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Author(s): Annalee Edmondson

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Narrativizing Characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Annalee Edmondson

University of Georgia

According to critical consensus, Virginia Woolf is the most “inward” of all modern British writers. Even critics who emphasize the socio-political vision of Woolf’s writing, such as Alex Zwerdling, read the character of Mrs. Dalloway in terms of her “private,” in contradistinction to her “public,” self. This essay seeks to question this “private” / “public” split, and argues that Woolf’s text evinces a privileging of intersubjectivity—the consciousness of other consciousnesses—over subjectivity—an individual’s “private” world as defined apart from any other subjects. First tracing how Woolf rewrites Mrs. Dalloway from short story to novel in order to foreground the deeply intersubjective nature of her central character, I will proceed by analyzing how Mrs. Dalloway narrativizes the other minds she encounters—by imposing the form of a story onto her recounting of events—in order to illustrate why she is indeed the model for ethico-affective response in the novel.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf / *Mrs. Dalloway* / narrative theory / cognitive approach / subjectivity / theory of mind

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3). As famous as this opening line of *Mrs. Dalloway* is, it remains ambiguous. Does Mrs. Dalloway speak these words, whether silently or aloud, to herself or to another present on the scene, most likely Lucy? Or is this instance of free indirect discourse an “unspeakable sentence,” one that does not imply that an original speaker uttered these words, whether silently or aloud (Banfield 108)? These questions also open up an ambiguity often foreclosed by the current critical consensus, which views Woolf as the most “inward” of all modern British writers and Mrs. Dalloway as a character whose “soul has gone underground” (Zwerdling 140): how “public” is Mrs. Dalloway’s inner life?

It would at first seem obvious that *Mrs. Dalloway*, as Alex Zwerdling puts it, “deliberately looks at its object from the inside” (120). After encountering the famous opening line, the implied reader is immediately plunged into the innermost recesses of Mrs. Dalloway’s mind—gaining access not only to what she is thinking and feeling on this June day in 1923, but also to what she thought and felt (or at least to how she now constructs what she thought and felt) thirty-three years earlier,¹ as an eighteen-year-old standing at the open French windows at

Bourton, her family's country house. Only after this reverie does the narrative definitively "place" Mrs. Dalloway in a public space, waiting on the curb for Durtnall's van to pass before she crosses the street. Suddenly, focalization shifts, and we view Clarissa from the perspective of her neighbor, Scrope Purvis. Purvis, who has lived next door to Clarissa in Westminster for over twenty years, views her as "perched" "very upright" (3). And before the narrative shifts again to her meditations—this time on why it is we love life and this moment of June—we learn that "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" (3–4, emphasis mine).

This description follows an assessment of Purvis's. He thinks Mrs. Dalloway is a "charming woman," "knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster" (3). This could be interpreted as ironically undercutting his knowledge: how well does he know his neighbor, even after an acquaintance of all those years? Yet, later, in a moment of very private intensity, when Clarissa withdraws like a nun to an attic room after discovering that Millicent Bruton has neglected to invite her to a lunch party, we learn that she "felt often, as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, *an exquisite suspense*" (26, emphasis mine). Purvis cannot fully account for why one feels, in encountering Clarissa, that she was an indescribable pause, a suspense, wondering if this might be due to a past illness. Yet he uses the same language to describe his affective response to her as she uses to describe her own recurring feeling upon entering her drawing-room. This repetition again raises the question: is Mrs. Dalloway's inner life "private"—only available to herself, an implied author, and an implied reader? If so, why is Mrs. Dalloway's subjective response to seeing her sister killed by a falling tree—a major, traumatic event from her past—conspicuously absent from the text? If the "depths" Woolf seeks to illuminate through her self-described "tunnelling process" (*D II*: 272) are times past erupting into the present of a private consciousness, then why is this access point to Clarissa's past narrativized by Peter Walsh and not by Clarissa herself?

Peter, as we will see, performs in this passage not the act of narration, the recounting of an event or a sequence of events, but the act of narrativization, the imposition of the *form* of a story onto a recounting of events. Peter does not simply narrate the events of Clarissa's past, but interprets many pieces of evidence, such as her favorite reading and a turn of phrase she often repeated (that her sister Sylvia was "the most gifted of them" [66]), in order to tunnel back into a highly interconnected if not shared past and create a theory about what she must have thought and felt upon witnessing her sister's death and how that might account for her past and current beliefs and desires. Peter is here practicing "theory of mind"; he theorizes about Clarissa's mental states based on evidence necessarily obtained from an external perspective, including what Clarissa says and does. Critics² often distinguish Mrs. Dalloway's "soliloquies in solitude"³ from the machinations of her "public self," and as Alan Palmer points out, most narrative theorists

have “tend[ed] to give the impression that characters’ minds really only consist of a private, passive flow of thought” (“Construction” 32). I want to question this sharp division between “public” and “private” selves, and argue that Woolf’s text evinces a privileging of intersubjectivity—the consciousness of other consciousnesses—over subjectivity—an individual’s “private” world as defined apart from any other subjects.

Of course, critics have long recognized that Woolf’s narrative technique in *Mrs. Dalloway*—a “shifting,” “collective free-indirect discourse” (Goldman 54)—“emphasizes the connections” between separate consciousnesses (Marcus 2). Michael North reads these points of connection as emerging from “the coincidences of public life,” claiming that “these threads of commonalty are often made up out of public materials, even commercial ones, so that even the most blatant advertising scheme can provide the point of contact for disparate individuals” (84).⁴ What is missing from these accounts, however, is a discussion of how major characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, namely Clarissa and Peter Walsh, actually experience intersubjectivity. Though these characters *are* connected by “the coincidences of public life,” I argue that what marks them as so highly intersubjective are the ways in which their consciousnesses register the other consciousnesses they encounter in the metropolis.

