and] often painful” (149). Despite all of the inconsistent changes in his life, Peter is clearly still in love with Clarissa, as he believes that they complete each other. He thinks fondly of young Clarissa’s theory “to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known”—according to young Clarissa, “to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places” (149). Indeed, Peter is still lives in the past, hanging onto the “mystery about [the bond]” between him and Clarissa, who has undoubtedly “influenced him more than any person he had ever known” (150).

“It is Clarissa . . . For there she was.”

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Within the narrative, Clarissa Dalloway’s home marks the starting point of Peter’s journey through London, yet at the same time, the house denotes the end of Clarissa’s excursion to and from the flower shop. Clarissa expresses her fondness for walking through the city, admitting to Hugh Whitbread, “I love walking in London . . . Really it’s better than walking in the country” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4). Yet, even as Clarissa is overwhelmed by the liveliness of the street and embraces her sense of being in the world, she also feels the anxiety of being separated or absent from this world:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all.<sup>9</sup> She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying,

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<sup>9</sup> This is perhaps a nod to Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” in which the poem’s speaker shows off a portrait of his late wife, “my last Duchess painted on the wall / Looking as if she were alive” (1-2).

no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (10)

Like Lady Bruton feeling inadequate in composing her letter, Clarissa loses her sense of self and her grasp of life, feeling detached from the present moment. Not only does she feel withdrawn from time but also from “this body she wore” (10). In this moment, she senses a separation between *Clarissa*, herself—a self that is “invisible, unseen; unknown”—and the identity recognized as *Mrs. Dalloway*—*Mrs. Richard Dalloway*—the name she has taken on as Richard Dalloway’s wife (10).

Although Clarissa, or rather Mrs. Dalloway, is the title character, her walking journey through London ends early in the narrative as she retreats to her home, continuing her preparations for her party. While Clarissa’s walk to Bond Street is depicted in great detail, her return home from Mulberry’s is not as elaborately described. Instead, as Clarissa walks home with her flowers, her mind is distracted by the probability of the Queen riding in the motorcar and the liveliness of crowded street. The narrative then follows the movement of the motorcar as it passes through the crowds. As the narrative concentrates on various members of the crowd, Clarissa does not reappear as the focus of the narrative until she has already returned to her house.

After buying her flowers, Clarissa returns home, entering her house and leaving behind the liveliness of the streets, “like a nun who has left the world” (28). The house is described as “cool as a vault,” a direct contrast from the sweeping sounds of the city from which the narrative has turned (28). Clarissa walks upstairs slowly, holding the bannisters “as if she had left a party,” an odd image considering she is anticipating a party that has yet to occur within the narrative

(30). In this way, her actions contrast the feelings of freedom she had exhibited while walking through the city streets. When Clarissa reaches the attic, however, her stream of consciousness focuses again on the present moment:

Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (36)

Clarissa's thoughts return from the outside world to her self as she makes her way upstairs. In this instance, Clarissa ceases to be a flâneuse, for she remains in her home the rest of the day, that is, the remainder of the narrative. She withdraws from the world, heading into the "emptiness about the heart of life; [the] attic room" (30). And as her thoughts reveal, this withdrawal is what she is expected to do: "Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe" (30). Indeed, Clarissa retreats to her attic, where she, as she lays her brooch on the table, looks at herself in the mirror—"collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway, of herself" (36). Seeing herself in the mirror, she has returned to being *Clarissa Dalloway*, the merged identity of her self as well as that of a wife and hostess. She sees in the mirror a portrait of her social self, the delicate pea-stick figure, the perfect hostess that "would stand at the top of her stairs" (10; 17). Yet, at the same time, she also sees "her self—pointed, dartlike, definite," as she composes herself before the mirror:



That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions . . . Now, where was her dress? (36)

