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Mrs Dalloway

VIRGINIA WOOLF

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MRS DALLOWAY

Virginia Woolf

Introduction and Notes by
MERRY M. PAWLOWSKI

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WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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MRS DALLOWAY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Mrs Dalloway *and the Feminist Revision of Male Modernism*

> [T]he mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of 'personality', not being necessarily more interesting, or having 'more to say', but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.
>
> [T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', pp. 53–4]

In the summer of 1922, Virginia Woolf's mind was a catalyst, illuminated at the beginning and the end of that summer by two forces: hearing Eliot read aloud *The Waste Land* and reluctantly reading Joyce's *Ulysses*. Echoes of both are heard throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, submerged, transformed and

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forged by Woolf into a new combination, a feminine quest to buy flowers and give a party in a social waste land shaken to its core in the aftermath of world war.

On 23 June 1922, Woolf wrote in her diary:

> Eliot dined last Sunday & read his poem. He sang it & chanted it rhythmed it. It has great beauty & force of phrase: symmetry; & tensity. What connects it together, I'm not so sure . . . One was left, however, with some strong emotion. The Waste Land, it is called . . . Tom's autobiography – a melancholy one.
>
> [*Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 178]

On the same date, Woolf reflected on her own work, writing about her anxiety over audience response, 'If they say this is all a clever experiment, I shall produce Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street as the finished product.' The story Woolf alludes to serves as precursor, an early version of the novel, and Eliot's poem surfaces later throughout in the rhythm and language of *Mrs Dalloway*, as Woolf's response to *Ulysses* shapes the revisionist direction of her plot.

By August 1922, Woolf was reading *Ulysses*,

> I should be reading Ulysses, & fabricating my case for & against. I have read 200 pages so far – not a third; & have been amused, stimulated, charmed interested by the first 2 or 3 chapters – to the end of the Cemetery scene; & then puzzled, bored, irritated, & disillusioned as by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples. And Tom, great Tom, thinks this on a par with War & Peace!
>
> [*Diary*, Vol. 2, pp. 188–9]

Again, on the same date, Woolf was 'laboriously dredging my mind for Mrs Dalloway & bringing up light buckets'. '[G]reat Tom' is, of course, T. S. Eliot, who thought *Ulysses* a masterpiece of modernist expression, and 'Mrs Dalloway' referred to here is not yet the novel but still the story which would provide Woolf with the idea for the novel. As the record of Woolf's diary indicates, then, at its inception, *Mrs Dalloway* not only shared but also reinterpreted the modernist preoccupation with Odyssean narrative and Waste Land myths.[1]

1 See for a development of this point, Maria DiBattista, 'Virginia Woolf's Memento Mori', p. 42.

Out of the Chrysalis

> Books are the flowers or fruit stuck here or there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, of our first experiences.[2]

The work of Joyce and Eliot had time to mingle in Woolf's creative imagination with her own memories and earliest experiences until 14 October 1922, when she noted in her diary the impulse for a new novel. 'Mrs Dalloway,' she wrote, 'has branched into a book; & I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side – something like that. Septimus Smith? – is that a good name?' (*Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 207). Only ten days before the appearance of Septimus Smith's name in her diary, Woolf had finished 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', where no such character appears.[3] But the evidence of her holograph notes for her third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), indicates that Septimus had taken shape in her imagination as part of a manuscript story entitled 'The Prime Minister', from which Woolf would draw heavily for the opening scenes of *Mrs Dalloway*. In the story, Septimus suffers from delusional paranoia, thinking that he is the messiah sent to assassinate the prime minister.[4] This story, along with 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', provided Woolf with the material to begin the novel. As 'The Prime Minister' folded into the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf had begun to reconceive Septimus to serve as foil and double to Clarissa. What may have been in Woolf's mind at the initial impulse to reinterpret him becomes more clear in Woolf's explanations of the novel long after its publication. It appears, though, that even at this early stage, Clarissa Dalloway reappears in the longer work as part of Woolf's effort to reconceive her in her own image, while Septimus accepts the death for which Clarissa had been destined. Woolf is able to distance herself through Clarissa from Septimus while at the same time drawing him closer through his name (Septimus means seventh, and Woolf was the seventh of the combined Stephen/ Duckworth children) and through his insanity.

2 Virginia Woolf, Introduction, *Mrs Dalloway* (New York: The Modern Library, 1928), p. vi

3 The story made its first appearance in *Dial*, July 1923.

4 See Suzette Henke's '"The Prime Minister": A Key to *Mrs Dalloway*' for a fuller discussion of the importance of the short story to the development of the novel.