In order to examine *Mrs. Dalloway*’s characters’ experiences of intersubjectivity, I will use a cognitive narratological⁵ framework, focusing more narrowly on the representation of consciousness, in order to illuminate “the central mystery of the novel, the occult sympathy of Smith and Dalloway” (North 84). Attending not only to how Woolf’s characters are narrativized, or to how their consciousnesses are represented in the novel, I will also analyze how these characters are represented representing other consciousnesses.⁶ My argument about what drives the narrative, Peter’s and the reader’s responses to Mrs. Dalloway, will also be informed by narrative theory as it intersects with affect studies.⁷ For I contend that it is often affective responses that motivate characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* to practice theory of mind in the first place.

In order to examine both how Woolf narrativizes intersubjectivities and how, in turn, these intersubjectivities narrativize other characters in the novel, I will first flesh out the passage I mentioned above as an instance of Woolf’s formal method—her “tunnelling process” (*D II*: 272)—and then trace how Woolf rewrites Mrs. Dalloway from short story to novel in order to foreground the highly intersubjective nature of her central character, creating other characters whom she must account for (Septimus Warren Smith) and who attempt to account for her (Peter). Then, I will analyze how Mrs. Dalloway narrativizes the other minds she encounters—in the context of London street-scenes filled with “social minds in action” (Palmer)—to illustrate how she is affectively provoked to create narratives and yet refuses to “say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that” (7).

Before I turn to Peter’s narrativization of Clarissa’s response to her sister’s death in the following section, however, I want to first contextualize Woolf’s

novelistic practices and make explicit how I see her method as a departure from that of most novelists. By deliberately “making strange” the implied reader’s expectation of direct access to a character’s thoughts and feelings from an internal perspective, Woolf’s text foregrounds the strangeness of literary minds, which are often “transparent” (Cohn). Woolf’s “resolve to represent the world from the point of view of incertitude” (DiBattista 84)—the point of view from which we necessarily read real minds, as opposed to literary, transparent minds—represented what she believed was a necessary renegotiation of writer-character and writer-reader relations. Woolf’s method was not only anomalous but also a radical challenge to the assumptions about typical narrative practice made by her contemporary E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, which appeared in 1927, two years after *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Forster sets up a contradistinction between the people we encounter during the course of our daily lives and the “people,” or characters, we encounter in fiction. In real life, Forster maintains, “we cannot understand each other” and “perfect knowledge is an illusion,” “but in the novel [readers] can know people perfectly” because the author “knows everything about [her characters]” and thus passes on this “illusion of perspicacity and power” (69). That *Mrs. Dalloway*’s implied reader only knows about a crucial aspect of Clarissa’s interiority (her response to her sister’s death) via the thoughts of another character who presumably does not “perfectly know” her raises a further question: does Woolf herself “perfectly know” Clarissa? If she does, why is she intentionally refusing the reader a complete inside view of Clarissa?

In his classic 1946 study *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach asks himself these same questions—this time about Mrs. Ramsay’s interiority as portrayed in *To the Lighthouse*:

the author certainly does not speak like one who has a knowledge of his characters—in this case, of Mrs. Ramsay—and who, out of his knowledge, can describe their personality and momentary state of mind objectively and with certainty. Virginia Woolf wrote this paragraph. She did not identify it through grammatical and typographical devices as the speech or thought of a third person. One is obliged to assume that it contains direct statements of her own. But she does not seem to bear in mind that *she is the author* and hence ought to know how matters stand with her characters. (531, emphasis mine)

I would argue that we can never know whether Woolf the novelist “perfectly knows” Clarissa. But we can determine that she refuses herself authority over her character and deliberately refuses the reader a complete knowledge of her character’s interiority because she is ultimately more interested in the question of how people attempt to account for other minds as they exist in reality—other minds which are not transparent—than in providing her reader with one individual’s fully realized interiority and the “illusion of perspicacity” (Forster 70). This formalist innovation on Woolf’s part, moreover, was an answer to the ethical dilemma she perceived as inherent in normative narrative procedures. To avoid

establishing a hierarchy empowering writer over reader or writer or reader over character, Woolf's narration instead privileges "those who possess the greatest degree of sympathy with the interior lives and thoughts of others, even when those lives are not easily accessible and are therefore sometimes incompletely understood," namely, Mrs. Dalloway (Wilson 33). By thematizing her character's "narrative empathy"⁸ in this way, Woolf provides her reader with a model for ethico-affective narrativization.

WOOLF'S "TUNNELING PROCESS"; OR, NARRATIVIZING CLARISSA

Rather than read about the tragic incident of Sylvia's death from an inside perspective, which might have led the implied reader to a complete knowledge of Clarissa's inner life—how she became, for instance, "a thorough-going skeptic" (66)—we instead only read Mrs. Dalloway's musings about what Peter calls her "atheist's religion" and its relation to her sister's sudden death *as they are constructed* by Peter. According to a "theory" Peter claims he "used to make up to account for her,"

possibly [Clarissa] said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship, (*her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical metaphors*), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (*Huxley again*); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. (66, emphasis mine)

Intriguingly, not only does Peter here engage in what Woolf called "character-reading" (*SE* 39) and what cognitive theorists today would call theory of mind ("explain[ing] people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" [6]), but he also creates a version of Mrs. Dalloway's mind in his own through the use of *inflected* third-person, past-tense narration. In other words, he imagines her inner life as if he were writing free indirect discourse.

