The Two Narrators of *Mrs Dalloway*

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In the 1980s, the general trend towards a more politically engaged criticism encouraged the feminist Jane Marcus and the Marxist Alex Zwerdling to object to the prevailing claim that Virginia Woolf's novels do not contain a political agenda. As a consequence, more recent criticism has been concerned with attempting to vindicate Marcus' and Zwerdling's argument. The two main arguments in support of the thesis that Woolf was committed politically focus either on her novels' realism *or* on their modernist subversion of the didactic, realist narratorial perspective. I do not intend to suggest that the critics necessarily analyse either modernist or realist features in Woolf's work, in a mutually exclusive way. Rather, my point is that every piece of information that we retrieve from the text will be framed differently, depending on whether we attune ourselves to one or the other mode of reading. Conversely, the apparent conflict between these two approaches entitles other critics to brandish Woolf's famous reputation (and biographical evidence) of elitism to downplay her political awareness.

In the case of *Mrs Dalloway*, it is clear that reading the narrative voice as realist or modernist determines our understanding of the text's politics.[1] I will argue that these two modes of narration do not exclude one another, nor do they alternate or combine. The text in fact juxtaposes two rival narrators in order to create a strategic ambivalence. I hope to show that the conflict between the different narrative perspectives brings to light the different ideologies that compete to control the text. I am particularly interested in this essay in the novel's treatment of class-related issues. Indeed the ambiguity of the narrator's attitude towards Clarissa reveals the author's twofold desire to give a social satire of her time as well as to suggest possibilities of resistance against the governing class' discourse of power.

Thus, whether critics locate Woolf's militancy in realistic portrayals or modernist perspectivism determines the debate that they spark. For example, Zwerdling and more recently Karen Levenback argue that Woolf forcefully criticizes the status quo. Levenback founds his argument on his objection to Miller's poststructuralist description of *Mrs Dalloway*'s modernist narrator. Opposed to Miller's description of the narrator as "disinterested" (Levenback

[1] Wheare notes that modernist writers hoped to record reality more truthfully than so-called realists, by whom we usually refer to Victorian and Edwardian authors (176). Similarly, J. Hillis Miller insists on the continuity between modernists and Victorians. Miller argues that Woolf "investigates the implications of these traditional conventions of form so as to say that she brings something new into fiction" (177). In this essay, I will use the generic term realism as it relates to the Victorian period.

46), Levenback defends the ironic agency of *Mrs Dalloway*'s narrator who, according to him, proposes a satire of post-war London. But Levenback's argument remains a possible prey to a more skeptical reader such as John Mepham. Keeping in mind Woolf's biography, Mepham thinks that inferring too much from Woolf's alleged irony "oversimplifies Woolf's attitudes to class" (Mepham 30).

In contrast, Toril Moi and Makiko Minow-Pinkney defend the novel from the attacks of Terry Eagleton. The latter considers that *Mrs Dalloway* at best parodies the "rigidities of upper-class English society" (36) but fails to recognize its own upper-class biases. For Moi and Minow-Pinkney, Woolf's strongest form of resistance against patriarchy and Empire is not parody but her rejection of realism and didacticism (and her use of what Moi, relying on the work of Kristeva, calls feminine and/or androgynous writing). But Elaine Showalter, hostile to this postmodernist feminism, considers that Woolf's modernist techniques fail to express her feminist accusations and represent instead a "flight to androgyny" (263). In each of these debates, the critics have taken to task both Woolf's modernist and her realist achievements. My argument is that at some points the novel uses the two modes simultaneously to oppose the dominant discourse.

The disagreement between Levenback and Miller, or between Eagleton and Minow-Pinkney, crystallizes around the role of the narrator in *Mrs Dalloway*. Those who consider Woolf first as a realist notice the narrator's moulding grasp on the narrative and her distance from the characters.[2] In contrast, reading Woolf as a modernist, Miller comments on the narrator's impersonality and passivity towards the narrative and her intimacy with the characters. This lack of consensus stems from the elusiveness of the narrative voice in *Mrs Dalloway*. The narrator indeed shifts from an authoritative, organizing, moral standpoint to that of an objective, neutral reporter who simply attempts to effect an impression of immediacy between story and reader.