Clarissa, though, had lived in Woolf's imagination for a long time before Septimus entered the scene or Joyce and Eliot fired her imagination into revisionist flames. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), introduced Clarissa Dalloway to the reading public as a flighty London socialite married to former MP Richard Dalloway and travelling, or skimming, rather, along the surface of life. It is quite likely that the character had suggested herself to Woolf in the person of Kitty Maxse, née Lushington, a friend of Woolf's mother and oldest sister, Stella. As girls, Virginia and her older sister Vanessa increasingly saw Kitty as a figure of fun and nicknamed her 'Gushington'.[5] We meet the Dalloways only briefly, as they board the *Euphrosyne*, having bullied their way on board by using their influence and connections. They've been abroad, 'broadening Mr Dalloway's mind', as he has little else to do, having been voted out of Parliament 'by one of the accidents of political life' (*The Voyage Out*, p. 39). Both Dalloways display their ignorance and supeficiality and are sharply satirised by Woolf when, for example, Richard opines, ' "... may I be in my grave before a woman has the right to vote in England!" ' (*The Voyage Out*, p. 43); and Clarissa emotes: ' "Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid – what it means to be English. One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages – and of men like you, Dick, and it makes one feel as if one couldn't bear *not* to be English!" ' (*The Voyage Out*, p. 51).

Yet by 1922, the character of Clarissa Dalloway had undergone a transformation. Despite her feeling that she might be writing 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' too quickly and insubstantially, the story gives Woolf the opportunity to begin working out her own narrative method, weaving in and out of the mind and emotions, perhaps partly (and unwillingly) influenced by Joyce's experimentation with stream-of-consciousness narration.

'Mrs Dalloway on Bond Street' launches Clarissa on the streets of London – this time to buy gloves rather than flowers – and to drink in the beauty of a June morning in town. Woolf has already found the defining image for the strokes of Big Ben, 'leaden circles dissolved in the air', and

5 I owe this information to Julia Briggs, who has shared with me a draft of her chapter on *Mrs Dalloway* from a forthcoming biography of Woolf. Julia points out that Kitty Maxse's sudden death in October 1922, rather than providing an impetus for Clarissa's death at the end of the novel, seems rather to have inspired Woolf to bring Septimus into the story as the suicide.

brings Clarissa into the same intersections with characters – Scrope Purvis, Hugh Whitbread – in the early pages of the story which reoccur later in the novel. Bourton and Clarissa's girlhood do not appear, but two allusions to an ageing woman's body do – a vague hint about menopause in Clarissa's reflections about Hugh's wife's illness; and, later in the story, a reference to the agony of standing at the onset of a menstrual period. From the shallow Clarissa of *The Voyage Out*, who makes inaccurate literary attributions, this ageing Clarissa asserts powerful literary echoes in the stream of her thoughts. 'And now can never mourn', punctuates a remembrance of unspoken sorrow, and ' "From the contagion of the world's slow stain" '[6] parallels her reflections on atheism. The story ends with an explosion outside in the streets while, inside the glove shop, Clarissa, hearing echoes of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in her mind, finally remembers the name of the other woman customer whom she has vainly tried to recall since she first entered the shop. This story is, in fact, one in a sequence of seven sketches edited by Stella McNichol and published under the title *Mrs Dalloway's Party*.[7] Woolf seems to have intended the story, which bears the closest resemblance to the early pages of the finished novel, to be a first chapter.

By early November 1922, Woolf had begun to sketch out the novel, thinking about the 'aeroplane chapter' as a release from writing criticism; and by June of 1923, she had named the book *The Hours* ('if thats its name?' [*Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 248]). Sanity and insanity, life and death, and criticism of the social system were the keynote issues Woolf wanted to embed in this work; yet, filled with insecurities as she wrote in her diary on 19 June 1923, Woolf asked herself, '. . . do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? . . . Am I writing The Hours from deep emotion? . . . Have I the power of conveying the true reality? . . . I foresee, to return to The Hours,' she writes as she concludes her self-examination, 'that this is going to be the devil of a struggle' (*Diary*, Vol. 2, pp. 248–9).

The new, though provisional title, now suggests an ingredient has been added to Woolf's creative cauldron. Much as Joyce's Leopold Bloom plots a course through Dublin in a roughly twenty-four-hour period, Clarissa Dalloway's movements through London intertwine with the

6 Both quotes are from Shelley's *Adonais*, XL, ll. 356–7: 'From the contagion of the world's slow stain/ He is secure, and now can never mourn//' For Woolf's use of the quotations, see 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' (Dick, pp. 148 and 152).