Peter, of course, does not know what Mrs. Dalloway really does say to herself to affirm her "atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness," or even if she herself would characterize her philosophy in this way (66). But he does know that she "always said" her sister Sylvia was "the most gifted of them," that seeing your sister die because of a tree felled by your father was "enough to turn one bitter," and that "her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall" (66). Peter, then, takes what he does know and constructs a theory, even writes dialogue for Clarissa's "soliloquies in solitude" by predicting that she might use "nautical metaphors" as a result of her reading.

Woolf deliberately disallows the reader a complete inside view of Mrs. Dalloway, as I argued above, because "everyday minds" are not transparent, though they are accessible.⁹ Moreover, Woolf creates her title character from both internal *and* external perspectives because she is more preoccupied with questions about what George Butte refers to as complex intersubjectivity¹⁰—how do networks of gesturing bodies and consciousnesses account for one another?—than she is with

questions of subjectivity—who is the “real” Mrs. Dalloway, whose “soul” has, in Zwerdling’s words, “gone underground” (140): “Clarissa,” at least in the world of the novel, exists as much in the minds of others, especially Peter’s, as she does in her own, “private” existence.

Woolf’s construction of complex intersubjectivities in *Mrs. Dalloway* is the result of a formal method she alighted upon after writing the short story “An Unwritten Novel” (first published in the *London Mercury* in July 1920). In a famous diary entry of 26 January 1920, Woolf proclaims she has “arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in An Unwritten Novel—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn’t that give the looseness & lightness I want: doesn’t that get closer & yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything?” (*D II*: 13). In a letter to Ethyl Smith on 16 October 1930, Woolf reiterates that “Unwritten Novel was the great discovery” (*Congenial Spirits* 274). She writes, “[“Unwritten Novel”] showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it—not that I have ever reached that end; but anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I discovered that method of approach, Jacobs Room [1922], Mrs Dalloway [1925] etc—” (*Congenial Spirits* 274). This formal method, which here she called a “discovery,” she later termed her “tunnelling process”: “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. *The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment*” (*D II*: 263, emphasis mine).

These caves *must connect* and *must surface*, then, because Woolf is fundamentally interested less in presenting us with “complete” internal views of Mrs. Dalloway’s and Septimus Warren Smith’s minds than in the process of how minds account for other minds based on external, behavioral evidence—based, that is, on what these other minds say and do. In fact, when Woolf writes in her third notebook in the Berg collection “All inner feelings to be lit up. The two minds. Mrs. D. & Septimus” on 9 November 1922, this follows a 16 October 1922 entry that reads: “The Question is whether the inside of the mind i[n] both Mrs. D. & S.S. can be made luminous—that is to say the stuff of the book—lights on it *coming from external sources*” (414, 412; emphasis mine). The *raison d’être* of Woolf’s “tunnelling process” is to foreground the deeply intersubjective nature of her characters’ minds—the ways in which they are continually interpreting each others’ behaviors and causally attributing thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires to each other. Therefore, both Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus *must each be seen from the outside*; “Peter provides that ‘tunnel’ to Clarissa, and the introduction of Lucretia as Septimus’s wife provides it for Septimus, as is evident in the British Museum notebooks” (Hoffmann, “From Short Story to Novel,” 175): “Septimus (?) *must be seen by some one*. His wife?; “Mrs. D. *must be seen by other people*. As she sits in her drawing room” (“*The Hours*” 416, 420; emphasis mine). Indeed, in a key passage I will turn to later, Peter narrativizes Clarissa “[a]s she sits in her drawing room,” and this scene functions as our *only* representation of her inner life at that crucial moment.

FROM "MRS. DALLOWAY IN BOND STREET" TO *MRS. DALLOWAY*

"Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" (1922), like the later *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), opens onto a street-scene, with the title character embarking on a shopping errand. As she makes her way across the "clogged" "river of Bond Street," "the tears actually r[ise] to her eyes" at the sight of Lady Bexborough—a "raised, regal" figure being "borne past [in a carriage] like a queen at a tournament" (*MDR* 20). She regains her composure, however, as she enters a shop and speaks "with her exquisite friendliness" in a "charming voice" (20). In fact, any bystander on this scene would see what Scrope Purvis sees on his way to his office—"a charming woman, posed, eager, strangely white-haired for her pink cheeks" (16).

Mrs. Dalloway's affective response to Lady Bexborough riding past—who "ha[s] nothing to live for and [whose husband] is failing and [who] they say" "is sick of it all" (20)—is clearly one of admiration, an admiration not sanctioned by the satirical nature of the portrait. In fact, from the very start, we are given authorial cues that direct us to position ourselves as pedestrians alongside Mrs. Dalloway who are *not* so well heeled and probably not on "errands of happiness" as is she (15). Though Mrs. Dalloway considers her "unused hour" as Big Ben strikes as "fresh as if issued to children on a beach," this response is starkly contrasted to "the deliberate swing of the repeated strokes; [the] something stirring in the murmur of wheels and the shuffle of footsteps" (15). This experienced contrast is our own, for "[n]o doubt [we are] not all bound on errands of happiness. There is much more to be said about us than that we walk the streets of Westminster" (15). *This* Mrs. Dalloway arrives on the London street-scene in order to buy gloves, not flowers, and for her, and "[o]nly for [her]," "the moment was complete; for Mrs. Dalloway June was fresh" (15).