The use of the past tense implies the narrator's distance and thus a sense of his control over the story. He repeatedly pauses the narrative to comment on the characters. But the narrator at times delegates most of his authority as narrator-focalizer to the character-focalizers. Instead of narrativizing the characters' flow of thoughts as an almost omniscient narrator would do, the narrator of *Mrs Dalloway* most of the time mimetically transposes the characters' free-associative psychic activity in (free) indirect discourse.[3] The stream-of-

[2] Miller has argued that the text gives us a hint that the narrator is a woman. But Kathy Mezei contends that the narrator often mimics the patriarchal voice (84). Other feminists would argue that Woolf's style is a fine instance of feminine writing (Moi). I personally prefer to alternate between the feminine and masculine pronouns, in the belief that the narrator actually encompasses the qualities of both gender constructs in her writing (both in turns and at the same time).

[3] This supposedly mimetic quality is in itself a convention. Woolf's narrator seems to record the characters' meditations more faithfully or more realistically than a traditional

consciousness dramatizes the intensity of the mind's wanderings and minimizes the role of the informant. The narrator of *Mrs Dalloway* often imitates so well the limitations of the characters themselves that he appears to report the characters' thoughts truthfully and resist the impulse to edit.

To reconcile this impression of immediacy with the presence of an authoritative narrator, we have to distinguish between two kinds of discourses, two times of narration and two narrators. On the one hand, there is the modernist narrator. She seems very close to the characters (physically and in her restricted authority on the story), and only uses "transposed discourse" (Genette 191). She is internal to the story because although she remains anonymous, she dwells within the story both spatially and temporally. On the other hand, the external, Victorian, authoritative, realist narrator retells the story of the internal narrator in the past. Thus, at times she speaks in the present tense and gives her straightforward opinion; but, most of the time, she invades the discourse of the internal narrator and controls (produces) her, albeit invisibly in some cases.

Levenback would argue that the external and omniscient narrator of *Mrs Dalloway* at some points positions himself within the story and deliberately imposes limited knowledge upon himself. It is only through this sort of flexibility, Levenback argues, that the external narrator can infuse the story with irony and provide hints as to where the implied narrator stands in relation to his story. In contrast, Mezei, who instead emphasizes the blurring of the identity of the narrator, considers that "the Proportion passage is jarring; readers balk at its incongruity" (84). In this famous scene, the narrator indeed criticizes, and in his own name, Sir William Bradshaw and his insatiable desire to convert the dissident. However, it could be argued that the arguments Levenback and Mezei make concerning the narrator do not necessarily entail exclusive choices. As we shall see, evaluating what belongs to the external narrator's interferences and what remains intact of the internal narrator should help us identify the dialogue between the external and internal narrator's often-clashing discourses as well as the tension between Woolf's discrete intentions.[4]

Miller most radically argued in favour of an impersonal and powerless narrator. However, as opposed to a realist narrator, his conception of the narrator in *Mrs Dalloway* is not theoretically tenable on its own. Indeed, Mezei or Minow-Pinkney readily acknowledge that it cannot be applied to the whole

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realist narrator, only because the irrational, a-grammatical language of this stream-of consciousness strikingly differs from the narrative style of the so-called realist movement.

[4] One might dispute that the distinction between the external and internal narrator is in fact that between external narrator and implied author. The external narrator is an integral function of the novel, whereas the implied author is not. This is the reason why critics have contested the usefulness of such a term as implied author. In the case of *Mrs Dalloway*, I will routinely consider that the external narrator and the implied author are very close, although the internal narrator sometimes frustrates this expectation.

novel. The narrator that Miller describes has all the characteristics of an internal narrator whereas, as Genette notes, theoretically there is always an external narrator. Moreover Mezei explains that, although we witness a powerful "decentering of the narrative authority" (83), the reader cannot help noticing "a submerged and ironic voice" (84) which, as will become clear below, runs contrary to the notion of a modernist narrator's "disinterested voice." In fact, the internal narrator's dependence on the external narrator does not prevent him from challenging the latter's authority. For this reason, I will retain Miller's definition and draw the full narratorial implications of having such a narrator. In his chapter on *Mrs Dalloway*, Miller indeed uses the concept more to illustrate the themes of the novel than to describe its narrative style.