Viewing herself in the mirror, Clarissa thinks of how other people tend to see her (and how she projects herself to be *to make people think this or that*)—radiant and protective—as well as the sides of her—the negative qualities—that are seldom (or not to be) exposed (10). But just as quickly as Clarissa has pulled her face together, she moves on to the next thought in her head: finding her dress for the party. Just as she begins turning to one of the negative sides, thinking “of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch; which . . . is utterly base!” Clarissa is reminded of her duties for the day—she must host her party, as “[all] was for the party” (36-7). The image Clarissa recognizes in the mirror is that of her self, one that can embody many features of her character and still be socially presentable. This is the self image Clarissa puts forth to survive. Clarissa has no time to waste contemplating the complexity of her self identity, as she quickly shifts to the task of mending her green dress for her party. While she acknowledges that “[she] was not old yet,” Clarissa still values time and seeks to make the most of her “untouched” time, especially here and now, in the “very heart of the moment” (36). Thus, she assembles herself again, “that diamond shape, that single person . . . who knows the very moment, the very temper of her house!” (37).

Although Clarissa falls away from the narrative's focus, she nevertheless appears in the thoughts of other characters as they stroll through London throughout the day. The perspectives of other characters further reveal, and complicate, the character of Clarissa. While both Richard and Peter criticize Clarissa's parties, they offer different views of Clarissa's purpose for hosting her gatherings. Richard thinks simply of Clarissa, thinking she childishly enjoys the excitement of parties. Peter, on the other hand, believes Clarissa "enjoy[s] imposing herself" and liked being connected to people (118). Yet, as Clarissa puts forth, "both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life" (118). While Richard and Peter's musings on Clarissa's parties may be valid, Clarissa sees carrying out her role as a hostess to be an offering—a gift to society, her contribution to life (119). "And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?" she wonders (119).

While Clarissa's retreat into her home and her embrace of her hostess duties may be read as a failure for Clarissa to successfully partake in the social space of the city, Clarissa's return to her home may also be interpreted as a manipulation of such a social space. Clarissa is concerned with experiencing the wholeness of life, bringing people together, and creating unity. Yet, having limited mobility in the public space of the city, Clarissa instead brings the public (rather, her social peers) into the space of her home through her parties. That is to say, Clarissa transforms her home into a socially acceptable space for her self to demonstrate her social influence. Similarly, Lady Bruton hosts her luncheons to exhibit her social clout and power. The space of the home, while often perceived as an exclusively private space, becomes a public space, if only temporarily. In this way, Clarissa's offering of parties can be read as her social contribution, that which is expected of her, as well as another means for her to *love life* and exhibit her sense of being part of the world within her own home.

Within the space of her party, Clarissa's conflicting senses of personal identity—what she is expected to be and what she *is*—can merge or coexist. Rather, perhaps, Clarissa is able to take hold of the contradictory sides of her character and reassociate them with her body. As her younger self had felt “everywhere; not ‘here, here, here’ . . . but everywhere,” Clarissa embraces the multiplicities in her identity and survives through her feelings of connection to the people around her (149). Clarissa's existence is thus affirmed in Peter's point of view in the closing lines of the narrative:

It is Clarissa, he said.

For there she was. (190)

Peter's perspective at the end of the novel suggests the division in Clarissa's sense of being and recalls Clarissa's transcendental theory Peter had earlier pondered as he had thought of their friendship:

since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps—perhaps. (149)

Thus, at the end of the novel, Peter recognizes the essence of Clarissa, the wholeness of her being that exists in the present moment and will continue to exist; this *is* Clarissa as a memory or thought in Peter's mind, the unseen that will survive throughout time. At the same time, in saying “there she *was*,” Peter acknowledges the apparition of Clarissa that appears before his eyes. In this way, Clarissa survives and transcends time, “here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other” (9). Clarissa is thus able to survive not only “here, here, here” but everywhere (149).