In *Mrs. Dalloway* criticism, there is perhaps no greater point of contention than the question of how to read the scene in which Clarissa affectively responds to the news of Septimus Warren Smith's suicide. Yet how to read the Mrs. Dalloway of the short story's affective responses—to Lady Bexborough, to Hugh and Milly Whitbread, to the shop-woman—is decidedly less problematic. Even as this Mrs. Dalloway contemplates the problem of suicide—why go on after the War?—she does so in such a complacent and condescending manner that our own affective response to her as implied readers is muted. "This kind of woman"—one who has a passion for white gloves and sincerely believes that the working classes will derive comfort from her continued belief in God—and her motivations perhaps represent case studies in specified types from a bygone era, but not studies of those whose actions and motivations, like the later Mrs. Dalloway's, continue to elude us.

But if Mrs. Dalloway in her later incarnation is still "that sort of woman,"¹¹ still "ha[s] a passion for gloves" (*MD* 9), why is it that she so fascinates both Peter, and by extension, the implied reader? The reader's own affective response is largely the result of the differences between what affects Mrs. Dalloway in the novel and in the short story. In the shorter piece, Mrs. Dalloway is moved by Hugh

Whitbread and his wife Milly, Lady Bexborough, and a shop-woman, while in the novel, she is most emotionally connected to someone whom she does not even encounter, and whose story parallels her own even though the connection between the main story lines is deferred.¹² The implied reader's interest is provoked because she continues to ask herself, how are these consciousnesses, Mrs. Dalloway's and Septimus's, *interrelated*? How will they account for each other when they are finally brought together? To create this network of complex intersubjectivities, Woolf creates both a character who deeply affects Clarissa (Septimus) and a framing character who is deeply affected by her (Peter).

If it is not so much Mrs. Dalloway as the ways in which she is related to others that shifts from Woolf's completion of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" on 4 October 1922 to her announcement on 14 October 1922 that "Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book" (*D II*: 207),¹³ what caused Woolf to decide on such a shift? I would argue it is Woolf's own affective response to the death of the model for Mrs. Dalloway—Katherine Lushington Maxse, or Kitty Maxse¹⁴—that suggested to her how Mrs. Dalloway might be singularly affected by someone she never even encounters. Maxse, "[a]s Kitty Lushington, had been a *protégée* of [Woolf's] mother, an intimate of her half-sister Stella and, for a while, of [her sister] Vanessa" (Briggs 141). However, Woolf records in a 1922 diary entry: "I hadn't seen her since, I guess, 1908—save at old Davies' funeral, & then I cut her" (*D II*: 206). Even though she had not "kept up" with Maxse (*D II*: 206), Woolf always suspected that her death was a suicide—"an ambiguous kind of text, whose survivors are obliged to interpret its meaning"—was deeply affected by it, and wanted to know why it happened (Higonnet 230). Any suicide, however, "deeply resists our attempts at knowledge and explanation" (Higonnet 230), and Maxse's was no exception.

Here, Woolf records in her diary her reactions to Maxse's death:

Saturday 14 October

I was interrupted in this, & now Kitty is buried & mourned by half the grandees in London; & here I am thinking of my book. Kitty fell, very mysteriously, over some bannisters. Shall I ever walk again? she said to Leo. And to the Dr "I shall never forgive myself for my carelessness". *How did it happen? Some one presumably knows, & in time I shall hear.* (*D II*: 207, emphasis mine)

The 8 October 1922 death, which Woolf suspected was a suicide, occurred just after Woolf's completion of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" on 4 October 1922.¹⁵ The compositional evidence,¹⁶ moreover, points to the creation of Septimus's character after Maxse's death. The evidence, then, suggests that Woolf decided to create a "double" for Clarissa, whose act of suicide, in place of her own,¹⁷ would deeply affect her and also provoke her affective narrativizations. Suicide raises questions—why did it happen? what does it mean?—that can only be answered when survivors attempt to account for another subject's interiority.

If the shift in Mrs. Dalloway's character from short story to novel is markedly different because she is now affected by someone who commits suicide, then her character is also different because Woolf creates a new character who frames her. Peter—a focalizer, in a sense, of the central focalizing consciousness, Mrs. Dalloway—was even read by at least two early critics as the work's major protagonist. Richard Hughes claims that Peter's return is the "sole principle event" (159) of the novel and Gerald Bullett maintains that Woolf's focus is on Peter, not Clarissa. Nathalia Wright corrects this view in her "A Study in Composition" (1944) by citing statistics: Clarissa appears on 153 of the book's 293 pages, while Peter appears on 123; 11 of the 17 hours of the day are devoted to Clarissa, while 10 are devoted to Peter. Of course, as Wright also points out, Mrs. Dalloway appears at the beginning and end of the novel, whose title bears her name. Hughes's and Bullett's critical misreadings are, I would argue, ones that can be easily explained. We as readers are analyzing Peter mostly as his mind is trained on the thoughts and experiences of another mind: Mrs. Dalloway's. As the central impasse of the novel, Clarissa continually provokes Peter to reinterpret her thoughts and feelings, and he does so by tunneling into their interconnected past and by attributing underlying states of mind to her actions. "He only felt [. . .] unable to get away from the thought of her; she kept coming back and back like a sleeper jolting against him in a railway carriage; which was not being in love, of course; it was thinking of her, criticizing her, starting again, after thirty years, trying to explain her" (65).

SOCIAL MINDS IN ACTION IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

When Woolf describes her experience of being "left alone together" with a "very clean, very small, rather queer" woman who "sat in [the] corner opposite" in her railway carriage in "Character in Fiction" (1924), she posits that "[m]yriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas crowd into one's head on such occasions" (*SE* 41). What strikes me upon reading this account, however, is the way in which these innumerable ideas are set in motion by the "impression" of the "intensely" "suffering" woman, an "overwhelming" one that "c[omes] pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning" (41). This physiological response provokes what Woolf variously calls "character-reading" (when referring to the everyday use of theory of mind) and the study of "character in itself" (when referring to the further step novelists take when they practice theory of mind outside the realm of practical necessity).

