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WOMEN IN THE CITY: FEMALE FLÂNERIE AND THE MODERN URBAN
IMAGINATION

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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My dissertation follows the trajectory of female flânerie in women's writing from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. I analyze the transformations of female urban subjectivity in the works of Charlotte Brontë, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys, and Virginia Woolf. These writers imagine female characters and narrators as urban subjects whose sense of self develops in the dangerous and attractive spaces of the modern city. I target those moments in which female flâneurs collapse the perceptual distance between themselves and the city so that their imagination fuses with urban space.

In my first chapter, I explain the concept of the flâneur as an urban walker and spectator, a central figure in urban modernity. I trace the transformations of the female flâneur in the urban culture of spectacle, and underscore the indispensable role of the flâneuse for modernist literary experimentation. In the second chapter on Brontë's *Villette* (1853), I focus on the heroine's struggle for independence and agency as an urban spectator. Next I treat Katherine Mansfield's short story, "The

Tiredness of Rosabel” (1918), and Jean Rhys’s novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), showing how these writers employ the flâneuse’s subjective fragmentation in order to imagine a new urban self that opens toward urban space. My study culminates with the analysis of Woolf’s writing, especially “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown (1923), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), in which she moves beyond the conventions of realism to emphasize the contingency and mystery of city life. Her characters and narrators come to life only in urban exchanges. Drawing on this kind of reciprocity between the flâneuse and the city, I argue that Woolf breaks new ground in articulating a provisional kind of collectivity between urban dwellers that becomes a base for future women’s writing.

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Chapter 1

Women in the City: Female Flânerie and the Modern Urban Imagination

The flâneuse is a significant and manifold literary figure. As an urban spectator and peregrinator, she appears in various modalities in literature written by women who saw in the urban experience possibilities for envisioning a new kind of woman and a new kind of writing. In the following chapters, I focus on writers of the nineteenth to the twentieth century who deploy this figure in order to express and give shape to new forms of women's subjectivity in the modern city. Exploring works of Charlotte Brontë, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys, and Virginia Woolf, I show how the female flâneurs in these fictions, as they emerge from the constraints of the domestic sphere, contest and re-draw the border between the observer and the observed, individual and collective identity, and private and public space in city life. In so doing, I will show that these figures suggest a revised understanding of the ways in which modern subjectivity—and particularly modern female subjectivity—came into being.

My critical approach builds on the work of Anne Friedberg, Rachel Bowlby, Deborah Parsons, and Deborah Nord who explored in some detail the ways in which modern women artists recognized and embraced the enormous transformative potential of urban experience. My project takes a closer focus: I analyze how women writers articulate the specificity of female flânerie. The writers I examine depict the flâneuse in contingent, open-ended encounters with urban space, in which she is challenged to imagine her subjectivity anew, as she negotiates the danger of fragmentation on the one hand and her affiliation with the city crowd on the other. In contrast to a typical male flâneur, who remains detached in order to keep his boundaries intact, the flâneuse in these

provocative encounters risks the dissolution of the boundaries of her individual subjectivity, and in negotiating that risk fashions a new dialogical understanding of her self and its relation to the world. I argue that these women writers thus expand our understanding of flânerie well beyond its conventional definition as a practice of solitary walking and detached observation. Instead, they develop flânerie as a multidirectional dialogue between one's self and urban space, forging in this process a crucial model for subjectivity in the modern world.

I will begin with Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), in which one finds a telling early depiction of women's experiences with modern urban spectatorship. Paying special attention to a short episode describing the heroine's brief visit to London as a crucial turning point of the narrative, I will analyze Brontë's use of flânerie as a destabilizing experience that enacts a fundamental transformation in Lucy Snowe's outlook and vision, enabling her for the first time to envision an independent future. Typically, however, this transformation is harrowing, often impaired by fatigue, anxiety, and even hallucinations. The image of female subjectivity offered by *Villette* implies that women's progress into the public sphere will be an uncertain one and without guarantees. Nonetheless, one finds in *Villette* a resonant treatment of women's encounters with modern urban space, and one that suggests already the characteristic outlines of the female flâneur whose subjectivity is open to encounters with the unknown and thus ready for radical transformation. In this novel, moreover, Brontë complicates the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* by connecting the heroine's movement from the home to the city and her subsequent transformation to her specific struggle to resist gender biases and gain spectatorial agency in the culture of spectacle—in short, to find her own terms of looking.

The new forms of agency toward which Brontë gestures in *Villette* become more prominent in the twentieth century, and in my second chapter I examine a cluster of modernist writers' treatments of the female flâneur. Katherine Mansfield's short story, "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (1907), and Jean Rhys's novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), explore opportunities as well as limits in the liberating potential of the city. These writers strive to renew women's agency when the modern metropolis forestalls the kind of changes that Brontë envisioned. Mansfield and Rhys render the subjectivities of their protagonists as permeable to public space and receptive to change. The agency of their protagonists, however, wavers according to stimulating or stifling urban space. Thus Mansfield's heroine Rosabel is a shop assistant who gains freedom to walk and work in the city but simultaneously falls into the trap of prescribed romantic and consumerist fantasies. Mansfield shows how the economic and gender status that shape the flâneuse's relationship to the city also determine her inner mental space. While Rosabel's innocent daydreams turn into nightmares, it is also possible to see the creativity of Rosabel's imagination as offering some hope for her future.

Rhys takes up the figure of a marginalized, disadvantaged, and mentally unstable flâneuse and yet draws on the creative moments of her imagination. As Rhys explores destabilizing moments in the city, she experiments with turning the fragments of the city into the fragments of the self. Indeed, Rhys's turning of the external world into the internal space of Sasha's mind is crucial to the novel's meaning. Rhys coins a new term, a "film-mind," to describe Sasha's rapidly forming cinematic imagination that projects the fragments of the self into new interactions with the city, as well as internalizing the city in her inner mental space. I argue that as the novel proceeds, this process intensifies

to the degree that Sasha ceases to function as a character with a conventional identity and instead gains new life as a self situated solely in the present moment. Thus rather than lamenting the story's unfortunate development toward Sasha's downfall, I propose a focus on the mobility and creativity of Sasha's "film-mind." This alternative vision of the self in the city is legible in Rhys's experimental narrative style that parts with conventional temporality and expresses the creative, even playful workings of the flâneurial mind that expands and takes shape in each moment anew.

In my next chapter, I move to Virginia Woolf's creative handling of this kind of interactive flânerie, in which the flâneuse draws on the vortex of urban life. For Woolf, the blurring of the boundary between the observer and the observed becomes a principal strategy of her modern experimental writing. Chapter Four explores how Woolf's essays "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923) establish the narrator as a flâneuse whose experiences with anonymous urban crowds become points of departure from which the narrative and the narrator herself unfold. The kind of writing that emerges out of urban encounters fosters a sense of community within public space and resists closure, as Woolf demonstrates in her story "An Unwritten Novel" (1920). Destabilizing so radically the boundaries between self and other, Woolf, more than Mansfield or Rhys, moves toward a collective urban subjectivity. Woolf's essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" (1927) is a prime example of the flâneurial mind that becomes identical with the creative mind of a writer who temporarily loses her realistic self in order to absorb city life as inspiration. The oscillation between the "I" and "we" in this essay suggests that individuality surfaces from the crowd while simultaneously remaining an integral part of it. A fitting term that we can use for such a new, semi-

collective identity is “self in company.” It describes the flâneurial mind that is neither separate from the city, nor dissolved in it completely. Woolf’s Clarissa Dalloway, for example, is both a part of and apart from the crowd. If she is seen as a “self in company” and not only as an individual literary character, Clarissa can be seen as rejuvenated by the city in contrast to her singular loneliness inside her home. Similarly, we may consider *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) as suggesting to future women artists a turn to the city for inspiration as well as for company. *A Room* valorizes public space and complicates private space. Although the narrator is driven out of the university library, she turns her outsider status to an advantage; the position “without” enables her to think outside of established institutions and securities. Similarly, a private room of one’s own is not just a separate space inside the house but one that crucially opens onto the street. The open window lends itself as a metaphor for Woolf’s own perspective on writing, opening out on the world outside and at the same time connecting the writer to the company of future and past women artists.

The Tradition of the Flâneur

The tradition of observing and interpreting the city is a long one.¹ The revival of the Theophrastian character books in the seventeenth century marks the need of readers to taxonomize urban crowds.² A similar need to understand the public sphere appears in the eighteenth-century periodicals, such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s *The Spectator* (1711-1714), in which, as Jürgen Habermas puts it, “the public held up a mirror to itself” (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 43).³ However, it is only in the nineteenth century, the century of industrial growth and the ensuing expansion of

cities and urban culture, that the experience of the flâneur as a register of modern urban life and a representative of urban modernity becomes a dominant literary motif.⁴ As Raymond Williams says, “City experience was now becoming so widespread, and writers, disproportionately, were so deeply involved in it, that there seemed little reality in any other mode of life; all sources of perception seemed to begin and end in the city, and if there was anything beyond it, it was also beyond life” (*The Country and the City* 235).

The flâneur was most famously described in the middle of the nineteenth century by Charles Baudelaire. In his essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire defines modernity as newness and the flâneur as a modern artist who searches for it.⁵ He finds the best example in the painter Constantin Guys who goes to the city to seek modernity unlike other artists who go to museums to study tradition.⁶ The flâneur is traditionally defined precisely by this constant search for the part of life that is in flux and has not been ossified, for the modernity that Baudelaire defines as “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable” (12).

Our contemporary understanding of the flâneur also stems from the works of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin identifies the flâneur in the writers of feuilletons of the 1840’s, and in Baudelaire himself, a walker “who goes botanizing on the asphalt” but who is also a poet, an artistic consciousness immersed in city life (“The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” 36). Especially in the unfinished collection of essays, *The Arcades Project* (1927 - 1939), Benjamin presents this nineteenth-century figure as crucial for understanding twentieth century modern life. For Benjamin, the flâneur represents a lens to examine the manifold phenomena of modernity such as consumerism,

the culture of spectacle, mass culture and the growth of mass media, but also individual alienation and the feeling of loneliness in the crowd. In sum, Benjamin appoints the flâneur as a figure representing modernism itself.⁷

Within this tradition, flânerie is gendered as male. When Raymond Williams describes the literature of the nineteenth century as the literature of the city, stating that the “perception of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets,” he has a male artist in mind (*The Country and the City* 233).⁸ The gendering of flânerie reflects the gendering of social space into private and public. Women’s “proper” sphere was conventionally considered to be private, an assumption that corresponded to rigid gender stereotypes: a domestic, virtuous woman was always protected from the street, in contrast to a prostitute who was tainted by it.

Like the privilege of undisturbed strolling, the advantage of undisturbed looking was also gender-specific. In public space gendered as a male domain, men could exercise the privilege of unrestricted flânerie. The flâneur thus stands on a social pedestal. He is “a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito,” enjoying his “pleasures” that are “to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world” (Baudelaire 9).⁹ However, women could hardly exercise this incognito. The scopic regime of the culture of spectacle that renders men as subjects of looking simultaneously marginalizes women as mere objects of the male gaze. Thus in the urban culture of the nineteenth century where the male flâneur thrives, unchaperoned women, immediately taken for prostitutes because of their exposure to the male gaze in the streets, could not claim the same kind of freedom. It comes as no surprise that some women artists, like

George Sand or Flora Tristan, resorted to wearing male clothing.¹⁰ The incognito of male gender was a necessary prerequisite to becoming spectators and experiencing modernity from the same perspective as men.