## Chapter 2: “What they call an impasse” in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*

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Characterized by lonely, poor female protagonists, the novels of Jean Rhys address her protagonists’ complicated understanding of identity and, as Christina Britzolakis points out, their “rootless and drifting ‘hotel existence’” (457). *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), Rhys’s last novel published before the Second World War and Rhys’s withdrawal from public life, depicts a middle-aged woman’s journey through the streets of Paris in the fall of 1937, in the closing months of the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life.<sup>10</sup> Sasha Jansen, Rhys’s protagonist, attempts to enjoy a two-week holiday but is relentlessly haunted by memories of her former life in Paris. The first-person, nonlinear narrative follows Sasha’s passage through the maze-like modern city, wandering between her hotel room and the Parisian streets—between past and present, dreams and reality, and living and dying. As Rachel Bowlby notes, Rhys’s novel “begins where it ends, ends where it begins,” in the hotel room, on a narrow street “going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse” (Bowlby, “The Impasse” 35; Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 9).<sup>11</sup> Although she tries to assert control over her life by having “a programme, not [leaving] anything to chance,” Sasha becomes preoccupied by her memories and nightmares, intensified by her endless drinking and use of sedatives, and

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<sup>10</sup> Britzolakis offers a detailed examination of the connections between Rhys’s fiction and the space of the Exhibition.

<sup>11</sup> A road or way having no outlet; a blind alley, ‘cul-de-sac’. Also *fig.*, a position from which there is no way of escape, a ‘fix’ (“impasse, n.”). Sasha’s street ends in an impasse, though it also ends with a flight of steps leading to an unknown place. In the novel, future references to the impasse tend to be figurative rather than literal.

deviates from her plans (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 15). Yet, as the narrative progresses, Sasha becomes less interested in self-discipline and conformity to a program, instead desiring to be recognized as an individual with a mind of her own<sup>□</sup>.

#### Arranging One's Little Life: Sasha's Programme

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Although *Good Morning, Midnight* takes on a wandering and nonlinear form, Sasha begins the narrative with a description of a simple "programme" for her Parisian holiday and frequently expresses a resolve to accordingly behave to the expectations of society, even "laughing heartily in the right places" at the cinema (16). Having described the arrangement of her cheap but large hotel room, Sasha announces she has chosen "a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have [her] drink in after dinner" (9). Like the hotel room, with its two beds on opposite sides and a curtained sink, Sasha's holiday agenda has been neatly planned. "I have arranged my little life," Sasha remarks before hesitating and reconsidering her decisions (9). She continues, "The place to have my drink in after dinner . . . Wait, I must be careful about that. These things are very important" (9). Sasha attempts to maintain control of her own narrative, carefully arranging everything as she believes it should be. Although Sasha promises there will be "No trailing around aimlessly . . . Above all, no crying in public," her plan soon unravels as she recalls the catastrophe of crying suddenly at dinner the previous evening in a cafe (15). Nonetheless, Sasha reiterates her commitment to her plan, addressing and warning herself in second person:

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 cafés, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go off beautifully. (25)

Speaking to herself as if she were addressing a disobedient child or patient, Sasha reminds herself of how she behaves and suffers when she deviates from her script, as she seems to have internalized the concerns of her friends and family.<sup>12</sup> Aware of her tendency toward self-destruction, Sasha makes a declaration to moderate her drinking and visitation of familiar places, yet, as she has this internal monologue, she passes a familiar café and enters to have a Pernod, “[j]ust one, just once, for luck” (15). While Sasha does have a single Pernod as she sits in the café repeating her plan, her insistence to have only “one drink” hints that her attempts at moderation will fail (16). Indeed, by the end of the first section of Part One of the novel, Sasha has done exactly what she promised not to do: “I walk along, remembering this, remembering that . . . The gramophone record is going strong in my head: ‘Here this happened, here that happened . . . .’” (17). As her holiday continues, Sasha finds that she cannot repress her memories or desires despite her attempts to control herself.

Sasha’s attempts at moderation are reminiscent of the sense of proportion advocated by Sir William Bradshaw in response to Septimus Smith’s illness in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. Septimus “had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion . . .” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 84). Yet despite following the program arranged for men of his age, Septimus can no longer “feel” and, disillusioned by human nature and society’s expectations, he wonders, “it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning” (86). To

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<sup>12</sup> Sasha shares little information about acquaintances like Sidonie (her relation to Sasha is not defined, though they seem to have known each other a long time) and her estranged family.