More precisely, Miller argues that "in *Mrs Dalloway* nothing exists for the narrator which does not first exist in the mind of one of the characters" (180). In other words, the narrator is not autonomous. The story produces him. The story is the primary condition of his existence. The narrator is therefore not individual and has no authority to supervise the story. The first sentence of the novel already warns the reader: "Clarissa said she would buy the flowers herself" (1). Clarissa is most likely answering Lucy here. This untypical beginning for a novel signals that the conversation between Clarissa and her maid started before the opening of the novel and suggests that the time and place they live in exist independently of the narrator and the reader. The narrator is then a "state of mind," "a general consciousness or social mind which rises into existence out of the collective mental experience of the individual human beings in the story" (Miller 180). The narrator's dependence on the story results in his impersonality. In turn, this impersonality guarantees the effect of proximity between the story and the reader, because his lack of individuality allows the narrator to endorse different personalities and to record without interpreting.

The instrument used by *Mrs Dalloway*'s internal narrator to organize and connect the characters' thoughts into a plot is "transposed discourse." The characters are focalizers and the narrator translates non-verbal thoughts or feelings into words. Genette defines transposed discourse as a form of indirect discourse (191–92). Although transposed discourse varies from free indirect discourse to the least mimetic indirect discourse, the novel suggests that the internal narrator's modifications of the characters' thoughts are minimal and that he objectively reports these thoughts. In order to extend the sphere of activity of the internal narrator, we can also include under "transposed discourse" a sort of narration that, strictly speaking, falls into Genette's category of "narratized discourse" (191). Consider this example:

> The hall of the house was *cool* as a *vault*. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hands to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to, and she heard the *swish* of Lucy's skirts, she felt like a *nun* who has left the world and feels *fold* round her the familiar *veils* and the response to old *devotions*. (42, my emphasis)

The words that I have italicized belong to Clarissa's vocabulary. She has used these terms before and she will use them again afterwards. In a sense, these words can be seen as an index of her identity. Except for "Mrs Dalloway raised her hands to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to, and she heard," the passage can be considered as free indirect discourse. But even this more descriptive part could be attributed to the protagonist. The sensitivity of Woolf's characters and the intensity of their mental lives are such that it is not aberrant to think of Clarissa self-consciously watching herself raise her hands. The use of Clarissa's last name may also suggest that Lucy is the focalizer in this part of the sentence. In any case, the internal narrator does not add any significant information that was not in the character's mind in the first place.

Miller suggests that Woolf's main device to define the narrator as a product of the story (rather than the other way round) resides in the spatial contingency affecting the characters and the narrator. The dependence of the narrator is "implied by those passages in which an external object [. . .] is used as a means of transition from the mind of one character to the mind of another" (Miller 180). The narration is thus continuous in space. It is as if, deprived of a will of his own, the narrator did not have the power to reposition himself. For example, the character-focalizer Mr Bowley, in Bond Street, looks at an aeroplane in the sky, and this sight triggers his reflections:

> [The aeroplane] soared up and wrote one letter after another—but what word was it writing?
>
> Lucrezia Warren Smith, sitting by her husband's side on a seat in Regent's Park in the Broad Walk, looked up. (31)

Here, the translator changes the perspective via the focalized. The narrator goes from Mr Bowley to the plane, then from the plane to Lucrezia. The only link between Mr Bowley and Lucrezia is the plane as a text. Because Mr Bowley transforms the plane into a text that Lucrezia herself appropriates and transforms, the narrator can compare the two texts and move from one character to the other. The work of the narrator thus illustrates the fact that objects are texts, which people compound by reliance on or defiance of other people's texts, and finally yields the possibility that the sum of these texts together represents ideologies.