The Debate on the Flâneuse

From the perspective of women's difficult access to public space, the wish to become a flâneuse, a woman spectator in search of modernity, appears as an endeavor bordering on the impossible. Therefore, some feminist critics hold that a woman could not be a flâneuse. Griselda Pollock argues that women could hardly engage in flânerie because they were always "positioned as the *object* of the flâneur's gaze" (*Vision and Difference* 71).¹¹ In "The Invisible *Flâneuse*," Janet Wolff sees the problem even more radically, stating that in the discourse on modernism that privileges the male perspective and sees public space gendered as male, the female experience is completely erased. Wolff then concludes that in such biased discourse, the flâneuse is simply "invisible."¹²

Other critics, however, contend that given the rapid industrial growth and the modernization of life in nineteenth-century industrial cities, public space was rapidly becoming more inclusive of women and that this process of inclusion produced female spectators. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, Judith R. Walkowitz describes the emergence of new social roles for women in rapidly growing industrial cities such as London. Walkowitz terms these women "new social actors" who claimed public space as shop assistants, factory workers, or Salvation Army activists, simultaneously becoming new spectators of urban life (41).¹³

Although still marginalized in most social spaces, such as the street itself, women were evidently more welcomed in others, such as the department store. Feminist critics such as Rachel Bowlby and Anne Friedberg celebrate the new culture of spectacle that drew crowds of both men and women, rendering them as spectators regardless of their gender. Bowlby and Friedberg stress the role of consumerism in the formation of the female urban spectator because it encouraged the activities so far restrained by the domestic ideal of femininity. Allured by the consumerist spectacle, women could elope from dreary domesticity. They were encouraged to walk to the stores and within them, to stroll and observe freely and exercise buying power. Thus going shopping represented a new adventure for women, almost an alternate love affair. Bowlby suggests that in the department store, women could become flâneurs, “just looking,” finally playing an active role, “one role almost never theirs in actual prostitution: that of consumer” (*Just Looking* 11). While the consumer culture restrained the typical male flâneur who felt that commercialized urban space failed to stimulate him, the flâneuse gained freedom there because the same kind of space liberated her from domesticity and represented newness that she had never experienced or explored before.

These critics move beyond a narrow understanding of flânerie as only a male experience and of the flâneur as only a male type. They recognize that the term flâneuse invites an analysis of how women not only extended the term but also co-produced it by creating their own version of urban life. Walkowitz points out that women’s contribution to our understanding of modern public space lies precisely in their effort to re-imagine it: “In their moves around the city, these new explorers drew on the well-established repertoire of the urban flâneur, imaginatively revamping certain features of urban

spectatorship to accommodate their own social circumstances” (41). Deborah Nord, interested in similar questions of women’s imagination, asks: “If the rambler was a man, and if one of the primary tropes of his urban description was the woman of the streets, could there have been a *female* spectator or a vision of the urban panorama crafted by a female imagination? And if such a vision were possible, under what conditions and with what distinctive features might it have been created?” (*Walking the Victorian Streets* 3). Nord’s analysis of nineteenth-century literature by women shows the specificity of their own, unique experience, different from men’s. Therefore, feminist critics have understandably turned to mapping and analyzing the multiple, situated, and particular instances of women’s urban presence. Even Wolff, who famously argues that women’s experience is invisible in the discourse of modernity (especially if the *flâneuse* is understood as a mere mirror image of the *flâneur*, except that she is going shopping), adds that “women become entirely visible in their own particular practices and experiences in the modern city” (*AngloModern* 85).

Flânerie as Imagination

I am interested in female *flânerie* precisely because of its potential to produce a new kind of imagination. However, I focus both on the mapping of individual experiences of female *flânerie* and on the working of the urban imagination itself. In the texts that I analyze, walking and observation always go hand in hand with imagination. In this respect, I draw on Friedberg’s analysis that shows how in the culture of spectacle, the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* are primarily imagining subjectivities. Thus besides women’s newly gained mobility in the streets and agency as consumers, Friedberg underlines the

power of new spaces of spectacle, such as the department store, to mobilize imagination. Equating shopping with “philosophical speculation,” she argues: “To shop is to muse in the contemplative mode, an activity that combines diversion, self-gratification, expertise, and physical activity” (*Window Shopping* 57). Flânerie thus takes on a different meaning: it does not just mean to observe the “real” world, or even the displayed object in a shop window, but instead to imagine oneself to be transformed. Friedberg speaks of the “imaginary *flânerie* through an imaginary elsewhere and an imaginary elsewhere” (2). Friedberg thus refuses to see a spectator as a merely passive consumer, suggesting that the spectator can re-imagine his or her self by being imaginatively transported beyond the actual “real” time and place. While this consumerist fantasy can represent merely another form of entrapment in mass-produced, prefabricated images, the mobilization of imagination nevertheless opens new imaginative vistas and thus new possibilities for change. This kind of potential for change is an important premise of my study. Besides examining the flâneuse’s imagination ignited by the spectacle of public life, the center of Friedberg’s analysis, I also examine the flâneuse in a variety of other, perhaps less usual encounters, both grand and subtle, such as with disenfranchised urban dwellers, with the mirages of her past life and future hopes, with the city “music,” with its joys and disappointments, and even with its ghosts.

The perspective on flânerie as a reciprocal mode of being in the city is crucial to my study. I take reciprocity, manifesting itself in various relationships between the flâneur (male or female) and the city, between the observer and observed, as a prerequisite for the emergence of the modern urban imagination. Even Baudelaire emphasizes reciprocity as the major characteristic of flânerie. He defines the flâneur as

“an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’” (10). According to Baudelaire, this relationship may seem one-directional, that is, flowing from the “I” to the “non-I” only (the observer has “an appetite” for the observed), thus leaving the “I” intact. However, the following examples from the texts by Edgar Allan Poe as well as Baudelaire himself show that this flow is far more complicated. Their male flâneurs are not immune to the transformative effects of the urban imagination. They are unable to maintain a comfortable distance from the observed, thus destabilizing their subjectivity. The observing “I” in their texts becomes exposed to the “non-I” in such a way that the assumed distance between them diminishes or even disappears.

In Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), the boundaries between the observer and the observed become blurred and subjectivity more fluid. The flâneur, who is also the narrator, becomes obsessed with a passer-by who does not fit into his catalogue of familiar types. Previously priding himself on sharp skills of crowd-reading, he now finds no clues pointing to the stranger’s identity. The more he fails to explain the stranger, the more the stranger fascinates him. The flâneur pursues him around the city, which escalates into a frenzied, hallucinatory wandering. In this moment of intense fascination with the “non-I,” the flâneur loses his sense of self. His “I” becomes temporarily suspended. However, he also feels the need to protect himself from the disturbing impact of the “non-I,” which in this case stands for urban multiplicity: “‘This old man,’ I said at length, ‘is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds’” (481). By restoring his distance from the man of the crowd, and thus from the crowd itself, the flâneur restores his “I.” He manages to contain this

threatening experience by negating it. He laments, “it [the mystery] does not permit itself to be read” (475). He thus maintains his own singular self, his distant perspective, and by the same token, his sanity. From this singular, safe, and all-knowing point of view, however, it is impossible for him to keep “reading” the city. The boundaries of his subjectivity prevent him from continuing the exploration of the urban mystery.

Baudelaire’s short prose-poem “Windows” from his collection *Paris Spleen* (1869) shows a similar fascination with the city, in which the flâneur’s “I” is not only colored by the “non-I” but completely determined by it. For Baudelaire, this moment also works as the origin of the flâneur’s narrative and its driving force. As the flâneur observes an anonymous woman in a window and starts telling the story of his exchange with the observed, the ‘non-I,’ we learn that the window is closed. This means that the flâneur’s observation is filtered through the barrier of glass and thus invites fiction: “Out of her face, her dress and her gestures, out of practically nothing at all, I have made up this woman’s story, or rather legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself and weep” (77). The flâneur’s observation is thus indistinguishable from imagination: “Looking from outside into an open window one never sees as much as when one looks through a closed window” (77). It can be said that the imagination ignited by the city is even more important for the flâneur than realistic observation: “Perhaps you will say ‘Are you sure your story is the real one?’ But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?” (77). Thus Baudelaire’s flâneur derives his sense of self from his imaginative engagement with the city. When he says, “And I go to bed proud to have lived and to have suffered in some one besides myself,” he uses imagination to construct his subjectivity outside the original boundaries

of his “I” (77). In this way, his “I” is constructed “beside himself,” that is, only in relation to the “non-I.”

The flâneur’s “I” becomes implicated in the story of the “non-I,” but he finally turns his attention away from the observed window toward himself. Thus on the one hand, it is only through the relation to the “non-I” that he can imagine his story. He writes himself into his own story—indeed, he writes himself as his own story since he seems to only exist there, in the fictional space of his own making, the space that is defined and delineated by the urban encounter. Without this encounter, there would be no story to tell and the flâneur’s new, fictional “I” could not be born in it. On the other hand, the flâneur’s story is finally only about this “I.” After his encounter with the “non-I,” the flâneur walks away from it. His story thus does not continue with any further destabilization of flâneur’s “I” but instead ends once he feels content to have finally found “who [he is] and what [he is].”

Thus Poe’s and Baudelaire’s flâneurs are not only involved in but also transformed by urban encounters no matter how much they might resist this process in order to preserve this detachment. They are observers of the city as well as of the changes that happen to them on the way. Importantly, these texts portray the flâneur in the process of change, defining him by the destabilization of his “I” in response to the “non-I” and thus they emphasize the intertwined processes of the solidification of his subjectivity and its simultaneous dissolution, the opening up of subjectivity to the uncertainty, unpredictability and contingency entailed in the experience of the city. Moreover, they significantly link this destabilization to the formation of the new urban imagination and art emerging from the modern city.

Female Flânerie as Transformation

Such transformative encounters between the “I” and “the non-I” are crucial in the texts by women writers that I examine. In them, the modern urban imagination unfolds once the observer and the observed interact. However, I see an important difference in how Brontë, Mansfield, Rhys, and Woolf treat these interactions, especially the moment of destabilization of the flâneuse’s “I.” These writers embrace the possibilities of change that the street offers in contrast to the male writers who strive, even if unsuccessfully, to contain these changes in order to preserve the flâneur’s detachment from the street. Women writers use the shifts and changes that the flâneuse experiences in the city in order to challenge the boundaries of individual subjectivity and redefine it in terms of its fluidity and in relation to the unknown, unfamiliar, and unexpected. Furthermore, the possibility of transformation has an irresistible appeal for them; it charges their imagination and works as an invitation to adventure and creativity.

My analysis of female flânerie is thus not based solely on the difference between male and female flâneurs in terms of their asymmetrical access to the public sphere, but on their different approach to urban transformation. Specifically, I see the difference in the next step that they take after the “I” clashes with the “non-I.” While the male flâneurs resist the possible dissolution of the “I,” female flâneurs explore it further, seeking in it a new opportunity for transforming their lives. While Poe’s and Baudelaire’s flâneurs tame the wildness of their urban encounters, restoring their selves to their original boundaries as they conclude on the note of stability and certainty about themselves, the female flâneurs leave all certainty. They seek the world beyond the “I,” asking where their imagination may take them next. Although it often means risking their sanity, they

question their subjectivity and expose their “I” to further negotiations. Flânerie leads them to the unknown territory beyond the certainties of domestic space and beyond prescribed scripts of romance or consumer fantasies. As they move beyond the boundaries of the self that is conventionally constructed through these forces of social stasis, they explore new possibilities for their imagination and thus new horizons and new visions of their lives.¹⁴

For women, stepping into public space outside of the confined space of their homes is an adventure new in kind. The experience of urban modernity is thus not only different for women but, because of its newness, it is also more transformative. The destabilizing space outside of the home can be threatening, but it can also be engaging and empowering. This underlying dynamic between danger and excitement is apparent from the very beginning of women’s mass entrance into public space in the nineteenth century. Charlotte Brontë’s correspondence contains a fascinating and revealing passage about her 1851 visit to London’s Crystal Palace: “It is a wonderful place—vast, strange, new, and impossible to describe” (Wise 3: 243). This sentence is striking by its number of qualifiers—not only is the Palace “wonderful,” but also “vast, strange, new,” even “impossible to describe.” These words are amassed and displayed as Brontë strives to capture her impression of the spectacular assemblage of exhibits and spectators from all over the world that produced the extraordinary sensory stimulation typical of the culture of spectacle. Fascinated by it, Brontë writes that her experience of the grand exhibition remains beyond the scope of a satisfactory rendition, “impossible to describe.” Nevertheless, this sentence also exposes Brontë’s aspiration to find adequate words for

this new experience of modernity: despite the proclaimed impossibility of describing it faithfully, she describes it anyway.