fix this disillusionment with life, Sir William insists on proportion and order, arranging a plan that must be followed: “rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends; without book, without messages . . . .” (97). Like Sasha, Septimus struggles against what he “must” do. He wonders, “‘Must,’ ‘must,’ why ‘must’?” (143). Ultimately, Septimus chooses to die rather than follow the program. Clarissa Dalloway interprets Septimus’s death as a defiant act of preserving his soul from the power of authorities like Sir William (180). While Clarissa has followed orders to deal with her own bouts of depression, she does not struggle against the expectations placed upon her; rather, Clarissa embraces the alternative aspects of her life and is able to come to terms with her conflicted sense of identity. Septimus, however, cannot accept world as it is and how he is supposed to exist in this world; thus, he chooses to die rather than remain in the middle ground of disillusionment. Likewise, when Sasha deviates from her plan, she self-destructively plummets into drinking and dreams.

Despite being on a holiday, Sasha spends much of her time in her hotel room, attempting to sleep, as she does in all the other hotel rooms—“as usual trying to drink myself to death” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 34). When she is not lingering in her room, Sasha walks around Paris, thinking of finding for another room to rent—“A room. A nice room. A beautiful room. A beautiful room with bath. A very beautiful room with bath. A bedroom and sitting-room with bath” (33). For a moment, Sasha believes she can change her fate if she can simply change hotel rooms: “I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can’t escape your fate? I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219” (37). Yet, Sasha cannot afford a nicer room, nor can she control how she acts within the hotel rooms, as she realizes the rooms are all the same, conceding that “A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that’s all any room is” (38).

In opposition to her obsession with finding a nice room and following a program, Sasha also expresses resentment toward order, mocking passivity and conformity through feelings of already being dead and her identification with inanimate objects such as store mannequins. Though she asserts control over her itinerary, Sasha is simply complying with what she believes is proper behavior for a woman of her age. Sasha admits she has come to Paris because a friend, Sidonie, insisted that she needs a change, and she seems to have passively accepted to make the trip to Paris. Sasha explains that Sidonie has lent her money for the trip because she was tired of Sasha's self-inflicted misery in London: "I had not seen this woman for months and then she swooped down on me . . . Well, here I am. When you've been made very cold and very sane you've also been made very passive" (12). Sasha's Parisian holiday does not seem different from what she had been doing in London, aside from the lack of any mention of drinking: "I had looked at this, I had looked at that, I had looked at the people passing in the street and at a shop-window full of artificial limbs" (11).

Throughout her narrative, Sasha expresses her identification with lifeless objects—automatons and mannequins. She characterizes herself as "a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely—dry, cold and sane" and compares herself to seemingly perfect mannequins with their "Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart—all complete" (10; 18). Even in her work as a real life mannequin (model) in Parisian shops, Sasha acknowledges the insentience she has been expected to exhibit. Interestingly, Sasha's remarks about having "been made very passive" indicate that her passivity is a condition that has been forced upon her rather than an intrinsic



quality.<sup>13</sup> Sasha, having little or no control over her future and feeling overwhelmed by all that is around her, frequently refers to drifting and drowning in water, in this way exhibiting a lack of a sense of identity:

[No] pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere . . . there I am, like one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm. (44)

In describing her lack of control over her life, Sasha identifies with being lifeless and dead, but at the same time, she seems to have embraced or accepted her struggle. As she remarks early in the novel, she doesn't struggle like a good swimmer, whose friends will come to her aid in times of danger. Rather, Sasha claims to experience "real" struggle, the kind in which she "jump[s] in with no willing and eager friends around, and when [she sinks she sinks] to the accompaniment of loud laughter" (10). No matter how much Sasha tries to adapt and choose her path, she cannot resist the nature of her true self.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In an interview published in *The Paris Review* shortly after her death, Rhys claims, "[L]ife's all laid out for one. One's choices don't matter much . . . If you can adapt, you're all right. But it's not always easy if you're born not-adapted, a bit of a rebel; then it's difficult to force yourself to adapt. One is born either to go with or to go against" (222). Sasha seems to be the latter, having tried to adapt but ultimately failing.