If the internal narrator is spatially close to her characters, she necessarily lives in the same time-frame as the characters as well. She does not control the time of her subjects. The narrator's recording time and the characters' thinking/living time occur simultaneously. The narrator's trouble in rendering coincident thoughts and actions into a linear language therefore hints at the temporal contingency of narrator and character. For example, in the following extract, the narrator is the witness of two people who listen and talk but also deliberate about what they say, what they hear and about their physical presence in the park. The lack of transition between sentences that belong to different focalizers, the swiftness with which the focalizers are substituted for each other, and finally the indeterminacy of the perspective in some parts of

the sentences, all gesture towards the narrator's struggle to sort all this information at once. Her efforts reveal the self-sufficiency of the story and her own subjection to it.

> Evelyn was a good deal out of sorts, said Hugh, intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court) that his wife had some internal ailment, nothing serious, which, as an old friend, Clarissa Dalloway would quite understand of course without requiring him to specify. (7)

It is difficult to ignore in this passage the ironic flavour that the external narrator injects into the portrayal of Hugh. If we attribute this description to an external narrator-focalizer, then the long succession of flattering adjectives, "well-covered, manly, extremely handsome," emerges as a mockery of Hugh's snobbishness, while the word "little" becomes all but insulting as the narrator condemns Hugh for his pretentiousness. However, we can also consider that the external narrator does not deliver this description from her detached perspective. Instead, using Clarissa as focalizer, the internal narrator, intent on not losing any information and on representing simultaneity of thoughts, alternates between Clarissa's own thoughts and Hugh's words as they resonate through her head. If on the other hand Clarissa were seen to be formulating this description, then irony would still mark the sentences. This would mean that the external narrator leaves Clarissa's extravagant language intact in order to direct her irony towards Clarissa herself, for judging people on such irrelevant details, for misreading Hugh in her naiveté, or for defending her own bourgeois status by standing by him.

But the idea of an internal narrator also allows us to credit the descriptive phrase to Hugh himself. Indeed the piece of discourse reported after the brackets might reasonably be ascribed to him, as the use of Clarissa's full name suggests. It is indeed unlikely that Clarissa would repeat Hugh's reply and refer to herself as "Clarissa Dalloway"—rather than simply "she." Hugh is in fact listening to his own voice since he would hardly address Clarissa by her full name. Finally the use of "would" (rather than "did") indicates that the narrator uses the words of the characters instead of summarizing the dialogue. If Hugh is indeed watching himself—"intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his well-covered, manly, extremely handsome body"—in the most self-conscious, narcissistic fashion, justifying his behaviour between brackets, then the external narrator forcefully accuses him of vanity. The narrator catches Hugh in the act of his own vice. Crucially, the internal narrator's position inside the story and her inability to control the story account for these possibilities. The internal narrator is therefore responsible for diluting the external narrator's irony (present in all of my readings), thus producing new shades of irony that are less apparent but nonetheless present.

As in the extract above, the internal narrator does not account very adequately for the parts told in the present. These moments do not belong to the

narrative. They break the flow of events/thoughts whereas, by Miller's definition, the internal narrator does not take any such measure. The present tense therefore embodies another narrative perspective. The external narrator might be using these privileged passages to shed light on the intent of his irony. But the difficulty lies in the fact that those passages also have a conversational tone and that their meaning is often hidden in metaphors. This is why these parts generate clashing interpretations among critics—and the role of the narrator plays a central part in those debates. The passages most often referred to include Peter's dream, Clarissa mending her dress, but also Londoners looking at an aeroplane or Clarissa's party. Each of these scenes expresses a desire for unity and communion, which critics generally recognize as one of the main themes of the novel. The particular anonymity of those passages makes it strikingly uncertain who shares in this desire: is it the implied author's desire, the narrator's, the characters' or only one or some of the characters'?