I would characterize Woolf's process, however, as one of narrativization. One of Mrs. Brown's utterances ("Can you tell me if an oak tree dies when the leaves have been eaten for two years in succession by caterpillars?" [41]) implies "the thought of [Mrs. Brown] in a seaside house, among queer ornaments: sea-urchins, models of ships in glass cases"; "[s]he pop[s] in and out of the room, perching on the edges of chairs, picking meals out of saucers, indulging in long, silent stares" (41). Woolf, like Peter in the letter-writing passage to which I will turn later, sees

Mrs. Brown “in the centre” of a “scene” she never actually witnesses; what has *provoked* her to this narrativization is Mrs. Brown’s impression, a physiological one akin to “a smell of burning” (41).

Woolf claims that her common reader has had “far stranger and more interesting experiences” than the narrator’s encounter with Mrs. Brown in the railway during the course of a single week; her reader has “overheard scraps of talk that filled [her] with *amazement*” and has “gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of [her] feelings” after the course of a day in which “thousands of ideas have coursed through [her] brain” and “*thousands of emotions* have met, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder” (53, emphasis mine). Mrs. Brown, that “surprising apparition” (53), provokes narrative not because knowledge about her is necessary for Woolf’s practical purposes, but because she has surprised, or *moved*, Woolf. In Woolf’s fiction, characters who practice theory of mind (or who create what Alan Palmer calls “double cognitive narratives”) are often first affected by an encounter with another.

Though Clarissa is only one of many minds engaged in the practice of theory of mind on the London streets through which she roams, she is a model of openness to being affected by others, and much like Woolf herself, she freely narrativizes other minds. As model common reader of all the “thousands of emotions” and “thousands of ideas” that meet, collide, and disappear on a Wednesday morning in June, Mrs. Dalloway “would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that” (7). And yet, her gift, she surmises, is “knowing people almost by instinct”; “[i]f you put her in a room with someone, up went her back like a cat’s; or she purred” (7). Though other minds encounter Septimus (Maisie Johnson) and even attempt to account for his strange behavior (Peter), it is Mrs. Dalloway whose affective response leads her to a remarkably accurate assessment of what Septimus must have thought and felt before he flung himself out the window onto Mrs. Filmer’s area railings.

Mrs. Dalloway’s insights are due to her method: she “slice[s] like a knife through everything; at the same time [she stands] outside, looking on” (7). She both desires to know others and creates inner lives by opening out narratives, yet also acknowledges that other minds are not perfectly knowable: to her, “this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab” is “absolutely absorbing,” and yet “she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (8, 7). This gift for mind- or character-reading is highly attuned; she cuts to the core and yet stands outside, looking on. She seems, in short, to embody the formal properties of free indirect discourse. Indeed, I would argue, the desire to know the other and the limits intrinsic to an external other’s knowability are precariously held within the tensions of the formal properties of free indirect discourse itself.

Everyday minds, as they are portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway*, are not transparent, but neither are they inaccessible to other minds, say, out for a walk in Regent’s Park.¹⁸ Many of the minor characters in the opening scenes of the novel speculate about who must have been in the motor-car, which letters emanate from the

sky-writing aeroplane, and what the odd couple Septimus and Rezia Warren Smith are up to. They function as focalizers, attempting to interpret events and others' behaviors. The degree to which these interpretations are inflected by the focalizing consciousness's own particular experiences is often striking—especially in the case of Septimus—but we are nevertheless instructed as readers of this narrative that other minds *are* accessible. As Richard Dalloway makes his way from Conduit Street to Clarissa in Westminster, we are made aware of what thoughts traverse Richard's mind and shown that the presence of these thoughts (if not their content) are somehow observable even from the external perspective of another pedestrian on the scene:

But it did make his blood boil to see little creatures of five or six crossing Piccadilly alone. The police ought to have stopped the traffic at once. He had no illusions about the London police. Indeed, he was collecting evidence of their malpractices; and those costermongers, not allowed to stand their barrows in the streets; and prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn't in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth; all of which he considered, *could be seen considering*, grey, dogged, dapper, clean, as he walked across the Park to tell his wife that he loved her. (98, emphasis mine)

By juxtaposing Richard's inner stream of thoughts against his environment, and, most importantly, by emphasizing that his thought processes—or at the very least the fact that he *is* thinking—are visible, Woolf depicts a “social mind in action.” Alan Palmer defines “social minds in action” as those that are “public, embodied, and so available to each other without the need for speech” (*Social Minds* 2). Woolf frames her narrative, moreover, by employing “double cognitive narratives”—the term Palmer uses “to refer to the versions of characters' minds that exist in the minds of other characters” (12). The first double cognitive narrative is, of course, Clarissa's working draft of a version of Peter's mind called up to her by her parallel states of mind this Wednesday morning in June 1923 and a morning at Bourton thirty-three years ago. Later, Maisie Johnson will be deeply affected by her encounter with Septimus, though she does not theorize about his interiority, as will Mrs. Dalloway: “[she] positively felt she must cry Oh! (for that young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew). Horror! horror! she wanted to cry. (She had left her people; they had warned her what would happen.) Why hadn't she stayed at home? she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railing” (23). Maisie will remember this scene and her subsumed cry of “Horror! horror!” fifty years hence. Presumably, she will continue to be haunted by Septimus just as Joseph Conrad's Marlow continues to be haunted by Kurtz—at a great remove of time and distance.