7 The sequence was published by the Hogarth Press and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1973. Versions of the seven pieces also appear in Susan Dick's edition, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*.

wanderings of other characters, and are pinned to the chiming of the hours – Big Ben, St Margaret's – 'the leaden circles dissolving into air'.

The 'struggle' continues, but by August 1923 Woolf has made a discovery: ' . . . 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 . . . ' (*Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 263). Slightly more than two months later, Woolf is 'in the thick of the mad scene in Regents Park', and confides to herself: 'It took me a year's groping to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far . . . ' (*Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 272). By August of 1924, the book has become, simply, 'Mrs Dalloway'; and, in October, a little more than a year after her discovery of a method, Woolf notes the novel's completion.

An Invitation to Clarissa's Party

> 'Peter! Peter!' cried Clarissa, following him out on the landing. 'My party! Remember my party tonight!' [p. 35]

The world of the novel is split, as Avrom Fleishman suggests, into a 'dialectic of communion and individuation' (Fleishman, p. 81); the individual, that is, and the community share the stage. Woolf herself alludes to this splitting of the novel by characterising her newly found method of tunnelling caves behind each character which ultimately connect in the present moment; and that moment is, of course, the day of Clarissa's party. If Woolf is to effect a criticism of the social system while she examines the nature of individual consciousness (and unconsciousness), a woman's party, and the preparations which go into it, provide the perfect vehicle for her purpose. 'Clarissa Dalloway,' Ellen Rosenman writes, 'brings together disparate strands of life and fashions them into the harmonious whole of the party' (Rosenman, p. 75), thus succeeding in reinterpreting the lack of importance given by society to women's roles therein. We're invited, then, not only to come to Clarissa's party, but to share with Clarissa the preparations for her party, and to enter the hearts and minds of other characters in her sphere as well as those of her suicidal double, Septimus Smith, on a marvellous June day in London in 1923.

Septimus Warren Smith: The Uninvited Guest

> Of *Mrs Dalloway* then one can only bring to light at the moment a few scraps, of little importance or none perhaps; as that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, has no existence; and that Mrs Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party. Such scraps are offered humbly to the reader in the hope that like other odds and ends they may come in useful.[8]

As Woolf looked back on her work in *Mrs Dalloway* for her introduction to the Modern Library edition, she acknowledged the fact that Septimus had indeed been intended as Clarissa's double; in fact, he would die in Clarissa's place. Yet as important as that psychological connection might be, Septimus Smith would never have been invited to Clarissa Dalloway's party. Such social status makes him an important vehicle for her critique of the social system while, at the same time, allowing Woolf to explore the interiority of madness.

Clarissa, though, is the novel's centre, with Septimus as her pale, and dying, shadow; and, as Abel observes, the potentially tragic plot of the soldier returned from war is sublimated and demoted to a tragic subplot (Abel, 1988, p. 107). With Clarissa foregrounded, Woolf is free to transfer the death she had planned for her to Septimus, thereby sacrificing male for female development. Furthermore, Woolf was able to distance, transfer and objectify her own memories of madness, especially during 1912 and 1913, and give them artistic expression through developing Septimus's mad discourse (Wang, p. 188).

While it is a critical commonplace that Septimus stands in for Woolf's own bouts with mental illness, the speculation about diagnoses differs widely. Septimus has been called schizophrenic, manic depressive and a survivor of trauma;[9] but regardless of the diagnosis, his illness afforded Woolf the opportunity for an exploration of madness and an attack on a medical community ill equipped to heal him.

Woolf's choice of the year, 1923, clearly suggests that, for Septimus, the trauma suffered as a result of warfare is just now – after five years – reaching a head. Septimus's case highlights the fashion in which society expected the war veteran to return to normalcy immediately, showing little

8 Virginia Woolf, Introduction, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. vi

9 See especially DeMeester, 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*'.

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patience with and even marginalising those who could not instantly conform. But even more importantly, Septimus's case allows Woolf to launch a sustained attack on the medical community of her time. Septimus is treated by his doctors like a child, or, more to the point, like a girl; for his grief and his trauma have been so 'feminised' by the medical community that he is left with no 'masculine' means of expressing his sorrow. Woolf directs her satire toward the figures of two doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw. Bradshaw invites the bulk of her satire as his lack of empathy for his patients is stripped away by Woolf's characterisation:

> Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess... Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion... [p. 73]

Bradshaw's cure is the rest cure, one for which Woolf had particular antipathy – if only such patients would stay in bed, eat, and drink milk, the medical wisdom dictated, they would regain their sense of proportion and be converted to conformity. 'But Proportion,' Woolf writes:

> ... has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged – in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own – is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. [p. 74]

Woolf's attack on Bradshaw and his ilk continues for another page, an attack that, had she sustained it any longer, would have threatened the very fabric of the narrative. As it is, Woolf bares her teeth as never before.