For Naremore and Miller, Woolf's narrative devices support and actualize the characters' longing for community. Naremore argues that there are two kinds of narrative perspective in the novel. The narrator at times erases his personality to follow the character's streams-of-consciousness but very often he also demonstrates his omnipotence and control over the story. The narrator's ability to recount both the particular and the general "implies that there is no clear boundary between the 'inside' and the 'outside'" (103), just as there is no clear boundary between the characters. Thus, the narrative voice of the novel sacrifices its personality for the sake of the characters in the same way as Clarissa effaces herself to create a social and spiritual unity between her guests.

Both Miller and Naremore agree that the unity that Clarissa attempts to create through her party is flawed. Naremore suggests that Clarissa's instinct of self-preservation and isolation finally overcomes her desire for communion. In Miller's view, human nature can achieve perfect unity exclusively in death and in writing, as Septimus and the novel's narrator exemplify. Both are aware that Woolf also criticizes other attempts at unity. For example, Miller considers that Lady Bruton's ideal of "emigration is a parody version of this theme of constructive action [of creating unity]" (193). Similarly, Clarissa's snobbishness represents the negative turn that a longing for harmonization can take. Such criticism finds its most spectacular justification in the Proportion Speech, which also concerns itself with attempts at bringing together. But Miller and Naremore find that this moment clashes with the rest of the novel and believe that "to sum up the novel as no more than negative social satire is a distortion" (Miller 194).

By contrast, Zwerdling and Caughie place the Proportion Speech at the centre of the novel. In their view, although the authorial intent is more obvious there, it occupies the same position as the moments mentioned above since the famous scene is told in the present. Against Naremore's analysis, Caughie argues that the narrator attempts to connect "those detached and

those intimate perspectives" (74), not to illustrate some kind of universality, but to reveal "how unity is perceived and contrived" (75). Just as the Goddess of Proportion excludes and represses in order to create a unity, so does Clarissa. In other words whereas, for Miller and Naremore, producing a community among people remains the author's ideal—which, despite practical shortcomings, can be seen as her solution to social issues—Caughie maintains that Woolf deems this political move immoral at source.

In one of those moments, for example, Lucrezia contemplates her solitude when an anonymous narrator abruptly turns to the present tense:

> "For you should see the Milan garden," she said aloud. But to whom?
>
> There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades [. . .] bleak hillsides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit. . . . (34)

The text interrogates itself. "To whom" does Rezia speak? Who is the focalizer of this paragraph? The text will not answer. For Miller, it is not an external narrator, nor a particular character. The characters' collective voice here expresses their common desire: to erase individualities so as to finally discover the essence of human nature. But could it be Rezia speaking, thus stepping out of the story, out of indirect discourse, out of the narrator's past perspective as her words fade? Can it be that Woolf is disrupting her narrative style to allow Rezia for the first time to speak directly, without the mediation of a narrator? For Caughie, the external narrator here gives his interpretation. If we then relate this passage to the Proportion Speech, what the night might reveal is the darker side of civilization, that which erases difference to create manageable groups of people. The same question "to whom?" wells up from Peter when he emerges from his dream, and from Septimus in one of his rare moments of peace. Woolf then strategically leaves the question open, and conspicuously so.

Criticism of and desire for a transcendental harmony often lie side by side in the text. In the next quotations, first Clarissa and Miss Pym, and then a group of people in the street, experience a feeling of deep communion. At first glance, the narrator apparently treats the two moments differently. But the sequence of the scenes allows the reader to wonder if we should establish a connection between the two moments. The first moment begins as Clarissa buys flowers and fulfills one of her upper-class consumer's duties. Miss Pym's kind deference consoles her for the bitter resistance that Miss Kilman ("that hatred, that monster") offers her and her class.

> And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when—oh! A pistol shot in the street outside!