The complexity of women's relation to urban space, manifested in Brontë's passage, corresponds to the complexity of women's relation to modernity itself. In my view, women's experience of modernity is characterized by the tension detectable in Brontë's words, one between taking up a new challenge and the difficulty of its realization. But Brontë's sentence also reveals a surprising sense of lightness, quite incommensurate with woman's restrained step into a territory that is not her own, a hurried step of a solitary female walker vulnerable to the dangers of the streets. Instead, there is a sense of the excitement of exploring new public spaces, experiencing new adventures, creating a new kind of art.

It can be said that the story of women's adventure in the city only begins after they take the risk of leaving the safety net of convention, whether it is the home, the self, or the narrative form that requires a happy ending. This is what Brontë, Mansfield, Rhys, and Woolf, writers otherwise very diverse, have in common. In different ways they all emphasize the moments of uncertainty and yet approach the encounter with the unknown as a positive force. They embrace the destabilizing power of the city because it is the power that opens new possibilities of imagining and writing. They approach the possibility of self-dissolution, imminent in each urban encounter, as an opportunity for taking the next imaginative step. No matter how difficult, challenging, and complex this task is, they nevertheless show that *flânerie* enables a new, modern way of being in the world.

My dissertation attempts to show how the urban imagination that emerges in Brontë's writing is realized and proliferates in Mansfield's, Rhys's, and finally Woolf's fiction. For all these writers, the encounter with the city continues to work as a premise for claiming new kinds of subjectivity for women and thus new kinds of freedom. However, this is not a finished project. These writers leave gaps and ambiguities in their writing to accentuate the recurrent motif of new beginnings. They offer no final vision but only multiple possibilities of what can happen. In this way, their heroines are not and cannot be circumscribed by a single route. Their lives continue to be subject to negotiation.

Withholding finite endings may also indicate these writers' belief that the lives of enlightened women seeking self-determination in a constraining society will always make only imperfect storylines, as failures and unanswered questions necessarily accompany their agency and independence. This incompleteness, however, is hardly a flaw. Neither one person's lifespan, nor the span of a novel, nor the span of any one generation of women artists, can be adequate for completing this long journey. The open-endedness of the process rather testifies to the unstoppable imaginative mobility that women writers as well as their protagonists continue to find in their relationship to the city.

Notes

¹ The flâneur developed within different national literatures where he took a multitude of forms. Characteristic features of the flâneur can be found in a range of types from the dandy to the social investigator, such as Charles Booth (*Life and Labour of the People in London* 1884 - 1891) or Henry Mayhew (*London Labour and the London Poor* 1861-2) who recorded the extraordinarily multifaceted population of London. Another narrator-as-flâneur can be seen in Charles Dickens' *Sketches by Boz* (1836). In German literature, the short story "My Cousin's Corner Window" (1822) by E.T.A. Hoffmann describes an invalid artist who feels rejuvenated by observing the hustle and bustle in the town market from his private window. In French literature, the most famous flâneurs before Baudelaire were the eighteenth-century Louis Sébastien Mercier (*Tableau de Paris* 1781 – 1788) and Restif de la Bretonne (*Les Nuits de Paris* 1788 – 1794).

² In *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Dana Brand traces the origins of the flâneur back to the genre of the Theophrastian character books that thrived between the years 1614 – 1642. These books worked as "languages or as dictionaries" that helped to interpret the city (23). They supported the belief that "it is possible to determine the character and history of a stranger on the basis of nothing more than what can be observed during a typically brief and silent urban encounter . . ." (20). As an example, Brand features Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters* (1614). Overbury believed that a "trained observer" could decipher the "hieroglyphs" of characters who could be "understood as signs" (Brand 23).

³ The very titles of these periodicals imply that the mirroring of modern life is imagined as the task of an individual who is able to use the privilege of unencumbered access to the public sphere. However, free access to newly emerging public spaces, such as the coffeehouse, was not available to all members of the new bourgeois class. By being denied access to the place of the debate, women were excluded from the debate itself. Although the elite society of London and Paris frequented salons held by ladies of high social rank, the class-based exclusivity of these salons is not representative of women's experience of modernity. The vast majority of women were not able to attend either salons or coffeehouses. The social and political debate that mirrored and transformed the public sphere remained the domain of men. Habermas's model of the public sphere thus fails to account for those subjects present in the cities but not participating in the debate, and because it universalizes its subjects, it automatically excludes their differences. Interestingly, Habermas recognizes the exclusion of women from the public debate in the coffeehouses, stating that "the women of London society, abandoned every evening, waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution" (33). He cites an interesting 1674 pamphlet "The Women's Petition against Coffee, representing to Public Consideration of the Grand Inconveniencies according to their Sex from the Excessive use of that Drying, Enfeebling Liquor" (237). Michael Warner's essay "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject" is helpful for understanding how our imagination of public subjectivity erases each subject's "particularities of culture, race, and gender, or class" (377). Peter Sallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* shows how the development of the modern public sphere depends on the cleaning of its carnivalesque

aspect. The collection of essays *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere 1700 – 1830*, edited by Elizabeth Eger et al. sheds light on the complexity of women's exclusion from as well as transgression into public spaces.

⁴ Richard Sennett provides some illuminating statistics regarding the growth of London in the nineteenth century. The population of London in 1801 was 864, 845 while in 1891, it was 4,232,118 (*The Fall of Public Man* 132).

⁵ In "The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris," Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson provides information about the etymology of the word *flâneur*. She finds this word to designate the "bourgeois *flâneur*" in an anonymous pamphlet written in 1806 (26). She also mentions that the first recorded usage is from 1585 in Touraine and that the Norman word *flanner*, deriving from the old Scandinavian *flana* appears in 1645.

⁶ Guys (1802-92) drew sketches for the *Illustrated London News*. Baudelaire describes him as "a *man of the world*," one whose "interest is the whole world; he wants to know, understand and appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe" (7).

⁷ Benjamin also describes other urban types that represent modernity: the *bohème*, the provocateur, and the ragpicker. He considers them as the *flâneur*'s precursors.

⁸ Williams gives examples from the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, and Thompson, as well as from urban novelists, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, George Gissing, H.G. Wells, Honoré de Balzac, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Charles Baudelaire.

⁹ Similarly, Addison and Steele's literary persona of *The Spectator* prefers to remain anonymous, claiming: "Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species . . ." (4). He refuses to reveal his identity because "the being talked to" and "being stared at" is "the greatest Pain [he] can suffer" (6). Correspondingly, in *The Function of Criticism*, Terry Eagleton analyzes the development of the figure of the gentleman and critic who must constantly negotiate between his detachment from and insight into the masses.

¹⁰ Tristan described her use of incognito when observing London in *Promenades Dans Londres* (1840). See Deborah Nord's discussion of this strategy in *Walking the Victorian Streets*.

¹¹ In *Vision and Difference*, Griselda Pollock describes women's resistance to the male gaze in the works of women painters Mary Cassatt (1841-1896) and Berthe Morisot (1844 – 1926). Pollock argues that their resistance lies in their repositioning of gender in relation to space. These painters depict "spaces of femininity," private spaces or spaces in between the public and private, such as the balcony. Their "spaces of femininity are defined by a different organization of the look" (84). In their paintings, "femininity ceases to function primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze, but becomes the locus of relationships" (66). For example, examining Cassatt's painting *At the Opera* (1879), Pollock draws attention to the way the painting "juxtaposes two looks, giving

priority to that of the woman who is, remarkably, pictured actively looking” and even “does not return the [male] viewer’s gaze (75).

¹² Wolff’s essay “The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity” appeared in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. In another essay, Wolff complicates the division between the public and private sphere when she examines the life of a female painter, Gwen John. She says that this division is not always identical with the male/female binary and that gender identities were often transgressed, especially in artistic circles (“The Artist and the *Flâneur*: Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris”). Nevertheless, Wolff holds that although these boundaries were transgressed, they were not completely erased. Similar points about the invisibility of women’s experience in the discourse of modernity have also been made by Elizabeth Wilson in “The Invisible *Flâneur*” (1992) and *The Sphinx in the City* (1991).

¹³ Walkowitz includes more types of these new public agents, such as “the platform woman” or “the glorified spinster.” These androgynous types raised a high degree of public interest given to them in the press of the day. Walkowitz cites the article “The Glorified Spinster” from Macmillan’s Magazine (1888) that shows the characteristic features of this type of woman: “her agility in gaining the tops of omnibuses, her power of entering a tramcar without stopping the horses, her cool self-possession in a crowd, her utter indifference to weather, and it must be added, an undoubted disposition to exact her rights to the uttermost farthing” (63).

¹⁴ The urban milieu offers freedom from previous constraints, such as prescribed domesticity, but it does not always offer satisfactory alternatives. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, for example, describe predicaments of female development beyond the domestic space: “Women’s developmental tasks and goals, which must be realized in a culture pervaded by male norms, generate distinctive narrative tensions—between autonomy and relationship, separation and community, loyalty to women and attraction to men. The social constraints on female maturation produce other conflicts, not unique to female characters, but more relentless in women’s stories. Repeatedly, the female protagonist or *Bildungsheld* must chart a treacherous course between the penalties of expressing sexuality and suppressing it, between the costs of inner concentration and of direct confrontation with society, between the price of succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive ‘normality.’” (*The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* 12-13).

Chapter 2

The Flâneuse in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

In this chapter, I propose to look at Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette* as a fiction that represents a first step toward a woman's urban novel. In *Villette*, Brontë turns to the emergent culture of urban spectacle to create a new type of heroine, one whose subjectivity and development are shaped in important ways by her spectatorial encounters with the city. Based on Brontë's experience of living in Brussels during the 1840s, she creates in *Villette* a female *Bildungsroman*, in which the protagonist develops into a new kind of urban spectator, a woman whose sense of self is transformed by the paradigmatic (and paradigmatically male) mode of interaction with modern urban life, flânerie. Brontë's novel offers an early glimpse of women's struggle to become urban subjects, revealing a process not only liberatory but also taxing, threatening, and disorienting. While Lucy Snowe, the novel's protagonist and narrator, finally emerges as an empowered spectator, her journey is neither easy nor straight, offering only temporary plateaus of success in the often hostile environment of the city.

The novel showcases a wide array of forms of looking, ranging from private spying to observation of grand public spectacles, and including voyeurism, surveillance, and scientific examination. In this way, Brontë breaks the Victorian conventions of female observation. These conventions, as Elaine Showalter shows in *A Literature of Their Own*, assumed women to be naturally talented as "sharp-eyed observers of the social scene," where they could pursue in the comfort of a domestic environment their interest in "sentiment and romance" and their "natural taste for the trivial" (82). Lucy

becomes a different sort of observer, one who courageously sacrifices the certainty and comfort of a familiar domestic scene for the risks of observing the unfamiliar dangers of the city. In the face of these unknown threats Lucy repeatedly breaks down. The novel abounds in recurrent instances of physical and mental illness that impede her ability to judge and act. The problematic nature of Lucy's development reflects Brontë's pioneering effort to envision a heroine ahead of her time. Lucy's flânerie both advances and undermines her agency, but the very fact that she is constantly and actively engaged in these negotiations of spectatorial modes is a radical move on Brontë's part. Moreover, these negotiations eventually lead to transformation. Observation works for Lucy not only as private reverie but as a decisive force that propels her through her encounters with the new and the unfamiliar. Thus Lucy is a new character not only because she is an urban observer but because her observation generates mobility and change, effects that prove more valuable for the modern woman's development than the stasis of certainty, comfort, and convention.

As Richard Lehan and Raymond Williams have suggested, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the city thoroughly overshadows the country as a bearer of cultural power, becoming the pre-eminent space in which personal transformation can be realized and identity created.¹ Even by the 1850s, encounter with the city has become a requisite element in literary treatments of individual development, at least for male characters. This mid-nineteenth century shift toward an imperative of urban experience appears to have been rapid and decisive. In earlier literary treatments of individual development, the traditionally male nineteenth century hero, such as the poet of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805), narrativizes his experience of the urban as optional and

reversible, as only one element in a larger process of personal development. Once the hero's adventure in London turns too exhausting, threatening a too radical transformation, Wordsworth's persona finds his way back to the country, discarding his transformed subjectivity to restore himself within nature. In general terms, the city represented for early nineteenth century writers a dangerously potent yet still not definitive space of change.