In her notes for the novel, Woolf wrote of Septimus, 'He must somehow see through human nature – see its hypocrisy, & insincerity, its power to recover from every wound, incapable of taking any final impression. His sense that this is not worth having.'[10] What Woolf

10 Virginia Woolf's *Reading Notes*, 12, dated 9 November 1922–2 August 1923, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, quoted in Zwerdling, p. 131

suggests, as Wang describes, is a psychic subterranean, in the form of madness, rising up in resistance to the stranglehold of the state (Wang, p. 179). It is, perhaps, Septimus's very ability to see to the core, together with the trauma of shell-shock, which has tipped him over the edge, allowing Woolf entry to a psyche out of touch with reality. The word 'time', for example, spoken by his wife in the park and indicating the time of their appointment with Bradshaw, sends Septimus into a visionary experience which ends in an encounter with his friend Evans, killed in the war:

> 'It is time,' said Rezia.
>
> The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself –
>
> 'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead. [p. 52]

Septimus, though insane, has seen the truth as the horror.[11]

Echoes of Eliot's *The Waste Land* are woven throughout the rhythmic interior discourse of Septimus's madness, and later, through Clarissa's thoughts as she lives through Septimus's death,[12] suggesting that they are linked in a way very like that which Yeats raises to a philosophical principle of opposition in *A Vision*: 'Dying each other's life, living each other's death.'[13] Woolf supports this notion of interdependency by writing to Gerald Brenan on 14 June 1925, 'And this I certainly did mean – that Septimus and Mrs Dalloway should be entirely dependent upon each other . . . ' (*Diary*, Vol. 3, p. 189). Clarissa is outraged that the Bradshaws should bring a story of death to her party and escapes for a moment to reflect, 'A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day

11 Neuman argues that the novel is filled with echoes of *Heart of Darkness*, and that Septimus sees the horror, when he thinks of human nature: 'the repulsive brute, with the blood red nostrils' (p. 68).

12 See especially, 'He who was living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying/ With a little patience,' *The Waste Land*, ll. 328–30.

13 W. B. Yeats quotes Heraclitus in *A Vision*, p. 68.

in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance' (p. 134).

Septimus, though, however much Woolf might wish him to be dependent on Clarissa, doesn't know she exists; for it is truly what Clarissa feels and experiences that ultimately matters:

> She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. [p. 135]

Assemble herself, assemble the last remaining guests of her party – these and more Clarissa accomplishes with an artist's deft stroke.

Clarissa Dalloway: The Perfect Hostess

> What a lark! What a plunge! [p. 3]

Our introduction into the interior of Clarissa's thoughts as she steps into the streets of Westminster to buy flowers suggests both a rising and falling motion predictive of the opposing trajectories that she and her 'twin' Septimus experience during the course of this June day. For it is Clarissa who will rise to assemble all the characters within her circumference at her party either literally or vicariously while Septimus plunges headlong to his death, impaled upon a fence. Woolf refuses pride of place to Septimus as returning war veteran and victim of shell-shock, insisting instead on Clarissa's centrality to the emotion of the plot and upon her awakening through living Septimus's death.

As a female plot, the novel develops a relational structure; Woolf has discovered her 'tunnelling' process, and through it, her ability to connect characters as their walks cause them to coincide in space. Social life and connection take on a heightened importance, entering the realm of legitimate art against action, for action matters less here. Unlike Joyce's Leopold Bloom, whose walk through Dublin engages him for almost an entire twenty-four-hour period, Clarissa's walk lasts only an hour at most, but establishes the tone of walking through London for the rest of the characters to follow. Thus the structure of *Ulysses* is recalled through progression across space within a duration of hours, but diffused through various personalities which ultimately connect and find their centre in Clarissa and at her party.

At the beginning of the novel, Woolf invokes time present and time past, for the 'plunge' instantly reminds Clarissa of the chill of early-

morning air at Bourton, the family country seat. The memory of Bourton, as Elizabeth Abel suggests, invokes a female pastoral world distinct from and prior to marriage and entry into the politics and society of London (Abel, 1989, p. 30), a pre-Oedipal haven where Clarissa first awakens, through a kiss, to female bonding and the love of another woman, Sally Seton. Yet now, years later, Clarissa tells Hugh Whitbread, as she launches out on her shopping expedition, ' "I love walking in London . . . Really, it's better than walking in the country" ' (p. 5). Bourton is gone, but Clarissa can gather those friends from the past who were there with her – Sally Seton, Hugh Whitbread, Peter Walsh and her husband Richard – together again at her party.