To contrast Maisie's affective response to the couple to other (more typical?) external views, the narrator, many pages later, seems to affirm that there is nothing, after all, to draw attention to Septimus and Rezia Warren Smith as they make their way to the offices of Sir William Bradshaw:

Perhaps they walked more slowly than other people, and there was something hesitating, trailing, in the man's walk, but what more natural for a clerk, who has not been in the West End on a weekday at this hour for years, than to keep looking at the sky, looking at this, that and the other, as if Portland Place were a room he had come into when the family are away, the chandeliers being hung in holland bags, and the caretaker, as she lets in long shafts of dusty light upon deserted, queer-looking arm-chairs, lifting one corner of the long blinds, explains to the visitors what a wonderful place it is; how wonderful, but at the same time, he thinks, how strange. (71)

Of course, this pronouncement—that others would not be affected by the couple's behavior—is called into question, as Molly Hite points out, by this singularly strange and defamiliarizing passage. Mrs. Dalloway, had she been on the scene, would almost surely have known, as does Maisie Johnson, that something is up. That Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway *do not* meet on the London streets is unexpected, even unprecedented in the long history of the double plot novel¹⁹—how can Mrs. Dalloway be singularly affected by someone she doesn't even encounter?²⁰

To these accessible minds in the opening episodes of *Mrs. Dalloway* can be added all those social minds who, by contemplating a question of collective interest—who was in the motorcar? what is being written in the sky?—can be said to be engaged in interpreting events, if not encounters with others. But why open a novel about a central consciousness that is presumably to be studied from what Palmer terms the internalist perspective—one that “stresses those aspects [of the mind] that are inner, introspective, private, solitary, individual, psychological, mysterious, and detached”—by framing such a mind in the London streets among other minds who are viewed both from internalist and externalist perspectives, ones that “stress those aspects that are outer, active, public, social, behavioral, evident, embodied, and engaged” (*Social Minds* 39)?

Woolf, by privileging a consciousness like Clarissa's, that has “[o]dd affinities with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter” (129), is presenting us with a model for ethico-affective response whom we as readers must in turn create, from the inside and the outside. We must both slice like a knife through her, and at the same time stand outside, looking on. Peter, the stand-in for the reader, disagrees with Sally Seton (who thinks we cannot know even the people we live with every day), and instead believes that he at least knows everything. He effectively narrates the scene in which Clarissa sits down to write him a quick note (an event that must have occurred), *a scene which is never given save as it here plays out in Peter's mind*. This, then, is the way we are to narrativize Mrs. Dalloway, the same way she narrativizes Septimus meeting his doctors—by guessing what she might think and feel, even by imagining what she might have said. Here Peter narrativizes Mrs. Dalloway writing the letter:

To get that letter to him by six o'clock she must have sat down and written it directly he left her; stamped it; sent somebody to the post. It was, as people say, very like her. She was upset by his visit. She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her

look it) something he had said—how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity; then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of. Yes; but there would come a reaction directly he left the room. She would be frightfully sorry for him; she would think what in the world she could do to give him pleasure (short always of the one thing), and he could see her with the tears running down her cheeks going to her writing-table and dashing off that one line which he was to find greeting him. . . . “Heavenly to see you!” And she meant it. (132)

Peter narrativizes the scene of Clarissa writing and sending off a letter just after he has left; in this narrativization he both describes actions, such as her sitting down, her stamping the letter, her kissing his hand, her crying, her dashing off the line, and interior states which drive those actions, her upsetness, her regret, her envy, her remembrance something he has said, her pity. Of course, we do not *know* that Clarissa has thought or done everything Peter outlines above. But, like him, we *can* attribute mental causes (her feelings for Peter) to her actions, writing and sending off the letter right away. It seems to me that by presenting us with Peter’s extended narrativization of Clarissa above—as well as with scenes such as the one in which Clarissa attributes the woman across the way’s actions to the bells striking—without also presenting us with an original scene that would probably include the narrator’s sanction of what the other mind is thinking or feeling, Woolf is presenting us with scenes of how minds *actually* work when they narrativize other minds and all the attendant risks and ambiguities of such narrativizations. Woolf tells the story of a self not from the outside in (as in a conventional novel) or from the inside out (as in stream-of-consciousness), but instead from the vantage of a highly motivated self who both slices through *and* stands outside, in other words, from the perspective of an everyday mind.

“*[T]he history of the novel,*” Michael Holquist and Walter Reed maintain, “*is the story of a series of narratives which subtend the catalogue of narrative restrictions that successive cultures have imposed on the way a self might be told*” (423). Here, we see Woolf deliberately reworking narrative restrictions, deliberately re-forming the way a self can be told through the use of a free indirect discourse operating largely apart from recognizable authorial sanctions of what a character is actually thinking or feeling. Since this is the way in which we account for others in everyday life, why not narrativize the self in this new way, as it affects and is affected by other minds, as it is in fact created by other minds? After all, another mind only exists for us insofar as it exists as a version of that mind in our own. Therefore, the climactic scene of the novel, Mrs. Dalloway’s retreat to the attic room after she hears the news of Septimus’s death, is so fraught with meaning because we have come to recognize one mind narrativizing another *as what happens in the novel*, and because we know the act of suicide demands causal attribution. How, we wonder, will Septimus’s interiority be reconstructed

by Clarissa, and how will she *relate* this interiority to her own, in the midst of her party?

MRS. DALLOWAY'S AFFECTIVE NARRATIVIZATIONS

If the text-world of *Mrs. Dalloway* prominently features many social minds in action, as we have seen, it is Clarissa, as Peter affirms, who is exemplary in this regard. She is unusually open to being affected and this provokes her to take action: "She enjoyed practically everything. If you walked with her in Hyde Park, now it was a bed of tulips, now a child in a perambulator, now some absurd little drama she made up on the spur of the moment. (Very likely she would have talked to those lovers, if she had thought them unhappy)" (66–67). In the climactic scene in which death arrives at Clarissa's party via the news of Septimus's suicide, she reacts in this way:

[a]lways her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? (156)

First, she is physically affected. Then she theorizes about what Septimus might have thought (Sir William Bradshaw was "capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it" [157]) and might have said ("Life is made intolerable" by "men like that" [157]) before he killed himself by jumping from a window.