By the second half of the century, however, urban experience gains privileged status, and transformation by the city becomes requisite rather than optional. Heroes who find themselves in the city are irrevocably transformed by it, and recourse to a refuge in nature or a return to the disappearing pre-industrial cultural spaces becomes increasingly less available. In the most dominant mid-nineteenth century literary renderings of individual development, such as those of Charles Dickens, urban experience seems imperative for effecting change in a protagonist's life and for forwarding the plot, and we find literary characters so inextricably linked to the city that it is impossible to imagine them in a different environment. In these narratives, subjectivity turns irreversibly urban.

Brontë's novel takes up this new model of urban transformation and simultaneously revises it, substituting a female protagonist for the predominantly male heroes of the *Bildungsroman* tradition and introducing problems that are unique to women's experience. Lucy Snowe joins the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* heroes who leave the country to be changed by the city, but unlike male heroes who enjoy the privilege of unencumbered access to the city and for whom the route to urban subjectivity and independence is typically linear and direct, Brontë's heroine finds access to city life difficult and dangerous. Her progress toward personal transformation unfolds erratically,

spiraling about its goal rather than moving steadily forward. In sharp contrast to narratives of male development, in which personal development is paired with the hero's acquisition of spectatorial skill and capacity, *Villette* highlights Lucy's human fallibilities, her hallucinations, misrecognitions, or errors of judgment. On her uncertain path of growth and change, Lucy strives to define herself anew by coming to terms with the public space and life of the city, but she finds her efforts repeatedly undermined and stymied by the difficulty and the threat of urban experience.

On the surface, the narrative traces a conventional story of development from childhood to young adulthood. *Villette* takes the form of a retrospective, first-person narrative of the life of Lucy Snowe—her childhood, her early employment as a nurse, her decision to visit London, travel and employment abroad, her encounter with romance and her decision to find her own path as a professional woman. However, at every point of change and decision, points that would be part of the expected path toward adulthood for a male protagonist, Lucy suffers uncertainty, social prohibition, and even hysteria and paranoia. While Lucy conquers these difficulties and moves to full autonomy in the end, Brontë shows the cost that this path extracts from her heroine.

The novel opens with Lucy's account of her childhood in the circle of the Brettons, her godmother's family, where she befriends two other children who re-appear later in the novel, Graham, the godmother's son, and a small girl, Polly. Later Lucy leaves the Brettons and works for several years as a nurse of an elderly and ailing lady, Miss Marchmont. After her employer's death, Lucy decides to venture to London, following an inner voice that tells her to "Leave this wilderness . . . and go out hence" (39). The voice that urges Lucy forward signals an imperative and radical inner drive for

autonomy that works against domestic confinement throughout the novel. It leads her first to the transformational space of London and then beyond to the Continent.

Lucy stays in London for only a few days. She enjoys walking alone in the city, impressed by its modernity, but soon, urged again toward the unpredictable, she decides to cross the Channel and start a new life on the Continent. Circumstances lead her to the French-speaking town of Villette in the country of Labassecour, probably representing Belgium. There Lucy spins into a vortex of new experiences. She finds employment in a boarding school for girls, Madame Beck's "Pensionnat de Demoiselles," where she struggles at first with a foreign language and culture but gradually becomes comfortable with her new profession. However, during the school vacation that Lucy must spend alone, her smooth adaptation comes to a halt. The solitude terrifies and paralyzes her. In a hallucinatory sequence, she sets out beyond the school's gates to roam through unfamiliar parts of Villette. The novel's first volume ends with this major psychological crisis, culminating in Lucy's loss of consciousness.

After her feverish wandering, Lucy awakens in "an unknown room in an unknown house," a scene that marks the beginning of Volume II (156). To her surprise, she is surrounded by familiar pieces of furniture that come from the Bretton house of her childhood, a fact explained by the move to the Continent of the Bretton family, including her godmother, Polly, and Graham, now calling himself Dr. John. To cure her "Hypochondria," Dr. John urges Lucy to explore Villette's public life. Surprisingly, Lucy flourishes as a *flâneuse*. She visits Villette's concerts, galleries, and theaters, where her observation is passionate and acute and she develops an independence of judgment, especially about her role as a woman, that leads her to renounce her secret romantic

interest in Dr. John and develop a new relationship with her colleague, Monsieur Paul Emanuel.

In the third and final volume of the novel, Lucy strengthens her position as a single, self-reliant woman who holds her own views of her place in the social world. Simultaneously, Lucy and Paul's relationship deepens as a consequence of Lucy's increased agency and her view of herself as an equal to Paul. However, Lucy's autonomy is challenged once again as she goes through another mental crisis caused by a dose of opium that she takes unknowingly. In this intoxicated, dream-like state, Lucy wanders through the city and sees it from a new perspective that upsets her stability. The effects of the drug and the city spectacle awaken her imagination but undermine her powers of judgment. In a state bordering on paranoia, Lucy learns of Paul's impending departure to the West Indies, an event that leaves Lucy alone once again. At the end of the novel, Lucy unexpectedly acquires an inheritance and decides to establish her own school, and she seems finally content with the outcome of her life. Brontë avoids the conventional happy ending of marriage by implying Paul's death and Lucy's independence.

We can see in the complicated process of Lucy's transformation from a domestic to an urban subject three successive stages that loosely correspond to the three volumes of the novel and define the imaginative positions that Brontë seems to suggest are paradigmatic of women's emergence from domestic space into public urban life. First, Lucy goes through a stage of fear and uncertainty that Brontë describes in Gothic terms, suggesting a tension experienced by women of Brontë's generation between a secure domestic space and the encounter with modern city life. Lucy feels that she is haunted by ghosts.² This Gothic anxiety and uncertainty accompany Lucy's struggle against the

forces of social stasis and domestic passivity, and while they expand her imagination, they also disturb her psychological stability.

The second stage of her development is marked by her overcoming of Gothic uncertainty. Upon the advice of Dr. John, Lucy wanders about the city, observes its spectacles and yields to its sensations. In her entrance into modernity, Lucy becomes part of modern urban spectatorship. However, she hesitates to embrace this socially structured and sanctioned way of seeing, in which a woman is forced to perceive herself as an object of visual scrutiny. Here, Brontë shows Lucy's engagement not with the earlier ghosts representing Gothic anxiety but with the visual regime of modern urban culture. Although she finally flourishes as a *flâneuse*, Lucy struggles with her marginal position as a spectator who can find no legitimate place within the culture of woman seen as spectacle.

The third stage of Lucy's transformation is portrayed as rebellion against the unfair terms of visual culture, and her pursuit of her own place in modernity. In this final stage, Lucy grapples with the complexity of being a woman in the city and negotiating a new female urban subjectivity as a response to it. She often falters, emerging as a *flâneuse* in rather disconcerting ways. Brontë renders this new female urban subjectivity as an imperfect, half-intoxicated state of self, reflecting the mixing of a new agency with the fear of leaving the secure shell of Victorian womanhood. Thus, the imperfect outline of a new subjectivity manifests itself in the moments of Lucy's indisposition; it appears on the horizon rather than in full view, on the periphery of the novel's vision rather than at its center.

As a female urban subject emerging in the pages of *Villette*, Lucy is characterized by imperfection, incompleteness, discontinuity, and mobility, the features that characterize the modern city itself. This experience of uncertainty and disorientation is crucial to the meaning of the heroine's journey. As a new subject, Lucy asks new questions about her position, looks for new venues in her development, and as the open ending of the novel suggests, pursues new, if unformulated, directions for her future life. In her migration from the transformational city and beyond to the foreignness of the Continent, Lucy becomes irrevocably modern.

Overcoming the Gothic Challenge

We need to look closely at each of these stages to understand their origins in Brontë's and her generation's social experience. The Victorian woman's experience of self was enforced by enclosed domestic space. Enlightened women of Brontë's generation rebelled against the enervating isolation of the domestic world and sought escape. Florence Nightingale, for example, called for women's exposure to life outside the home, no matter how harsh the experience might prove. Nightingale was convinced that a direct, unmediated contact between women and the city, no matter how grim, would work as a tonic: "But if ever women come into contact with sickness, and crime, and poverty in masses, how the practical reality of life revives them! They are exhausted, like those who live on opium or on novels, all their lives—exhausted with feelings which lead to no action" (*Cassandra* 41). In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter points to this passage from Nightingale's *Cassandra*, written around 1852, arguing that the difficulty of this challenge and the ambivalence women felt about it is evident in the way

women writers of Brontë's generation searched for "two kinds of heroines," both "romantic heroines" and "inspiring professional role models" whose adventures moved from strictly private realms toward the public sphere (103).³

The tension between these two models of female identity is evident throughout Brontë's *oeuvre*, but it surfaces especially in *Villette*, where the heroine struggles to move from one model to the other. Here Brontë conceives of a heroine who neither follows the typical development of Victorian women, nor breaks completely free of it. As she says of her own writing, a narrative woven solely around the "spirit of romance" would be "unlike real life—inconsistent with truth—at variance with probability" (Wise 4: 22-23). Instead, she exposes her heroine to what Nightingale called "the practical reality of life," siding with empowerment in real life over fictional romance.⁴

Perhaps inevitably, this struggle yields an imperfect heroine, for Brontë sets for herself the almost impossible task of envisioning and depicting a female character who seeks independence from the domestic sphere and conventional romance but does not give them up completely. She envisions a woman who is enlightened, even a rebel, but not a complete revolutionary, one who resists the mold of the Victorian woman but is still shaped (and sometimes haunted) by it.

Ironically, Brontë was criticized by some for overemphasizing romance. As Harriet Martineau put it, "All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thought,—love. . . . There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love . . ." (qtd. in Gaskell: 425). Others, however, did not understand Brontë's conception of a character who is relentless in her efforts to gain exposure to "real life" and for whom this exposure takes a toll. In

her letter to W.S. Williams, Brontë explains why it was important for her to have this kind of heroine: “You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she *is* both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid” (Wise 4:18).

Lucy’s instability reflects her lack of social position—and the corresponding lack of an approved identity—for a mid-nineteenth-century single woman. As Martha Vicinus points out, unmarried women who found their place outside the nuclear family were perceived as “redundant” (*Independent Women* 3).⁵ Vicinus ascribes this lack of place both to an “ideal of domesticity” that “masked the exclusion of middle-class women from political, economic, and social power” and to the widening gap between the public and private spheres (2). Thus, according to Vicinus, “Since genteel single women could be neither mothers nor prostitutes, they were forced to redefine themselves in terms beyond those of the nuclear family” (5). The impulse toward such a redefinition is apparent in *Villette*. In fact, Lucy lacks a nuclear family. She is merely related to the Brettons, always remaining an outsider even in this family’s midst. Brontë created her heroine as a woman ready for transformation.

Lucy can be said to epitomize this class of “redundant” women struggling to find ways out of a predicament they did not choose. Sometimes Lucy has enough strength to resist loneliness, but at other times she experiences, in Brontë’s words, “the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness” (Wise 4:18). When writing *Villette*, Brontë herself was struggling with loneliness and often suffered from “nausea, headache, [and]

sleeplessness . . .” (Gaskell 396). In a letter to Ellen Nussey, she describes one such episode:

Perhaps you think that I generally write with some reserve—you ought to do the same. *My* reserve, however, has its foundation not in design, but in necessity—I am silent because I have literally *nothing to say*. I might indeed repeat over and over again that my life is a pale blank and often a very weary burden—and that the Future sometimes appals me—but what end could be answered by such repetition except to weary you and enervate myself?