<sup>14</sup> Britzolakis points out Sasha's association with carnivalesque, "primitive" tropes, suggesting the novel's autobiographical parallels to Rhys's Dominican roots.

Consequently, Sasha is haunted by a fear of being different and being seen as a difficult woman. When she dreams of the London tube station with no way out, she recognizes the man with the steel hand as “‘Just like me—always wanting to be different from other people’” (13). In her dream, Sasha looks for an exit but is trapped underground, where signs in every passageway direct her, “‘This Way—This Way—This Way to the Exhibition’” (13). Moreover, her dream is paralleled by her memory of working in the Parisian dress-house, where she is asked to take a letter to a Monsieur Grousset somewhere in the building. Sasha wanders down labyrinthine passageways—as she says, a nightmare—looking for Monsieur Grousset, but she cannot find his office. Although Sasha reveals she was confused by the shop manager’s poor pronunciation of *la caisse*, where she would have found Monsieur Grousset, Sasha remains silent and does not correct the manager’s mispronunciation. In her dreams and real experience, Sasha is characterized by her passivity and silence. While she seems physically incapable of screaming in her dream, having to tear her voice “‘loose from [her] chest’” in order to finally shout for help, in her real life experience, Sasha willingly chooses to keep quiet in her confrontation with the shop manager, preferring to be a nobody, invisible and anonymous (13). Even as the shop owner, Mr. Blank, criticizes her, Sasha seems to prefer being a silent fool over stepping out of line and talking back to him, demonstrating her preference for passivity.

At the same time Sasha tries to hide in anonymity, relying on self-discipline to stay in line, she strives to affirm her individuality. Early in the narrative, Sasha describes different lavabos. The English lavabo is characterized by its cold and disciplined atmosphere, with “‘fifteen women in a queue, each clutching her penny, not one bold spirit daring to dash out of her turn’” (11). “‘That’s what I call discipline,’” Sasha remarks dryly (11). On the other hand, the Parisian lavabo is a cosy place “‘where the attendant peddled drugs—something to heal a

wounded heart” (11). Sasha’s mention of the Italian lavabo seems to have been interrupted by the entry of a well-dressed girl with cakes in a paper bag. Through her comparison of lavabos, Sasha indicates her loathing of English conformity. Nonetheless, Sasha finds the space of the lavabos comforting, as she frequently retreats to the lavabo when she begins to feel insecure and uncomfortable in public.

In the lavabo, Sasha is able to look at herself in the mirror and assess her self image. Early in her narrative, she runs off to the lavabo because she has begun crying unstoppably. But when she reaches the lavabo, she is not sure what she is to cry about (10). She sees herself in the glass and concedes that this is a moment of sanity, noting, “it’s when I am quite sane like this . . . that I realize how lucky I am” (10). Later, Sasha suggests the lavabo is a space to recompose oneself, as women (particularly those that “have a drink, these women”) go to the lavabo and “come out—powdered, but with hollow eyes—and head down, slink into the street” (107). The lavabo serves as a retreat but only to reaffirm, if not reinforce, the emptiness of these women’s sense of existence. Indeed, as Sasha, at a later point in her journey, sees herself in the mirror, she only sees what exists at surface level. She sees herself looking “thin—too thin—and dirty and haggard, with that expression that you get in your eyes when you are very tired and everything is like a dream and you are starting to know what things are like underneath what people say they are” (121). Yet, unlike Clarissa Dalloway, who, sitting in front of the looking glass, is able to imagine the various characteristics that make up her being, Sasha cannot even say what “things are like underneath” the surface (121). In this way, Sasha implies that there is perhaps nothing underneath what people say they are.