> "Dear, those motor cars," said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars, those tyres of motor cars, were all *her* fault. (19)

Images of water as well as the words "more and more gently" announce one of Clarissa's moments of being that open a window to her ideal of "unity, reconciliation, of communion" (Miller 181). An external event, however, interrupts the moment. The disturbance comes from the explosion of the tyre of a car that, people in the street suspect, encloses the Prime Minister or some other figure of authority. In the second paragraph, the narrator reports Miss Pym's feeling that Clarissa's well-being falls under her responsibility. Clarissa has herself noted that the florist's kindness (especially when she compares it to Miss Kilman's criticism) facilitates her well-being and conjures her moment of being. Eagleton observes that even Clarissa and Peter, for all their sensitivity, depend "on a settled structure of wealth and leisure to protect it from the exigencies of work" (36), no less than less sympathetic characters such as Richard or Lady Bruton; but critics dispute whether the text is aware of this privilege or not. My point is that this will depend on the narrator to whom we attribute these comments. If Clarissa is probably the focalizer in the first paragraph, the second paragraph leaves us more interpretive leeway.

The most plausible reading is that the external narrator here gives his commentary in this second paragraph. The italicization of "her" makes it clear that he finds it ironic, although not altogether surprising, that Miss Pym should harbour such guilty feelings. After a blank space, the narrator resumes the narrative and describes with unmistakable disapproval the Londoners' emotion at the view of the prestigious car:

> Yet rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson's scent shop on the other, passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly. But now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew. (19–20)

The last two passages I have quoted describe feelings of transcendence and communion between several people. If a wave conquers Clarissa and offers her tranquility, a cloud enfolds the observers in the street and encourages serenity, which here translates into submission. The second extract's images are strikingly similar to those used in the above-mentioned meditations of Rezia. But this passage also reminds us of the Proportion Speech, which similarly links religion and power. The correlation between these four extracts entitles Caughie to believe that the text is suspicious of any kind of

reconciliation between people who presumably have different (economic, social, spiritual) interests. In this case, the external narrator would be asking the reader to reconsider Clarissa's conception of transcendental communion by establishing connections between her sense of unity and the Goddess of Proportion's. In this light, the harmony between Clarissa and the florist only exists because of the latter's subordination and at the price of Miss Kilman's exclusion.[5]

This interpretation loses credibility however if it is Clarissa, instead of the external narrator, who mentions Miss Pym's guilty feelings. The passivity of the internal narrator allows us to consider this possibility. Indeed we have seen that the internal narrator liberally lends her voice and allows the characters to tell the story from their own perspective. If Clarissa herself is here expressing surprise that Miss Pym should apologize, she shows that she can relate to the working-class woman instead of taking her work for granted. The internal narrator could also give voice to Miss Pym's realization of herself, laughing at herself for presenting such a servile attitude. Instead of exposing the false consciousness of the working class, the text would then portray working-class hypocrisy and resistance.

The internal narrator also plays a role in the second passage quoted. Miller's "collective consciousness" does not seem to apply here since the narrator opposes himself to "they," those people who bow in front of figures of authority. But the narrator in this passage remains close to the characters since he can overhear the questions they are asking themselves. Septimus then seems a possible focalizer. Indeed Septimus, the outcast, has tried repeatedly to make sense of the world around him in the same metaphorical language. Moreover the text gestures towards this possibility. Just after the second passage that I have quoted, Septimus overhears Edgar Watkins commenting on the car in the same fashion as the narrator in the preceding paragraph. Septimus certainly refuses to view this unity as beneficial. As he notices "this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre" (21), he dreads that everything may be "about to burst into flames" (21). Considering Septimus as the focalizer here makes the social criticism in this passage harsher than the criticism offered by the internal narrator, but also easier to dismiss, for Septimus' observations belong to madness.

The internal narrator undercuts the external narrator's indictment of the supremacy of Clarissa's class by implicitly offering other possibilities. Clarissa might be conscious of her own privilege and, in this realization, challenge the dominant discourse of her class. The working class, represented by Miss Pym and Septimus, might also offer passive resistance against the governing class.

[5] Arguing along the same lines, DiBattista explains that the scene of the commercial skywriting, another sign of Britain being a consumer society, gives the characters a false sense of community and spiritual importance and that "only the fact-recording, determinedly naturalistic side of the narrative mind resists" this "communal rite of transfiguration" (108).