The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart—lie in position—not that I am a *single* woman and likely to remain a *single* woman—but because I am a *lonely* woman and likely to be *lonely*. But it cannot be helped and therefore *imperatively must be borne*—and borne too with as few words about it as may be. (Wise 4:6)

Thus besides depicting a heroine buffeted by “real life,” Brontë was perhaps describing her own experience of loneliness in her portrayal of Lucy as a reserved and seemingly “cold” person. “A *cold* name she must have,” Brontë explained, “for she has about her an external coldness” (Wise 4:18).⁶ In her description of Lucy’s coldness and her own loneliness, Brontë emphasizes a social stasis that leads to concealed terror and hopelessness about the future. Rather than the lack of a social life itself, it is the uncertainty and fear of the future that “enervates” her.

Importantly, Brontë shows that the fear of an uncertain future has specific implications for women, accompanying their entry into urban spectatorship as a residual anxiety about the lack of social place, a fear that was often expressed in Gothic terms. As Lehan suggests, the literary expression of the Gothic and the uncanny appears as a function of the increasing power of the modern city because the city “disrupts the natural processes in a mysterious, uncanny, and sometimes supernatural way” (37). Thus the Gothic may be understood as a mode of expression prompted by urban modernity.

From the beginning of the novel, Lucy is depicted as a spectator. During her childhood with the Bretton family, Lucy seems detached from the family life around her, a “mere looker-on at life” (131). The primary object of Lucy’s early observation is the child Polly, a small girl placed temporarily in the Bretton family by her father. Brontë emphasizes the difference between Lucy and Polly in terms of their different modes of looking. Polly, longing for her father’s return, is fully absorbed in her reverie-like observation. Brontë describes her as “cursed” with a “monomaniac tendency” (10). In contrast, Lucy functions as a detached, disinterested spectator engaged in observing others. When Polly’s father finally returns, Lucy observes her reaction: “She had sat listlessly, hardly looking, and not counting, when—my eye being fixed on hers—I witnessed in its irid (sic) and pupil a startling transfiguration. These sudden natures—sensitive as they are called—offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries” (11). Lucy rejects Polly’s emotional involvement: “I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination” (10). “I, Lucy Snowe, was calm” (19). Brontë presents both extremes of spectatorship as rigid and ultimately untenable because both positions preclude development. Brontë exposes these two extremes to show how they reflect major modes of female confinement in the domestic sphere. Lucy’s detachment from the family renders her as a sharp-eyed observer of the domestic world, which is the role expected from a Victorian woman as Showalter described it. Polly’s position is equally problematic. Her emotional fixation on her father renders her as an eternal child, another unacceptable modality of Victorian womanhood.

Lucy's journey leads her through both extremes. When Lucy lives in Miss Marchmont's house, she loses her detachment and takes on a dependent subjectivity, not unlike Polly's. When she is entrapped in Miss Marchmont's sick room, Lucy loses sight of the world beyond it:

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty—her pain, my suffering—her relief, my hope—her anger, my punishment—her regard, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, and ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content to forget it. (33)

In this way, Brontë shows the immobilizing effects of such a full immersion in the domestic sphere, one that weakens Lucy's curiosity and courage to proceed on her own life's journey.

Brontë suggests that the only way to escape the unacceptable social stasis of either of these models of life in the domestic world is to gain exposure to the world outside. When Lucy travels to London, it is a mysterious inner voice that tells her to leave. Interestingly, Lucy follows this inner guide without much equivocation, as if to suggest that the only way to develop beyond the stale modes of Victorian female subjectivity is to seek the urban and the modern. The moment of Lucy's inner vision of London is an important turning point. Lucy imagines the city in her mind even before she actually sees it. "I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London" (39). It seems that Brontë poses London not as an option but a necessity, as if London is not just a next step that Lucy may take, but a state of culture and of mind that she must experience if she is to become a modern woman. Brontë seems to say that modernity has already begun to make an impact on everyone, even those who have resisted it.

Brontë herself had an ambivalent relationship to London. During her numerous trips to London's circles of artists and publishers, she perceived it as "a Babylon of a place," and in her letters she describes it as a rather "dreary place" in comparison to such cities as Edinburgh (Gaskell 347-8). But in spite of her reservations, Brontë recognized the city's transformative possibilities. This is most evident in her fascination with the Crystal Palace, a space that epitomized London's baffling, Babylon-like modernity. In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, she wrote a letter to her father describing her visit to this most striking exemplar of nineteenth-century consumerist and cosmopolitan culture.⁷ Noting the power of such a modern space to mesmerize the crowds by spectacular excess and an overwhelming multitude of sights, she writes:

It is a wonderful place—vast, strange, new, and impossible to describe. Its grandeur does not consist in *one* thing, but in the unique assemblage of *all* things. Whatever human industry has created, you find there, from the great compartments filled with railway engines and boilers, with mill-machinery in full work, with splendid carriages of all kinds, with harness of every description—to the glass-covered and velvet-spread stands loaded with the most gorgeous work of the goldsmith and silversmith, and the carefully guarded caskets full of real diamonds and pearls worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. It may be called a bazaar or a fair, but it is such a bazaar or fair as Eastern genii might have created. It seems as if magic only could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth—as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it thus, with such a blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect. The multitude filling the great aisles seems ruled and subdued by some invisible influence. Amongst the thirty thousand souls that peopled it the day I was there, not one loud noise was to be heard, not one irregular movement seen—the living tide rolls on quietly, with a deep hum like the sea heard from a distance. (Wise 3: 243)

It can be argued that in this "wonderful place," a space of spectacle, excess, and vertigo, Brontë saw an immense potential for expanding one's imagination: the "marvellous power of effect" invites the imagination in "vast, strange, new" directions, and puts it in conversation with distant, unfamiliar places. It seems that one is at a

“bazaar” of one’s own identity there, in a place where one can negotiate the self anew in previously unimaginable ways. In this “supernatural” space and under the spell of spectacle, the crowd is “subdued” by novelty and multitude, swept by a flow or a stream toward a modernity that will eventually transform everyone into an urban subject. At the moment of Brontë’s visit to the Crystal Palace, this transformation is on the horizon; this sea-change, or at least a sure promise of it, is metaphorized as “the sea heard from a distance.” Thus in her letter Brontë recognized the power of the city to mobilize imagination and transform subjectivity. In a similar vein, the very idea of London stimulates Lucy’s imagination and emboldens her to make an adventurous step into the unknown. I interpret the discovery of this “new power” of inner vision as Lucy’s discovery of the power of imagination, one that works as a crucial catalyst on her journey (39).

However, despite the positive force of this power, Brontë translates the urban experience into Gothic uncertainty. In the London chapter of the novel, the independent woman’s insecure place in society is represented by a fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown. While Lucy clearly enjoys her stay in London, her experience is double edged; its newness is pleasurable and liberating but also frightening. Upon her arrival, London seems to be a place that disturbs Lucy’s balance, “a Babylon and a wilderness of which the vastness and the strangeness tried to the utmost any powers of clear thought and steady self-possession . . .” (40). The city’s “vastness” and “strangeness” change Lucy’s spectatorial disposition. She is no longer a victim of domestic confinement and cannot withdraw into extreme detachment; instead, she begins to see herself as someone who must necessarily reinvent herself within a milieu where even English seems as “odd as a

foreign tongue” (40). Thus Lucy’s observation of London begins a process of redefinition that requires a new kind of imagination, an imagination that helps her navigate a treacherously unfamiliar terrain in which old frames of reference are shattered.

Brontë captures Lucy’s ambivalence in the language of a ghost story. As Lucy puts it, “All at once my position rose on me like a ghost” (41). Feminist critics have explored the use of Gothic elements by female writers. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that “Brontë joins the *Bildungsroman* to the mystery story to demonstrate that growing up female requires vigilant demystification of an enigmatic, male-dominated world” (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 426). In *Villette*, the Gothic element (“the ghost”) is merged with the urban.⁸ Susan Fraiman suggests that novels of female development “account for growing up female as a deformation, a gothic disorientation, a loss of authority, an abandonment of goals” (*Unbecoming Women* xi). However, they also signal the possibility of rebellion. In *Villette*, Lucy experiences Gothic fear, but she faces that fear with defiance, with the “spirit of protest” and the courage “to hazard the distasteful and indecorous” (Fraiman xi).

The merger of the Gothic and the urban is evident in the scene in which Lucy first laments the difficulty of navigating the Babylon-like metropolis: “How difficult, how oppressive, how puzzling seemed my plight! In London for the first time; at an inn for the first time; tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold; unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act, and yet—to act obliged” (40-1). As Lucy’s exposure to London intensifies, her fear gradually abates and she feels guided by “the hands of Common-sense” (41). As she overcomes her fear, she begins to see her future in more positive terms. Her assertion, “I shall gain good,” signals hope (41).

Lucy becomes enchanted with London, concluding that after all, “to walk alone in London seemed of itself an adventure” (44). Letting herself be led by the flux of city life, she becomes intoxicated by freedom and attracted by the unknown: “Descending, I went wandering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment; and I got—I knew not how—I got into the heart of the city life. I saw and felt London at last” (44). In the mixture of intoxication, excitement, and mobility that Lucy experiences in London, Brontë delineates new contours of Lucy’s subjectivity, drawing her closer to a model of urban identity new for women.⁹

Commenting on her first impressions of London, Lucy, like a Baudelarian flâneur, draws pleasure from the heart of city life: “I mixed with the life passing along; I dared the perils of crossings. To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps an irrational, but a real pleasure” (44). Importantly, Lucy’s pleasure, both “irrational” and “real,” shows a quality different from those of the typical male flâneur. Unlike Baudelaire’s Monsieur Guys, for example, who never risks the coherence of his subjectivity in the city, Lucy’s flânerie destabilizes her. Lucy’s pleasure in the city transforms her into a more self-confident flâneuse, but she simultaneously deals with the possible consequences of this transformation: “What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?” (41).

Lucy often suffers from spells of mental and physical indisposition resulting from her confusions about a new, difficult to understand environment. However, her experience of urban disorientation produces something new and powerful in Lucy, a

determination to stay the course. Such resolution is evident in the scene of her last night in London, in which she decides to proceed on her journey:

I wet the pillow, my arms, and my hair, with rushing tears. A dark interval of most bitter thought followed this burst; but I did not regret the step taken, nor wish to retract it. A strong, vague persuasion that it was better to go forward rather than backward, and that I *could* go forward—that a way, however narrow and difficult, would in time open—predominated over other feelings. (41)

After this tumultuous night, Lucy decides to leave London for the Continent. Her decision “to favor the adoption of a new, resolute, and daring—perhaps desperate—line of action” means that she embarks on her own voyage, one in which she will employ her newly acquired urban imagination (44). She pictures her new direction as a journey beyond London: “In my reverie, methought I saw the continent of Europe, like a wide dreamland, far away” (51). In her imagination, she creates new mental images. The perception of her self on this sea voyage contrasts sharply with her previous rendering of herself “as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbor still as glass . . .” (31). Even the name of the ship carrying Lucy to the Continent, *The Vivid*, reflects a newly awakened imagination that will enable Lucy to navigate the rest of her life’s journey.

Lucy’s independence is repeatedly put on trial. When Lucy arrives in Villette to take up her position as a teacher in Madame Beck’s school, she finds herself in a school environment both foreign to her and in which she is the foreigner: “All this was very un-English: truly I was in a foreign land” (64). She is aware that both teachers and students see her as “other,” as an “Anglaise.” She is amazed and yet amused by the superficiality of students like Ginevra Fanshawe who is always on social display. But the atmosphere of the school is one of suspicion and secrecy. Lucy recognizes that Madame Beck

maintains her power by “watching and spying everywhere, peering through every keyhole, listening behind every door” (67).

This unfamiliar environment challenges Lucy to rely on herself, on her own subjective interpretation of the unfamiliar.¹⁰ Her empowerment is evident in one of several theatrical scenes in the novel. Lucy is asked by her fellow teacher, Monsieur Paul Emanuel, a colleague who takes an interest in her, to substitute for a student-actor and take a man’s part as a fop in the school’s vaudeville play. Anxious about “the public display,” Lucy rehearses the whole day in a ghostly attic (124).