Sally remarks ironically that we cannot know other people and for emphasis asks of the Bradshaws, "what could one know about people like that?" (164). Yet Mrs. Dalloway, as a result of her typical affective responsiveness, has uncannily approximated both what Septimus said and thought at least partly because she is able to imagine what *feelings* might have motivated his thoughts and statements. And because—unlike the passages discussed earlier in which the reader cannot compare, for instance, Peter's version of the letter-writing scene with what Mrs. Dalloway actually thought and felt when she composed the letter—this scene *can* be directly compared to the scene of Septimus's suicide, what Mrs. Dalloway has intuited merely from the sight of Sir William Bradshaw (the "obscurely evil" doctor causes her to "curl up" [157, 155]) and from her own prior experience with him is indeed remarkable. Holmes and Bradshaw, in Septimus's inflected thought, "were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place!" (125). Bradshaw, as Clarissa intuits, *is* capable of forcing someone's soul, of committing an indescribable outrage against him. Sally Seton and Peter, however, never come close to this interpretation. Sally asks of Bradshaw, a "distinguished-looking man," and his wife, "what could one know about people like that?" and Peter answers "'That they're damnable humbugs'" (164).

Clarissa, as our model of ethico-affective response throughout the novel, however, is fascinated by even those actions that, unlike suicide, do not demand causal attribution. Even the actions of the woman across the way²¹ as she goes to bed and turns out the light fascinate Clarissa. That other mind *affects* her—causes “thousands of emotions [in her to] me[e]t, collide, and disappear in astonishing disorder” (SE 53). Clarissa, when young, had “go[ne] on top of an omnibus with [Peter] somewhere,” had been “all aquiver” “spotting queer little scenes, names, people” (129). Now, near the end of her party, too, she

part[s] the curtains; she look[s]. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, in the room opposite. *It was fascinating* to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. *Could she see her? It was fascinating*, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed alone. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. [. . .] There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! (157–8, emphasis mine)

Woolf sets out to destabilize her audience by endowing Mrs. Dalloway—a woman, and, moreover, an immanent²² woman—with these highly prized character-reading qualities, and in that way privileges her as a model narrativizer. But Woolf stages an even greater coup by setting up Mrs. Dalloway’s mind as the central dilemma of the novel. In the end, we cannot say of her that she is this, or she is that. We can say only that she is, and that we continue to desire to know her, as Peter continues to be psychologically and physiologically affected by her very presence. “However conflicted and confabulated she is shown to be, that Mrs. Dalloway exists and is in fact a figure worthy of our interest is the unquestionable premise that propels the novel” (Newman 44). As Woolf wrote in her notebook, “[e]very scene should build up the idea of C’s character. That will give unity, as well as add to the final effect” (“The Hours” 422).

In her analysis of Vanessa Bell’s portrait, “Mrs. Dalloway’s Party,” Diane Gillespie writes: “Although Vanessa has blurred facial features in the background and suggested potential movement among her temporarily frozen party-goers by arranging them so they are partly obscured by each other or edges of the canvas, she has orchestrated shoulders and gestures to draw our eyes back to the woman dominating the center” (129–30). Another woman who is seated looks up at the woman dominating the center. I would argue it is mostly this gaze—what is the seated woman looking at which so fascinates her?—that continually draws the viewer’s eye back to the face of the central, standing figure. In the same way, Peter repeats throughout the narrative that it is Clarissa “one remember[s],” even though

she is not “striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was” (65). Peter describes her dominating any scene like Bell’s portrait’s central figure dominates her own: “[Clarissa] came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her” (64).

In an echo of Woolf’s fellow passenger Mrs. Brown in “Character in Fiction,” Peter metaphorizes his own inability to stop thinking about Clarissa, who “keep[s] coming back and back” to his mind, as like someone’s inability to disregard “a sleeper jolting against him in a railway carriage” (65). He finds himself, still, after thirty years, “trying to explain her” (65). Peter, after all this time, can only make a “mere sketch” of Clarissa, because try as he might to “account” for her, though she is “so transparent in some ways, [she remains] so inscrutable in others” (66). There is “something very profound in her, which [Peter] had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability” (52). “In between the ‘Mrs. Dalloway’ of the first line of Woolf’s novel, and the ‘Clarissa’ of the concluding lines of its last page, the reader is led to an awareness of the enormous complexity of the character in question” (Hawthorn 9). “Throughout the day, she comes in and out of focus (for herself as well as the reader), dissolves and materializes, lapses into dull conventionality and bursts into exquisite originality” (Kiely 142). In the final analysis, Clarissa’s interiority has not been completely revealed to us. On the contrary, she continues to elude us, even as her very presence provokes our affective narrativizations.