These two other readings need not supplant our first interpretation. If anything, they add optimism to the social satire. But they also warn us that the text does not express this hope straightforwardly because it distrusts its own ideal of spiritual communion, as well as its own status of privilege.

I want to look at one final example to illustrate the role of the internal narrator in the text's treatment of its working-class characters. The party starts with Lucy's praise of the beauty of the house and of the guest's manners and clothes. At best, Woolf is giving an implicit critique of working-class false consciousness. At worst, the text can seem to glamourize working-class life and to erase the economic conflict between the oppressed and the governing classes. But the internal narrator gives us the alternative possibility of reading the following passage as a bold critique of Clarissa by one of her servants.

> "How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to every one. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst—effusive, insincere. It was a great mistake to have come. He should have read his book, thought Peter Walsh; should have gone to a music hall; he should have stayed home, for he knew no one. (254)

The external narrator informs the reader six sentences into the paragraph that these thoughts are Peter's, whose criticism of Clarissa's worldliness had been introduced earlier in the novel. But the external narrator's delayed announcement of the focalizer entitles the reader to attribute these thoughts to a servant, at least until the narrator contradicts the reader's first impression. The preceding paragraph indeed records a servant's admiring observations of the manners of Mr Wilkins, the master of ceremony.

> And then Lady Lovejoy stiffened. "Lady and Miss Lovejoy," she said to Mr Wilkins (hired for parties). He had an admirable manner, as he bent and straightened himself, bent and straightened himself and announced with perfect impartiality "Lady and Miss Lovejoy . . . Sir John and Lady Needham . . . Miss Weld . . . Mr. Walsh." His manner was admirable; his family life must be irreproachable, except that it seemed impossible that a being with greenish lips and shaven cheeks could ever have blundered into the nuisance of children. (254)

The consciousness from which these thoughts originate remains anonymous but Lucy is the most probable candidate. Only a servant would be in awe of the master of ceremony. Moreover, information such as "hired for parties" proves that the focalizer belongs to the house and pays particular attention to the effectiveness of the service. (I will also argue below that Clarissa could be the focalizer in this paragraph.) Finally, the paragraph ends on the less than sympathetic remark that the doorman's concern with respectability must have prevented him from dabbling in procreation. The spatial and temporal continuity but also the similarity of tone between the two paragraphs allow the reader to consider that the same focalizer shapes the two paragraphs. In this case, the criticism of Clarissa takes a whole new significance. If Lucy describes Clarissa in such unflattering words, she proves herself capable of an inde-

pendent opinion. If this servant sees through Clarissa's conceit, she also despises the occupations and lives of the dominant class because she perceives that these people's pleasures and interests are artificial and meaningless. Miss Kilman had introduced this note of contempt earlier in the novel. Next to Peter's critique, the text therefore tentatively opens a space of resistance for the unprivileged.

Halfway through the paragraph, though, the external narrator encourages the reader to reassess his/her first impression and credit the attack to Peter. His disapproval of Clarissa similarly reveals Woolf's ability to understand her main spokesperson's snobbishness. But Clarissa's and the narrator's comments on Peter's own position of privilege and egocentricity render his attack less threatening. Because Peter belongs to the governing class, his accusations remain isolated. His protestations prove that the upper-class has to meet resistance from some of its own members, but they do not suggest that the dominant class is losing power. The servant's voice then only lingers as a frustrated possibility or a stifled threat.

As I suggested earlier, Clarissa might also have focalized the observation of Mr Wilkins. As a hostess concerned with her party, she may be expected to keep an eye on the service. In addition, the next paragraph begins with her own voice so that the narrator could have quite naturally turned to her internal voice in the next sentence. Clarissa, conscious of Peter's earlier critiques, despairs at recognizing, in her own voice, Peter's accusation of insincerity. Looking at Peter's expression, she imagines what he might think. At the end of the paragraph she then agrees with him, "he should have stayed at home," and she understands that the real motivation for his regret is that "he knew no one."