For Lucy, assuming a place in the spotlight means to step out of her usual place in the shadow. This move is doubly uncomfortable for her because she is asked to play a male role and put on male dress. The notion of gender transgression seems to accompany the moments of Lucy’s identity destabilization at several occasions in the novel. In a later part of the novel, for example, Lucy both admires and abhors the unfeminine actress Vashti, whose performance suggests that a woman’s freedom from social constraints may require transgression of gender boundaries.

When Lucy rehearses in the attic, a frightening space full of rats and cockroaches, she remembers the rumor of “the ghostly Nun” who is said to haunt the attic (125). The nun, symbolizing womanhood contained within circumscribed space, appears in the enclosed spaces of the school, the attic and later even in Lucy’s bedroom. The nun haunts Lucy whenever she contemplates a transgression of an enclosed cultural space. The vaudeville play, for example, represents for Lucy a transgression of conventional womanhood not only because she will appear on stage and thus leave the shadowy,

marginal social space, but also because the male part threatens to jeopardize her femininity.

Because Lucy wants to remain in the background, she decides to wear a dress of “purple-gray—the color, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom” (122).

Although the *tailleuse* objects that the dress is too somber, Lucy insists, “in this same gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease” (122). With resolve, Lucy refuses the male costume and claims that “it must be arranged in [her] own way” (129). She finds a compromise between a man’s and a woman’s dress: “Retaining my woman’s garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a *paletot* of small dimensions” (129). In her dress, Lucy negotiates a compromise between the light and the shadow, the feminine and the masculine.

Lucy is empowered by overcoming her fear. As she learns her role in the prison-like attic, the attic becomes a space of transformation when Lucy discovers her own voice. Performing “before the garret vermin,” she speaks “first in a whisper, and then aloud” (126). On stage, Lucy becomes animated by her role as the fop, wooing Ginevra as the female lead with skill and enthusiasm.

When the performance is over, Lucy restores her distance:

But I had acted enough for one evening; it was time I retired into myself and my ordinary life. My dun-colored dress did well enough under a *paletot* on the stage, but would not suit a waltz or a quadrille. Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe—the ball, its splendors, and its pleasures passed before me as a spectacle. (131)

For a moment, Lucy is able to cast herself into a new role when circumstances require it and even find pleasure in the experience. Although she withdraws from the social

spectacle at the end of the day, her self-confidence grows and her abilities are recognized by Monsieur Paul. Thus she becomes more at home in the school.

It is telling that Lucy's development comes to a standstill when everybody leaves for vacation and the school becomes empty and quiet. When her routine is disrupted and she is left alone at the school, she loses her equilibrium and begins to fear her future again. Lucy runs away from the empty school: "The solitude and the stillness of the long dormitory could not be borne any longer; the ghostly white beds were turning into specters . . ." (148). Lucy feverishly roams the uncanny labyrinth of old city streets and becomes "immeshed in a network of turns unknown," lost in the city (152). In this scene, where Gothic disorientation is pictured in urban space, Lucy loses consciousness. To her astonishment the room in which she wakes up from her delirium is furnished exactly like the old house of the Bretton family of Lucy's childhood. Lucy tries to decipher the eerie puzzle of her old surroundings in this new setting:

Bretton! Bretton! And ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror. And why did Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus? Why, if they came at all, did they not return complete? Why hovered before my distempered vision the mere furniture, while the rooms and the locality were gone? (159)

There is a reasonable explanation for the presence of the familiar room; the Bretton family has moved to Villette without Lucy's knowledge. The son, Graham, now called Dr. John, and his mother and Polly have recreated their family home in this foreign city. It is interesting to speculate on why Brontë uses this means to resolve, at least temporarily, Lucy's psychological conflict at the end of the first volume of the novel. By placing Lucy back in the familiar domestic space of her childhood, Brontë seems to offer Lucy another opportunity to choose the domestic over the new and frightening sphere of the unknown city. Indeed, the romance plot of Victorian fiction is introduced later when

Lucy falls in love with Dr. John. Their courtship and Lucy's final rejection of her opportunity for traditional marriage and family is the subject of the second volume. Lucy's choice is closely identified with her emerging vision as an urban subject. As she becomes more familiar with the city and sees both its opportunities for self-revision yet its often negative ways of viewing women, her choices become more complex and in many ways more difficult.

Negotiating the Urban Spectacle

At the beginning of the second volume of *Villette*, Dr. John undertakes the cure of Lucy's morbid state of mind.¹¹ Lucy experiences "Hypochondria," a psychosomatic ailment seen in Brontë's time as a "morbid state of mind, characterized by general depression, melancholy, or low spirits, for which there is no real cause" ("Hypochondria" def. 2). It is interesting that Dr. John's advice is reminiscent of Florence Nightingale's in *Cassandra*—exposure to life outside the domestic space. It could be said that Lucy takes the medicine of public life in order to cure herself, once and for all, of domesticity and the limitations of the romance plot as an answer for women's lives. Plunging into Villette's concerts, galleries, and theaters, Lucy becomes a city walker and an observer of city life—a true flâneuse.

Lucy seems cured of her Hypochondria as she steps outside into the streets. In Villette's urban space, Lucy enjoys her position as an urban spectator. However, as she becomes a more assured spectator herself, she is increasingly dissatisfied with the way women are considered as objects of the male gaze. This process seems important to

Brontë for she carefully describes Lucy's initial infatuation with the city's glamour and her gradual disillusionment with the superficial values of the urban spectacle.

At first, Villetle turns into a spectacle that Lucy, as a flâneuse, avidly consumes: "Our way lay through some of the best streets of Villetle, streets brightly lit, and far more lively now than at high noon. How brilliant seemed the shops! How glad, gay, and abundant flowed the tide of life along the broad pavement!" (196). In Villetle's concert hall, Lucy is overwhelmed by a "mass" of "rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or fragments of rainbows shivered," reminiscent of London's Crystal Palace that Brontë described in her letter to her father (197). In her description of Villetle's spectacle, Brontë again uses the trope of the Eastern genii to capture the invisible but intoxicating power of the spectacle, a foreign and fairy-tale like presence: "It was only the chandelier, reader, but for me it seemed the work of eastern genii: I almost looked to see if a huge, dark cloudy hand—that of the Slave of the Lamp—were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure" (197).

But although Lucy becomes an urban subject in the city of Villetle, she remains uncomfortable with the male-oriented visual regime. She tries to demystify the rules by which women are marginalized, if not completely excluded, from the privileged position of looking. The more Lucy sees of Villetle, the less she is willing to accept various images of womanhood available there. The theater scene illustrates this conflicted process. The agency Lucy gains as a member of the public presents a dilemma. In order to empower herself in the social world of the city's spectacle, Lucy must follow its rules and regard women, including herself, as objects. Yet seeing herself as such an object

counteracts the pleasure she finds in the spectacle. Lucy's dilemma is demonstrated by her strange misrecognition of her own mirror image in Villette's theater. In this scene, Lucy literally sees herself as an object. While accompanied by Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton, Lucy catches sight of a party approaching from the opposite direction:

I noted them all—the third person as well as the other two—and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. (197)

For a brief moment, Lucy occupies two vantage points. She sees her own image as constructed by public spectatorship and she simultaneously sees her mirror image as she knows herself:

Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse. (198)

Although Lucy describes this moment with her typically sardonic self-criticism, she grasps a more general truth about how women are viewed. When she sees herself "as others see [her]," Lucy realizes that as a woman, she does not fully control her own image and that she is asked to negotiate her own look in relation to the looking of others. In the public sphere, she must judge herself by prescribed yet to her unacceptable images of womanhood.

Another example occurs in Lucy's visit to the picture gallery. Lucy denounces both the admired Cleopatra and "La vie d'une femme." In expressing her distaste for the paintings, Lucy resists being subsumed into the mass of "worshipping connoisseurs" (188). In the painting of Cleopatra, Lucy sees a "well-fed" woman who "had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa" and "ought likewise to have worn decent garments"

(188). A set of four pictures depicting “La vie d’une femme,” that is, a “Jeune Fille,” a “Mariée,” a “Jeune Mère,” and finally a “Veuve,” Lucy judges as “painted in a rather remarkable style—flat, dead, pale and formal” (190). In both these examples, Lucy refuses to accept what she regards as false images of womanhood and protests against the superficiality of this male perspective on women’s lives. Her conclusions about the paintings are characteristic of her increasingly pronounced spectatorial rebellion. Lucy refuses to accept terms of spectatorship that require her to join others in their uncritical consumption of these images of womanhood: the four stages of a woman’s life depicted in the paintings “were grim and gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! Insincere, ill-humored, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gypsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers” (190). In the end Lucy is a disobedient spectator who rejects the biased male culture of the city at the same time that she recognizes the opportunity for empowerment the city offers to women.

At the end of Volume II, as a climax to Lucy’s crisis of spectatorship, Brontë presents Lucy’s profound reaction to the actress Vashti. The performance of an actress who “could thrill Europe” exerts an overwhelming effect on Lucy (240).¹² Vashti, reminiscent of the rebellious biblical queen Vashti, disobeys the usual rules of the submissive woman subject: she both looks “with the eye of a rebel” and disregards the way she is seen (243).¹³ This passionate performer fascinates Lucy by embodying an almost Satanic defiance:

Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair. Even in the uttermost frenzy of energy is each mænad movement royally, imperially, incedingly upborne (sic). Her hair, flung loose in revel or war, is still an angel’s hair, and glorious under a halo. Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled. Heaven’s light,

following her exile, pierces its confines, and discloses their forlorn remoteness. (243)

Vashti's impact lies in the uncontrollability of her performance. Lucy is confronted by Vashti's resistance to approved images of womanhood. In this resistance, Lucy recognizes an unprecedented force absent from the conventional rendition of women in art. She admires Vashti's unique unruliness, wondering why artists fail to be as intrigued by this trait as she is. "Where was the artist of the Cleopatra?" she asks (243). Lucy thus compares the kind of art that depicts lifeless images of women to Vashti's dangerous power. Although she is fascinated by the actress who upsets the prescribed images of womanhood by exposing female dissent and agency, Lucy is not yet ready to identify with Vashti's transgression, to embrace fully this kind of explosive art: Her comment, "I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil," illuminates Lucy's lingering anxiety about transgressing gender divisions (242).

Several feminist critics have commented on the significance of Brontë's strong gender statement in *Villette*. Laura Ciolkowski observes that Vashti "resist[s] the disciplinary gaze," and "threatens to defraud Victorian fictions of masculinity and femininity of their absolute authority" (Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*: Forgeries of Sex and Self" 224). Vashti's performance, she says, represents "the embodiment of undisciplined gender" (225). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar underline Vashti's "androgynous, imaginative power" but they also point to the pitfalls of this transgression, concluding that "Vashti's passionate acting causes her to be rejected by proper society" (423). Brontë herself enforces this idea by showing Dr. John's disapproving reaction to the actress. To Lucy's disappointment, Dr. John "judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment" (244). Lucy's own response is ambivalent: "It was a marvellous sight: a

mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral” (242). Brontë emphasizes the incendiary nature of Vashti’s performance by showing it brought to an abrupt end when the theater catches fire.¹⁴ If the fire is understood as symbolizing Vashti’s fiery rejection of prescribed images of womanhood, Brontë shows the fire to be quickly extinguished, and the conventional social spectacle epitomized by the theater quickly re-established.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Lucy is increasingly dissatisfied with the dominant social regime and she seeks a spectatorial position that would enable her to be a subject rather than an object of the social gaze.

Lucy’s continuing critique of prescribed gender roles goes hand in hand with her increasing financial and social independence. At the end of Volume II, Lucy reasserts her course toward independence by planning to run her own school. She defines herself as a woman pursuing her own path, as “a rising character” who was “once an old lady’s companion” but is “now a school teacher” (290).

Envisioning a New Female Urban Subjectivity

Disassociating herself from the social conventions that dictate gender roles, Lucy severs her ties to Dr. John, realizing that she cannot pursue a romance with him. She realizes that she has been long troubled by his inability to look beyond the conventional. After the theater fire, Lucy buries Dr. John’s letters in the school’s garden. Brontë renders this moment as a symbolic severance. After it, Lucy pursues a more equal relationship with Monsieur Paul Emanuel who represents a contrast to Dr. John because of his ability to see social conventions as constructed by social custom. Paul persuades Lucy that their similar looks demonstrate their equality: “Do you see it, mademoiselle,

when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine—that your eyes are cut like mine? . . . Do you know that you have many of my looks?” (345). Again, as in the mirror in the theater, the metaphor of the looking glass emphasizes the power of the mirror’s truthful gaze in a world of false spectacle.