“It is Clarissa,” [we read].
 “For there she was.” (165)

Notes

1. Clarissa is now aged fifty-one, so her rejection of Peter’s proposal the summer she was eighteen occurred thirty-three years earlier. See Bradshaw 185.
2. See, for instance, DiBattista: “*Mrs. Dalloway*[’s] protagonist is struck and somewhat tormented by the difference between the private Clarissa and the public Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (33).
3. See Woolf’s 1927 essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art” in *Essays*.
4. Vera Tobin takes up this modernist trope of “joint attention”—“the ability to share attention to some object with another person and mutually recognize that the attention is shared”—and claims that it is “a foundational facet of intersubjectivity” in her study of *To the Lighthouse* (185, 186).
5. The term “cognitive narratology” is a recent coinage (1997), and “can be defined as the study of mind[-brain]-relevant aspects of storytelling practice wherever—and by whatever means—those practices occur” (Herman, “Cognitive Narratology,” paragraph 2). The “Cognitive Approaches to Literature” discussion group’s proposal for division status was approved by the MLA in 2011. This group will begin functioning as a division in 2013.
6. Hence, the dual nature of my title, “Narrativizing Characters”: characters are both narrativized by the text (if “narrativizing” is read as a verb) and in the process of narrativizing other characters

(if “narrativizing” is read as an adjective). I borrow this construction from George Butte’s subtitle, “Narrating Subjects,” and his explanation of its dual nature in his introduction (vii).

7. See Flatley, as well as Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*. See also Hogan for a comparative analysis of cross-cultural narrative patterns that seeks to illuminate “the ways in which our emotion systems affect and explain our stories” (23). Hogan argues that “narratological treatments of emotion have on the whole been relatively underdeveloped, at least in comparison with other aspects of narrative theory,” and seeks to redress this imbalance by “conten[ding] that story structures are fundamentally shaped and oriented by our emotion systems” (1).

8. See Keen, “Narrative Empathy.”

9. See Herman, Introduction.

10. See Butte for more on what he calls “deep intersubjectivity, that chiasmus [. . .] of consciousness of consciousness felt, registered and rerepresented, of perception of perceptions perceived and interpreted and sometimes espoused, sometimes violated” (236).

11. See Schappell.

12. As Brian Richardson maintains, “a kind of aesthetic tension mounts as long as the two strands [the Mrs. Dalloway and the Septimus Warren Smith narratives] resist unification” (99).

13. “References to this story appear in VW’s letters and diary between 14 April and 28 August 1922” (Dick 302); it is published in *Dial* in July 1923. Woolf had earlier entertained the possibility of expanding the short story into a longer work. On 28 August 1922, she writes: “Shall I write the next chapter of Mrs D.—if she is to have a next chapter; & shall it be ‘The Prime Minister?’” (*D II*: 196).

14. For more on Kitty Maxse as the model for the character of Mrs. Dalloway, see Curtis; Hoffman, “Real Mrs. Dalloway”; and Latham, “The Model” and “Origin.”

15. See Woolf’s diary entry for Wednesday 4 October 1922: “I have done my task here better than I expected. Mrs Dalloway & the Chaucer chapter are finished; I have read 5 books of the *Odyssey*; *Ulysses*; & now begin Proust” (*D II*: 205).

16. For more on the manuscript revisions of what would become *Mrs. Dalloway*, see Hoffmann, “From Short Story to Novel”; Latham, “The Manuscript Revisions” and “Origin”; and Woolf, *The Hours*.

17. Woolf claimed (in her introduction to the 1928 Modern Library edition) that Mrs. Dalloway was “originally to kill herself” (“Introduction” 11).

18. See Herman, “Re-minding Modernism.”

19. Hilary Dannenberg defines the “modernist coincidence” as one in which “[a]nalogous relationships link characters and objects on the same spatial and temporal level” (251). Though modernist coincidence, as Dannenberg notes, “can also take a purely perceptual form” (106), in other words, occur in a character’s mind and not in space and time, to my knowledge, *Mrs. Dalloway* is the first double plot novel in which the major protagonists from each strand never actually physically meet. Even in the highly experimental *Ulysses*, for example, Joyce creates a significant delay between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom’s meeting that ratchets up narrative tension, but these major protagonists do eventually meet.

20. The idea for this unlikely encounter, and also for Clarissa’s physiological response to it, may have come in part from Vanessa Stephen’s response to the death of a young man at a party she attended on 26 June 1922:

Dinner with Nessa last night. My attempt[s] at sensation were over-shadowed by her really great & surprising one—nothing less than the death of a young man at Mrs Russell’s dance. They sat out on the roof, protected by fairy lamps & chairs. He crossed, perhaps to light a cigarette, stepped over the edge, & fell 30 feet onto flagstones. Adrian alone saw the thing

happen. He called a doctor sitting there, & very calmly & bravely, so Nessa felt, climbed the wall into the garden where the man had fallen, & helped the Dr over. But there was no hope. He died in the ambulance that fetched him. The dance was stopped. Nessa says the younger generation is callous. No one was upset; some telephoned for news of other dances. Aunt Lou bungled everything with her salt American cheerfulness. *It was odd how, sitting high up, one began to get a sense of falling.* The man was called Wright, aged 21: for some reason he had his birth certificate on him. Only the girl who brought him knew him. The parents, rich country people, come up, were shown the spot & had nothing to say except, 'That was where he fell'—but what could they say? Aunt Lou gave her version of the thing 'not a tragedy—not in the least a tragedy—a stepmother only & seven other children—& its over for him poor boy.' A strange event—to come to a dance among strangers & die—to come dressed in evening clothes, & then for it all to be over, instantly, so senselessly. Pippa had warned them. No brandy was to be had in any of the three houses. (*DI*: 51, emphasis mine)

21. Here, I'd like to note a parallel scene of an intensely "private" moment which is also shared with another, Septimus's act of suicide: "Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at [Septimus]. Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give it you!' [Septimus] cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings" (127).

22. De Beauvoir claimed women were relegated to the "immanent" sphere, one defined by repetitive acts which created nothing new and led to stagnation; this sphere is directly contrasted to the transcendent sphere of men, in which man "produce[s], fight[s], create[s], progress[es], go[es] beyond himself toward the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future" (468).

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