To use Dorrit Cohn's terminology, the following paragraph begins with the external narrator's "psycho-narration" (14) of Clarissa's consciousness. The following sentences therefore go to Clarissa.

> Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure, Clarissa felt in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there apologising for his wife who had caught cold at the Buckingham Palace garden party. She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, there, in that corner. Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson! It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself, exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticise? (254–55)

Peter's silent challenge pressures Clarissa to justify herself. The last sentences may confirm the notion that Clarissa put the words of the preceding paragraph into Peter's mouth. Without pronouncing a word, Peter and Clarissa can predict each other's thoughts and, as a consequence, their voices are almost interchangeable.

Finally, the text accepts yet another interpretation although this is not one that it encourages. The internal narrator does not have his own voice and psycho-narration is therefore not a possibility. Theoretically, no sign in the text rejects the possibility of Peter as a focalizer. As the highly emotional quality of Clarissa's language subjects her to mockery, Peter could be impersonating Clarissa in the first half of the paragraph and then more openly predicting the result of her dishonesty: "Might it consume her anyhow!" Clarissa's self-offering then becomes a punishment.[6] "These things" has no clear referent. Clarissa probably alludes to the risk of throwing parties whereas Peter hints at the vanity behind the alleged purpose for her parties. Peter's impersonation also introduces the possibility of understanding Clarissa's simple acceptance of Lord Lexham's presence at the "Buckingham Palace garden party" as an ironic emphasis on Clarissa's unawareness of her privileged position. Finally, several critics have commented that Clarissa's rejection of Ellie proves her snobbishness. In the next paragraph we learn indeed that Ellie is not so dull as she is poor. Here again if we allow Peter to pose as Clarissa, he puts an ironic emphasis on her lack of sympathy for Ellie.[7] Certainly Peter is not the most probable candidate as a focalizer here but, once again, my point is that the ambivalence of the text opens a space for irony and criticism against Clarissa's social class.

This interplay of interpretive possibilities shows the measure of Woolf's dilemma. By adopting a realist narrator, she can openly produce a social satire of the governing class but can only do so from her own position of privilege. She can have Peter criticize Clarissa and *vice versa* but she cannot show the fissures that the working class creates within the dominant discourse. It is relevant that Woolf praises Joyce for breaking with novelistic conventions but deplores the fact that, reading Joyce, "we feel neither jovial, nor magnanimous, but centred in a self which despite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond" (qtd. in DiBattista 98). Woolf knows that, from that position, she cannot completely transcend her own limitations.

In addition to her omniscient narrator, she therefore uses an internal narrator that produces an impression of immediacy between the narrator and the characters. Thanks to this device, the text tolerates alternative interpretations. It enables the characters to dialogue with each other, and with the external narrator, without the supervision of the latter. Bakhtin describes this narrative device as "a dialogue [that] is played out between the narrator and his characters—not a dramatic dialogue broken up into statement-and-response, but

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[6] For Henke, the passage links Clarissa to Septimus. Both want to offer their lives to save/help humankind (142). Peter's prediction of punishment matches this reading. Crucifixion is for some a punishment and for others a voluntary surrender.

[7] The paragraph directly following this one is devoted to Ellie. Interestingly, the first sentence could be Ellie's or Clarissa's, which ironically questions the difference of character (so vehemently stressed by Clarissa) between the two women.

that special type of novelistic dialogue that realizes itself within the boundaries of constructions that externally resemble monologues" (320). Thus, behind the external narrator's monologue around the Prime Minister's car incident might hide Septimus' voice. Behind Peter's attacks against Clarissa might lurk Lucy's accusations.

The juxtaposition of two modes of narration therefore constitutes not a failure but a strategy. Mezei, drawing on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and focusing on free indirect discourse, contends that "the narrator mediates between an author who may possess radical and controversial views (on sex, class and propriety) and a potentially conservative and disapproving audience" (70). The fact that the external narrator overshadows the working-class voice can confirm Woolf's self-censorship, but it can also be understood as an indication that Woolf is struggling to overcome the limitations of her own social criticism.

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