“The, this, that, these, those”: Never Correct

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As Sasha resents the classifications society has imposed upon her, she seems to mock Clarissa Dalloway’s refusal to “say of herself, I am this, I am that” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 8). While Sasha resists being defined by one thing or another, choosing to “not say” anything of herself, she cannot provide a clear alternative to what she believes bystanders think of her.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Sasha is characterized through negation or absences, and her identity is formed in relation to other characters, especially the exiles and outcasts she encounters in Paris.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout Rhys’s novel, the demonstrative determiners and pronouns *this* and *that* appear rather frequently to show complementary or contrasting points, particularly in relation to Sasha’s characterization. In the novel, the resonance of voiced *th*- words seems to have a negative, dissonant connotation, as suggested by Sasha’s mocking response to the young Russian man taking English lessons from Sasha: ““Would you tell me, please, if I have the ‘th’ correctly?’ The, this, that, these, those—all correct” (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 131). Just as the Russian tutee worries about proper pronunciation of an “English” sound, the voiced dental/interdental fricative (ð), Sasha worries about how these words—the definite article *the* and

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<sup>15</sup> Even Sasha’s real name is not specified, though she recalls being called Sophie and Sophia at some point, remembering some male figure’s refusal to “call [her] Sasha, or even Sophie. No, it’s Sophia, full and grand” (42).

<sup>16</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa is depicted in a similar manner of comparison and contrast to other characters. But while the perspectives of other characters build and enhance our understanding of Clarissa, the connections made to fellow outcasts further distorts our view of Sasha.

demonstratives *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*—will be used to define her.<sup>17</sup> Even as she resists comparison to others, Sasha judges people around her, utilizing *this* and *that* to classify them. Thus, as she mocks her tutee’s fondness of Oscar Wilde, “the greatest of English writers,” she reveals her own hypocrisy in defining others (131): “‘But I do like [Wilde]. I think he is very—sympathique.’ . . . He makes a little speech about English hypocrisy. Preaching to the converted” (132). During the last tutoring session, they read *Lady Windermere’s Fan*,<sup>18</sup> and the Russian again asks Sasha to stop him if he mispronounces a word (138). As Sasha remarks, the young Russian “speaks English just as well as I do,” but when he arrives in England, he will be judged

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<sup>17</sup> While *th* (ð) is not exclusive to the English language, its pronunciation does seem to indicate one’s “Englishness” in Rhys’s novel. In “Teaching the *th* Sounds of English,” Elizabeth Carr considers the necessity for English language students to learn the voiced *th* sound, as it is “rare among other languages” but “has an extraordinarily high frequency in English” (7).

<sup>18</sup> The well known line from Wilde’s play, spoken by Lord Darlington, “No, we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars” brings to mind the painting Sasha buys from le peintre, featuring a gentleman “standing in the gutter, playing his banjo, star[ing] at me” (Wilde 267; Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 109). Sasha remarks that the man in the painting “is gentle, humble, resigned, mocking, a little mad . . . He is double-headed, double-faced,” and Sasha feels hurt and ridiculed from staring at the painting (109). Whereas the painted man mocks her, Sasha, later in the scene with the Russian tutee, takes on the role of the mocker and ridicules the young Russian instead, attempting to maintain her sense of superiority.

and marked by his nationality, just as Sasha has been.<sup>19</sup> However, Sasha realizes the Russian is “very lucky,” for he has family in London, a scholarship at Oxford, and plenty of money. Thus, when she comments that “The, this, that, these, those are all correct,” she points not to his pronunciation of *th*- words but to his character (138). Sasha’s sympathy for her tutee turns to resentment as she realizes he is more “likable” than she is:

‘Do you think English people will like me?’

‘Yes, I’m certain they will.’ (I’ve only got to look at you to know that they’ll like you in England.)

‘And my English?’

‘But you speak English perfectly.’

He is pleased at this. He smirks. ‘I try to keep in constant practice,’ he says. He gives me the ten francs, kisses my hand again, bows from the waist and goes.

Good-bye, dear sir, good-bye. . . . (138-139)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sasha is presumably English, *Anglaise*, though she sometimes speaks of the Englishness of other characters, like Mr. Blank, in a strange, detached manner. Moreover, Sasha’s attitude toward English characters supports the notion that Sasha is not quite as “English” as the other English characters are. There is no explicit explanation for Sasha’s inadequate Englishness, though Sasha does indicate that her family was unhappy with her marriage to Enno.