In her relationship with Paul, Lucy actively searches for freedom from socially prescribed images of femininity. This freedom necessitates a different kind of looking. While Paul does not always seem to challenge the power of the social gaze fully enough to satisfy Lucy, he nevertheless becomes an important ally in her fight against false social conventions. Their conversations enable Lucy to articulate her critique of the social gaze more sharply. Paul is described as “a small, dark, and spare man, in spectacles” who scrutinizes Lucy in his Jesuit-like fashion: “The little man fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him” (60). Paul’s unwavering scrutiny reflects a new kind of male gaze – a gaze that seems to look beyond the usual stereotypical reactions to women. Although his gaze is sometimes critical and often differs from her own, Lucy realizes that he wants to see her accurately, at first as a colleague and then as a friend. When he complains about her dress, condemning it as scarlet, Lucy insists that it is only pink. This disagreement causes Lucy to think more deeply about his view of her as a woman; she wonders if Paul’s way of looking at women is any different from that of Dr. John. At the same time, she recognizes that his ironic manner and their teasing relationship with each other marks a more equal partnership than she has known with other men. And she sees something about herself as well: “You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life’s sunshine: it is a new thing to see

one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray” (315). Brontë emphasizes the symbolism of vision by Lucy’s accidental breaking of Paul’s “shortsighted *lunettes*,” perhaps a hint that Lucy has aroused in him a deeper vision than the conventional social gaze of a man toward a woman (307). While he, as a man, does not always share Lucy’s critique of the urban spectacle, he turns a critical and objective eye on the world at large and represents a potential partner who can help her negotiate the world with independence and autonomy.

In the final stage of Lucy’s development as a woman comfortable in the city, she seeks a different kind of looking that will be less mediated by the conventions of the social spectacle.¹⁶ Lucy seeks a more direct and truthful relationship not only to Paul but also to her surroundings. This search for transparency and direct access to the world is apparent in her pronounced resolve: “It is right to look our life accounts bravely in the face now and then, and settle them honestly. . . . Call anguish - anguish, and despair - despair; write both down in strong characters with a resolute pen . . .” (340). The agency that Lucy strives to achieve does not lie in arriving at some objective, final truth, but in the very process of negotiating the troubled border between the self and the city, her familiar self and the unfamiliar environment, the “I” and the “non-I.”

Lucy’s complicated struggle to envision a new self reaches a climax in the scene of Vilette’s fête night. In this scene, Brontë seems to test the limits of the conscious and rational self.¹⁷ She presents Lucy as intoxicated with her vision and her judgment impaired. She falls into a strange dream when she is given a strong drug to fight a headache, a drug that proves to be opium.¹⁸ It induces a state of highly awakened consciousness:

Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought—to reverie particular in coloring. A gathering call ran among the faculties, their bugles sang, their trumpets rang an untimely summons. Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous. (422)

The drug has a mobilizing effect on Lucy. It awakens her to “new thought” and ignites her imagination. Interestingly, Brontë presents Lucy’s imagination as specifically female. Brontë’s description underscores the imagination’s reckless, disruptive power that is reminiscent of Vashti’s performance. The narcotic also propels Lucy toward the city: “Entering on the level of a Grande Place, I found myself, with the suddenness of magic, plunged amidst a gay, living, joyous crowd” (424). In the city, Lucy’s experience is similar to her memories of her previous stay in London: “Safe I passed down the avenues—safe I mixed with the crowd where it was deepest” (425). Although she is intoxicated, Lucy feels almost at home, “safe,” in the city’s midst.

Lucy’s full immersion in the city leads to the dissolution of her established notion of her self. The city distracts Lucy as it draws her toward a series of detours: “I knew my route, yet it seemed as if I was hindered from pursuing it direct: now a sight, and now a sound, called me aside, luring me down this alley and down that” (426). Instead of a single direction, she is led on and on through Villette’s circuitous streets. Lucy’s intoxicated *flânerie* represents the path of a new kind of imagination that embraces the urban; it offers a different state of consciousness, allowing her to follow new, unexplored directions.¹⁹

But despite the euphoria she experiences, some effects of Lucy’s new consciousness are negative. With the expansion of her imagination, she also experiences distortion of reality and paranoia. Lucy’s opium-induced state of mind precludes the clarity of vision which she previously aspired to:

Villette is one blaze, one broad illumination; the whole world seems abroad; moonlight and heaven are banished: the town, by her own flambeaux, beholds her own splendor—gay dresses, grand equipages, fine horses and gallant riders throng the bright streets. I see even scores of masks. It is a strange scene, stranger than dreams. (424)

Here the effects of the drug and the spectacle itself seem indistinguishable. They produce in a spectator a sense of abandon, and, like in the Crystal Palace, an enthrallment. These effects produce the creative playfulness of a dream and at first the masks of this dream promise a possibility of transformation. Similarly to the Crystal Palace, Villette's fête offers a proliferation of foreign artifacts; it takes place in a park, decorated to create an illusion of the "strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphynx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt . . ." (424). In the midst of this spectacle, Lucy loses all sense of self-control: "To be still was not in my power, nor quietly to observe. I took a revel of the scene; I drank the elastic night air—the swell of sound, the dubious light, now flashing, now fading" (425). As an intoxicated spectator, she embraces the flickering, "dubious light" that offers multiple images simultaneously. In this phantasmagoria, Lucy's vision is distorted as it adjusts to the flux and change of modern life.

Several critics have noted that Brontë renders Lucy's flânerie in this scene in an almost cinematic manner. Lucy, like a spectator in a cinema, stands separate from the scene and hidden in the dark, observing one scene after another. She narrates her experience to her readers in the same manner. As F.B. Pinion states, "The vivid scenes which Charlotte conjured up miraculously from the past, and which we follow with Lucy as if they were part of a motion-picture, hold the reader like a dream" (*A Brontë Companion* 152). Lisa Surridge emphasizes the multiplicity of roles Lucy employs: "the

roles of director, spectator, and masquerader in the carnivalesque scenes of her own imagination” (11).²⁰ In this way, Brontë anticipates the twentieth-century female flâneurial consciousness. The works of Jean Rhys, and to some extent Virginia Woolf, show the influence of cinema as a new art form that could articulate a new sense of self in a stream of consciousness form. Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) contains passages reminiscent of Brontë’s treatment of Lucy’s intoxication, a state of consciousness in which the unfolding of the flâneuse’s mind takes the form of wandering in the city. Rhys even calls her protagonist’s imagination a “film-mind.” I will examine the uses of the cinematic form in the following chapters.

As Lucy’s vision becomes more paranoid, various figures Lucy has encountered during her stay in Villette appear and seem to plot against her; suddenly, they appear to be “the secret junta,” consisting of Madame Beck, the priest Père Silas and the outlandish Madame Walravens (431). As Lucy observes, the “secret junta” talks with Monsieur Paul who is accompanied by a young woman. They seem to hold Paul captive. Lucy overhears words of Paul’s impending departure as well as the young woman’s marriage and Lucy assumes that it is Paul who will marry her. But what Lucy gathers is only partially true: Paul turns out to be the young woman’s godfather, not a suitor. But he will, after all, leave her to sail to Guadeloupe.

At the end of the text, Brontë fails to give a clear resolution of the question of Paul’s fate, but she does outline Lucy’s future as a professional woman in the city. Lucy firmly rejects a conventional role in the domestic sphere. Brontë portrays this process first in an episode where Lucy conquers her ghostly fear. When Lucy returns to her school after her night of drugged wandering, Brontë presents a final encounter with the

ghost of the nun who so frightened her before. She finds the phantom in her bedroom. This time, however, Lucy is able to fearlessly confront it, perhaps because the intoxicated adventure she has just experienced has given her new strength, providing her with new resolve: “Besides, I was not overcome. Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defied spectra” (440). Lucy no longer fears the nun; instead, she attacks her: “I tore her up—the incubus! I held her on high—the goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down she fell—down all round me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trod upon her” (440). Lucy’s courage in her confrontation of her fear is significant. Lucy no longer fears her ghosts; what is more, she can now laugh at them. Brontë turns the Gothic into the comic, the mystery of the nun into farce. We learn that the ghost of the nun was merely a stuffed figure used to play a trick on Lucy by one of Ginevra’s suitors who used the nun’s disguise to break in and move around the school; it was also he, together with Ginevra, who planted the nun effigy in Lucy’s bed to amuse themselves at her expense. Lucy’s Gothic fear disappears as she is “relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly” (441). Indeed, in the final part of the novel, Lucy takes hold of her “earthly” life.

With financial help from Paul and an unexpected legacy, Lucy is able to run her school successfully during the three years of his absence, claiming that “they were the three happiest years of [her] life” (461). At the same time, Lucy sees her relationship with Paul as the source of sustenance: “The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond seas, in an Indian isle” (462). Brontë was clearly uncertain about how to present

Lucy's fate. She concludes the novel with Lucy's vision of a deadly storm and Paul's probable death at sea:

That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm. (463-4)

Despite her ambivalence about Paul's fate, Brontë's insistence on her heroine's independence was firm. To Brontë the novel's happy ending was Lucy's independent life, not marriage to Paul. Gaskell describes Brontë's resistance to her father's wishes that she end the novel as a romance:

Mr. Brontë was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind; and he requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy tales) “marry, and live very happily ever after.” But the idea of M. Paul Emanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination, till it assumed the distinct force of reality; and she could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she could do in compliance with her father's wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words, as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning. (414)

Brontë must have been aware that her readers would also prefer a happy ending.²¹ She addresses her readers in the “Finis” chapter, asking them to participate in the continuation of the text:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (464)

But despite this wish to encourage her more hopeful readers, Brontë neither confirms, nor denies Paul's death. Thus the highly ambiguous ending of *Villette* asks readers to imagine Lucy's life beyond his death. After all, Lucy narrates her story in retrospect, and thus the

ending fails to fill the gap between the last moment of the story and Lucy's narratorial position set long after that final moment.

Although Lucy's route toward becoming a female urban subject is characterized by misjudgments and misinterpretations rather than by clarity, it is exactly these obstacles and slippages, these digressions from a direct route, that lead to Lucy's enhanced imagination as well as to her closer exchanges with the city. Lucy's failures, these seeming deviations from the path, even her hysteria and breakdown, seem to be necessary steps to the enhancement of her imagination and maintenance of her mobility, and thus finally to her transformation and empowerment. Brontë does not see Lucy's new agency divorced from her fallibility. Instead she seems to say that it is only when a Victorian woman embraces urban modernity and thus urban uncertainty, that she can catch a glimpse of her new self and the new possibilities and meanings available to her.

Finally, Brontë seems to ask her audience to ponder the rhetorical question that Lucy poses at the beginning of her journey: "I like the spirit of this great London which I feel around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and forever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity?" (43). Lucy's affirmation links her to the collective of readers who in Brontë's time and after become urban subjects. In this way, Brontë invites everyone to join Lucy in her exploration of the transformative possibilities of *flânerie*. In this gesture, Brontë establishes a firm link between her character and the culture of spectacle, a tight knot characterizing the literature and culture of the times to come.

Notes

¹ I am referring specifically to Williams's *The Country and the City* and Lehan's *The City in Literature*.

² Diane Long Hoeveler sees *Villette* in "the female gothic novel tradition," but she also argues that it shows "limitations of gothic feminism" (*Gothic Feminism* 186). Hoeveler claims, "The Brontës existentialize the female gothic heroine, and as such they introduce her to the modern world" (186).

³ Elaine Showalter writes: "Denied participation in public life, women were forced to cultivate their feelings and to overvalue romance," thus making up for "the vacuum of experience" (*A Literature of Their Own* 79).