Gathering is accomplished throughout the novel, though, and long before the party, as the narrator moves through London knitting together the lives and interior monologues of disparate characters, many of whom will reappear as partygoers later that night. Woolf, through her narrator, deftly arranges for characters to intersect in space, thereby creating a logical link for the narrator to slip from one consciousness to the next. Septimus, for example, is first introduced at the same moment that Clarissa is buying flowers for her party. Clarissa is drawn to the window of the shop by the sound of a motor car backfiring, a sound that draws Septimus, in the street outside, to look at the car:

> Mrs Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? [pp. 11–12]

Thus, with Septimus standing rooted to the spot, time seems to stand still as he sinks into the interiority of madness. Woolf freezes motion and time, lingering a moment as Septimus's consciousness unfolds, a technique she will employ again and again as she illuminates the interior spaces of each successive character.

Before her party begins, and after her journey for the flowers, Clarissa reflects upon her past in a calm solitude that is summarily interrupted by

Peter Walsh's unexpected visit. Peter is Clarissa's 'road not taken', the suitor she refused so long ago at Bourton, but who has remained a friend. His demands, both physical and emotional, would have been too great for her to meet; and now Clarissa, who chose Richard Dalloway instead, is in search of her identity as someone other than 'Mrs Dalloway'. She finds herself largely alone now at night reading Baron Marbot's memoirs, like a nun in a convent attic room, who 'could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet' (p. 23). Woolf invokes the fairytale 'Sleeping Beauty' to suggest that, rather than a princess waiting to be awakened by Prince Charming's kiss, Clarissa is a queen whose privacy must be protected: 'Like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected . . . so that anyone can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her . . .' (p. 32)

Clarissa is Woolf's version of Sleeping Beauty grown old, now in her fifty-second year, still, in a sense, sleepwalking through life; and much of her interior monologue throughout the day resurrects the past in a nostalgic reverie interwoven and underscored by lines from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun,' and *Othello*, 'If now it were to die/ 'Twere now to be most happy.' Both allusions gesture towards death, suggesting on the one hand its release from suffering, from the 'contagion of the world's slow stain', while on the other, the potential for freezing and sealing the happiest of moments with the finality of death. Clarissa, making peace with her past illness, her ageing, her sleeping alone and her death, has her finest moment when her party, her own artistic production, is a success. Looking across to the house where an old woman looks back at her, her mirror image, Clarissa thinks:

> 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. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. 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. [p. 135]

Outside Clarissa's Drawing-Room: Social Outcasts

> . . . the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree forever barren of leaves, which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing . . . [p. 60]

Echoing the theme of Clarissa's ageing is the presence of the ageing female vagrant on the margins of the text. Clarissa's more privileged role as Tory hostess is offset by the presence in London of carnival folk, homeless tramps and derelict women. This presence is, Leena Schröder argues, a 'radical and disruptive spirit' which undermines the vision of London as epicentre of economic and imperial power (Schröder, p. 329). But Schröder, while correctly invoking the revolutionary potential of such marginalised characters in the text, ignores that their very presence is also the confirmation of British power, a fact that was not lost on Woolf. Peter Walsh passes an aged street singer, whose song, 'ee um fah um so/foo swee too eem oo' (p. 60), reminds the narrator of the voice of an old spring, 'the battered woman – for she wore a skirt – with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love – '(p. 60). This woman wields an ancient power that, though lost on Peter, is not lost on the narrator; she is the feminine voice of the tribe, the one who, later, Woolf would call 'Anon', Woman as primeval storyteller. Later, as he leaves Lady Bruton's, Richard Dalloway passes a female vagrant and thinks, 'But what could be done for female vagrants like that poor creature, stretched on her elbow (as if she had flung herself on the earth, rid of all ties, to observe curiously, to speculate boldly, to consider the whys and the wherefores, impudent, loose-lipped, humorous), he did not know' (p. 85). Richard's view echoes a rather standard imperial view which, while intoning humanitarianism, really wants to rid itself of such social outcasts who, having nothing to lose, have slipped from social control.

The presence of the female vagrant, though, is only one of many criticisms in the text of a social system which encourages and allows the presence of an underclass, a goal which, as we have seen, Woolf had for this novel from the very beginning. The power of the social class in which Clarissa's birth, breeding and marriage places her, while apparently in charge as the novel unfolds, is unmistakably on the wane. As Alex Zwerdling cogently points out, Clarissa's way of life is made

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