<sup>20</sup> Sasha also attributes her resentful attitude toward the Russian to her pregnancy, as the Russian arrives shortly before Sasha is to go to the sage femme. When he arrives, Sasha exhibits paranoia and suspicion. She wonders, “Does he think it’s all arranged, this being in bed? Does he think I want him to make love to me? But surely he can’t think that. I believe he does, though” (137-

The young Russian may be a foreigner once he arrives in England, but he will somehow seem English enough to be accepted as he is. And yet, despite Sasha's resentment of markers of identity (her passport stating her nationality and marital status, her hat marking her as *Anglaise*, the fur coat marking her as rich but *veille*, for instance), she too reduces her tutee to his nationality, refusing to refer to him as anything but "the [young] Russian" (131). *The, this, that, these, those* are never correct for Sasha.<sup>21</sup> No matter how constantly Sasha practices, she will not achieve what is expected of her. Sasha constantly tries to control her own fate, but despite her planning, she never succeeds.

In Part Four, Sasha, despite her identification with lifeless objects and her resistance to being classified as *this* and *that* throughout much of the narrative, attempts to affirm her individuality again, this time expressing a desire to be recognized as a *cérébrale*. Throughout the novel, Sasha's identity is formed through physical and emotional traits, not to mention negation and absences. However, Sasha finally says something of herself in her conversation with René, the gigolo:

‘I’m no use to anybody,’ I say. ‘I’m a *cérébrale*, can’t you see that?’

...

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138). However, Sasha feels relieved by the Russian's pronunciation (rather, his mouth movements) of *femme*, which she oddly interprets as an indication that he hates or fears women.

<sup>21</sup> Sasha seems to be out of place no matter what she does, and while Sasha's low self-esteem is evident, it is not often clear why she feels the way she does. As David Plante, a close friend of Rhys who helped her compile her autobiography, remarks, "[Rhys] never asked why her main female characters acted as they did: they just did, as she did" (Plante 273).

‘Is that your idea of yourself?’ he says.

‘It is, certainly.’ (161)

What’s more, Sasha describes herself with a sense of certainty in addition to her usual self-effacing humor. As she does with her Russian tutee, Sasha exhibits a sense of superiority toward René, who also has an ambiguous backstory. Though she has had her suspicions about René and his intentions, Sasha speaks openly with him. The conversation continues as she and René debate what a *cérébrale* is. Although René offers a frank definition, Sasha does not show her offense to his remarks. Rather, Sasha seems to embrace the definition offered: “‘The true *cérébrale* is a woman who likes nothing and nobody except herself and her own damned brain or what she thinks is her brain’ . . . ‘Yes, a monster’” (162). Sasha seems to enjoy their playful conversation; though she becomes annoyed or vexed by some of his comments, Sasha acts amused by René as the night continues and eventually allows him to come up to her room. As Sasha acts and speaks more freely in René’s presence, she also begins to blur the distinctions between reality and imagination.

As reality and imagination merge, Sasha’s claim to being a *cérébrale* is weakened and her emotions begin to regress to their state in the beginning of the novel. Having had a bit too much to drink and a bit too much excitement, Sasha finally collapses like a balloon once René leaves. Whereas Sasha’s advice for when she gets “excited and exalted” is expressed as a second-person voice internalized by Sasha’s thoughts, Sasha’s realization of her collapse is haunted by a second voice in her head (25). “This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other—how do I know who the other is? She isn’t me,” Sasha exclaims (184). This voice of the “other” echoes the caution and concern Sasha had expressed earlier but with a mocking tone. Of course, to become sane again, Sasha drinks more, becoming very drunk and hearing multiple voices, until the



second voice has finally gone and Sasha can concentrate on imagining René's return to her room. As Sasha pictures René walking back to the hotel, she also imagines his thoughts: "“You like nothing, nobody. Sauf ton sale cerveau. Alors je te laisse avec ton sale cerveau”" (188). Thus, getting into bed, Sasha realizes she must put out the light, not only in the room but also in her sale cerveau, to please René. In doing this, however, Sasha seems to return to her lifeless state as she lies still, "with my arm over my eyes. As still as if I were dead" (190).<sup>22</sup>

Having "put out" the light in her head, Sasha gives up control of her mind and body, so when the commis enters, she embraces him and her fate—"Yes—yes—yes. . . ." (190). Although the novel ends where it began, with Sasha lying on the bed, whether Sasha remains at an impasse seems to be open to interpretation. The abrupt and surprising ending does not neatly resolve Sasha's struggle between her desires for discipline and individuality, and Sasha's acceptance of the commis voyageur seems to be another self-destructive act. Thus, in this way, *Good Morning, Midnight* does return to the impasse, ambiguously affirming a return to what the room calls "quite like old times" (9).

#### "Quite like old times . . .": Remaining in the Room

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Indeed, because Sasha's motives and actions are often obscurely explained and become increasingly difficult to understand, the novel concludes at a dead end, providing a dubiously affirmative answer to the room's mocking inquiry: "“Quite like old times . . . Yes? No?”" (9). The novel's conclusion can be interpreted quite literally as a "dead" end, as the "light in

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<sup>22</sup> According to Plante, "There is about [Rhys's female characters] a great dark space in which they do not ask themselves, removing themselves from themselves to see themselves in the world in which they lived: why do I suffer?" (273).

[Sasha's] sale cerveau has gone out," Sasha lies still, "as if [she] were dead" and "despise[s] another poor devil of a human being for the last time" (189-190). Rather, Sasha seems to embrace her fate in the final scene.<sup>23</sup> However, Sasha does not seem to come to terms with her sense of identity; she instead succumbs to her cycle of depression and self-loathing. In this way, she illustrates a cynical view of women's independence and solitude in the modern city. Whereas Clarissa Dalloway can embrace the multiplicities in her identity and survive her connections to people, Sasha rejects this notion as she retreats further from society. Sasha remains in between spaces—continually cycling through the past and present, dreams and real life, and life and death.

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<sup>23</sup> Though she has been wishing and waiting for the young prostitute to return and embrace her, she accepts the commis as an alternative.

### “I’m here because I’m here because I’m here”: Concluding Thoughts

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Through *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys illustrate contrasting ways in which their female protagonists “come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass” (Gilbert and Gubar 970). Clarissa and Sasha confront the public and private perceptions of their individual identities and attempt to affirm their individualism, not accepting fixed definitions of their identities. In Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, although she is not the attention of narrative at all times, Clarissa permeates the novel, through “apparitions [and . . .] the other, the unseen part of [her],” as she once theorized, through the thoughts of and comparisons to other characters (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 149). Clarissa transforms and transcends the simple identity of Mrs. Dalloway, that which designates her existence in the very first line of the novel (not to mention, of course, the title of the novel), and reveals a multifaceted individual that survives and transcends space and time, beyond the *here* and *now*. On the other hand, in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jansen, a woman with no family, friends, or money, ridicules the notions of survival and connection that Clarissa illustrates. Although she struggles and, as Woolf suggests in *A Room of One’s Own*, attempts to “protest against, to overcome” the labels and perceptions placed upon her, Sasha continues in her self-destructive cycle and eventually gives in to what she perceives as her destiny: to let “the light in [her] sale cerveau [go] out” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 54; Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 189). Whereas Clarissa’s identity is composed by her self reflections and the thoughts of other characters, Sasha offers only her self reflections and her often negative interpretation of how others see her. While Sasha expresses her individuality in her thoughts, she does not come to terms with her sense of identity, remaining at an impasse, identifying herself as a *cérébrale* (a *monster*, like that which

the woman writer must transcend), and retreating further from society as she becomes more distrustful of other human beings (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 162). Although Woolf has indeed paved a way for women to move beyond the path designated for them, Rhys has responded with cynicism, rebuffing the sense of unity that Woolf promotes. Nonetheless, as Woolf composes a complicated, multilayered portrait of Clarissa Dalloway, who embraces each moment of life, Rhys too offers a complex, yet frustrating, approach to female identity through the character of Sasha Jansen, for whom life drags on and for whom “tomorrow never comes” (159). Ultimately, as these portrayals of modern women demonstrate the uncertainty and insecurity in female identity in the early 20th century, they also prove that female identity can transcend the expectations of society.

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