⁴ Showalter points out that "Brontë [was] shocked, dismayed, and hurt to discover that her realism struck others as improper" (91). Similarly, Gaskell mentions that Brontë's writings were sometimes criticized for their "coarseness," unfit for what "men felt to be proper in works of this kind" (*Life of Charlotte Brontë* 371). Gaskell defends Brontë: "I do not deny for myself the existence of coarseness here and there in her works, otherwise so entirely noble. I only ask those who read them to consider her life,—which has been openly laid bare before them,—and to say how it could be otherwise" (371).

⁵ The term "redundant" recalls the influential journalist W.R. Greg, the author of "Why Are Women Redundant?" published in 1862 (*Vicinus* 3). In this respect, *Vicinus* speaks of a stark difference in the position of women in industrial and pre-industrial societies. In the nineteenth-century, "The genteel poor woman had a choice of three underpaid and overworked occupations—governess, companion, or seamstress" while before, "[s]ingle women had held key positions in pre-industrial society, including the management of large convents in the Middle Ages, the administration of vast estates during the Renaissance, and the running of countless shops, small businesses, and inns throughout the early modern period in English history" (3).

⁶ Brontë even contemplated the name "Frost" (*Wise* 4:18).

⁷ Drawing on Brontë's experience of the Crystal Palace, various scholars focus on the relationships between the rapidly expanding British Empire, the bourgeois class, and the culture of spectacle in *Villette*. For example, Eva Badowska notes that instead of the title "Villette," it is "Choseville" that appears in an earlier draft of the novel, the term that Badowska translates as "Thing City or City of Things" ("Choseville: Brontë's *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority" 1509). Badowska argues that "*Villette* constitutes an attempt to negotiate between a critique of commodity fetishism and a paradoxically fetishistic preoccupation with the traces and tokens of inner life" (1510). In this novel, Badowska continues, "its [the bourgeois subject's] interiority has been lost under the pressure of things" (1510). In a similar vein, Heather Glen detects "a new kind of emphasis on things" in the novel due to the influence of the Great Exhibition: "There was

a new kind of focus on things as such. Things were displaced from their contexts, placed in strange juxtapositions, oddly defamiliarized by being put on show” (*Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* 215). Isobel Armstrong’s recent *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* analyzes the nineteenth-century fascination with glass in what she calls the glass culture of Victorian modernity.

⁸ In *Apartment Stories*, Sharon Marcus offers an interesting interpretation of Victorian ghost stories as “the urban deformation of the domestic ideal” (122). However, while I see the Gothic theme in *Villette* as representing the journey toward urban modernity, Marcus holds that “ghosts represented a drag on modernity, an exception in a regime defined by new technologies of visualization and surveillance designed to abolish all hidden dangers, including specters” (117).

⁹ Erika Diane Rappaport sees the “coupling of bourgeois women and urban pleasure” as an important turning point generating a new literary heroine: “When Charlotte Brontë created Lucy Snowe in the 1850s, she invented a new type of urban character, a female character who consumed the city’s sights and sounds, its goods and amusements” (*Shopping for Pleasure* 3).

¹⁰ Laura E. Ciolkowski argues that Lucy’s “specular disobedience” leads to the “reinvention of her own ‘feminine’ vision” (221).

¹¹ Sally Shuttleworth analyzes “the interpretative gaze of medical science” in Brontë’s novels as a model for generating the modern self (*Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* 9). Regarding *Villette*, Shuttleworth writes: “Lucy is subjected to educational, professional and religious surveillance. Each observer tries to read her inner self through the interpretation of outer signs. This practice takes its most authoritative form in the medical judgments of Dr John” (220). She concludes that “Brontë finally, tentatively, asserts the claims of the realm of imagination, in opposition to the reason and control of the masculine world, with all its spurious offers of healing aid” (233).

¹² Brontë saw the actress Rachel (1820 – 1858) perform in London. Her description of the performance resembles that of Vashti: “On Saturday I went to hear and see Rachel; a wonderful sight—terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet, and revealed a glimpse of hell. I shall never forget it. She made me shudder to the marrow of my bones; in her some fiend has certainly taken up an incarnate home. She is not a woman, she is a snake; she is the—” (Gaskell 382).

¹³ Gilbert and Gubar explain that “Queen Vashti of the Book of Esther refuses to placate King Ahasuerus” when she refuses to come to him “to display her beauty,” thus “refus[ing] to be treated as an object, and consciously reject[ing] art that dehumanizes its subject or its audience” (424).

¹⁴ Lucy is aware that what Surridge calls Vashti’s “transgressive experience of acting” has implications beyond the theater’s walls (7).

¹⁵ Both Laura Ciolkowski and Patricia E. Johnson underline Vashti's final containment within the same structures the actress sought to disrupt. Ciolkowski argues: "The gesture to fix Vashti's incendiary performance as a subversive excess that permanently dismantles Victorian fictions of gender fails to take account of the ways in which the flames of her performance are also brought under control" (225). Johnson comments on the closing sentences of the "Vashti" chapter, saying, "The theater—the public place—has already forgotten Vashti and returned to normalcy" ("This Heretic Narrative" 627).

¹⁶ Here Janet Freeman stresses Lucy's demand for a vision less mediated, claiming that in the novel's third volume, "observation becomes a form of mutual intimacy" between Lucy and Paul ("Looking On at Life" 483).

¹⁷ Here Brontë anticipates a modernist concern with the unconscious that at least partially determines subjectivity.

¹⁸ Gaskell writes: "I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description in 'Villette' was so exactly like what I had experienced,—vivid and exaggerated presence of objects, of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist, etc. She replied, that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe anything which had not fallen within her own experience; she had thought intently on it for many and many a night before falling to sleep,—wondering what it was like, or how it would be,—till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested at this one point for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience, and then could describe it, word for word, as it had happened" (441). Surridge mentions the influence of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) on the Brontës.

¹⁹ Brontë revises the straight course of a traditionally male character's development. Lucy's development is full of multiple branches and alternative turns. Some critics have seen this kind of proliferation of possibilities as necessary for a female subject who must, as Susan Fraiman puts it, "imagine the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as the endless negotiation of a crossroads" (*Unbecoming Women* x). Patricia E. Johnson makes an interesting point that Lucy "names her own narrative strategy 'heretic'" (617). She notes, "The word, heretic, comes from the Greek *hairetikos* meaning 'able to choose' . . ." (618). In respect to the proliferation of possibilities, Joseph Litvak argues: "Breaking down sexual and aesthetic polarities, Lucy 'breaks character' so as to divide and multiply characters—both her own and others'—and to produce an unmanageable proliferation of plots, whose point is its very excessiveness, its refusal to be straightened out into a single coherent narrative line" (*Caught in the Act* 95). Thus the construction of female urban subjectivity remains an open, unfinished project

²⁰ Surridge adds that "opium, like theatre, enables a form of cross-dressing" for Lucy who can thus "undertake the traditionally masculine role of the *flâneur*" (11).

²¹ Gaskell also relates how much excitement the ambiguity of *Villette*'s end raised in the circle of her readers. Brontë intended to provide no straightforward resolution, writing in one of her letters: "Since the little puzzle amuses the ladies, it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key" (470). Today, some critics find this ambiguity troubling. Terry Eagleton, for example, writes: "The ambiguity of the novel's ending—is Paul drowned or not?—is then appropriate to the book's continually double-edged attitude to the question of secure settlement. . . . In the end, *Villette* has neither the courage to be tragic nor to be comic; like all of Charlotte's novels, although in its conclusion more obviously than any, it is a kind of middle-ground, a half-measure" (*Myths of Power* 73).

Chapter 3

Subjects Made of Urban Fabric in the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys

The twentieth-century writers Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys show women's urban experience in a new light. Drawing on the changing terms of women's *flânerie* in the twentieth century, Mansfield and Rhys dramatically revise the nineteenth-century model of female *flânerie* developed in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Brontë's model shows a woman who, despite perilous struggles, can arrive at autonomy and agency in the public sphere if she confronts her fears of the unknown and her fantasies of romance. The twentieth-century *flâneuse* depicted by Mansfield and Rhys, in contrast, is not personally fulfilled in the city and her autonomy is severely challenged.

Katherine Mansfield's early short story, "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (1908), pictures the unfolding thoughts of a young woman living and working in the city, but Rosabel's life as a shop girl seems an ironic commentary on Lucy Snowe's empowering dreams. Sasha, the central character of Jean Rhys's novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) is an even more disillusioned city dweller, trapped in the chaos of her own irrational thoughts and fantasies. In Rhys's elaboration of a new female urban subjectivity, she departs from the optimism of the previous century in radical ways, and instead enters a conversation with the twentieth-century sensibility of high modernism.

One reason for this shift is the changed perception of the city reflected in these two writers. Although historically the twentieth-century city represents a much wider arena of freedom for women than in the previous century, especially in terms of their economic independence and corresponding physical mobility in urban space, both Mansfield and Rhys shift their focus to ways in which the city restricts or controls women's imagination—their lack of economic power and the ways that consumerism invites a return to dreams of romance for urban women. The fulfillment of the promise of urban life is not available to Mansfield's and Rhys's protagonists because of their class and poverty. Mansfield's *flâneuse*, for example, is a shop girl faced with the discrepancy between her desire for the exotic luxuries that symbolize happiness and the grim reality that makes it impossible to obtain them. In her desire for escape, she is confronted everywhere with a mass culture that exploits her dreams of romance and leads her back to the enclosure of domestic space. The situation of Rhys's *flâneuse* is even more desperate. Her life in the city is not sustainable. Her earlier hopes for stability and happiness have collapsed. She cannot afford the luxuries that the city offers to the bourgeois class and she becomes a middle-aged drifter, disoriented in the midst of the city.

Although the women in Mansfield's and Rhys's texts retreat from the city, they do not return to nineteenth-century homes. Neither the country nor a safe domestic space is available to them. Their private rooms, usually cheap lodgings, serve as provisional homes that are squarely situated in the city. In these private rooms, newly permeable to city life and vulnerable to intrusion, the private space of their mind becomes permeable as well; it expands, opens toward the city, and

intensifies its exchanges with it. As the minds of these heroines turn urban and their imagination expands, their actual options in life diminish and they are trapped in a new stasis within city life.

While Mansfield's flâneuse stands at the beginning of this process of interior change, Rhys's flâneuse is destroyed by the process. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's old self disintegrates as she finally embraces her nightmare, the phantasmagoria in which the fragments of the city and the fragments of self mix and float in her mind. However, while Rhys presents a picture of a disturbed mind that distorts reality, Rhys's style almost celebrates her flâneuse's disorientation, especially when Sasha embraces the city in all its negativity. Rhys's contribution to the literature of urban women's experience lies precisely here: in the way she presents this embrace of the negative as an opportunity for a new vision of the modern female self made of fragments of urban experience and emotion.

How to tell the story of this new self, a story full of disjunctures and gaps, a discontinuous story in which romance is transformed into chance encounters and hope into loss, is the challenge that Rhys takes up. In order to conceptualize the flâneuse's story as a flexible collection of disjointed fragments of experience that defy the order of a linear unfolding, Rhys turns to the model of the cinema. Cinema offers her new tools for picturing phantasmagoria in images and lends itself to a formal experimentation with narrative that exploits the use of odd constellations of fragments. This new art form, unavailable to Brontë's generation, offers new possibilities for narrativizing a disorderly story of a disorderly self. When Rhys

describes her flâneuse as possessing a “film-mind,” Rhys breaks her ties with the Victorian narrative tradition and situates her story firmly in modern times.

Katherine Mansfield: “The Tiredness of Rosabel”

In her short story “The Tiredness of Rosabel,” written in 1908 but published in 1920, Mansfield presents a picture of a single, disillusioned working woman in the city. The protagonist of the story is a flâneuse who is outwardly emancipated: she is young, economically self-sufficient, and free to walk in the city without being harassed or taken for a prostitute. However, Mansfield shows how, in the city of the early twentieth century, this apparent freedom, which in Brontë’s fiction would have signaled a woman’s new self and agency, has resulted in a stunted development. Although a woman can be a city walker, she is now limited in urban space by economic constraints and a culture of consumerism that stifles her imagination. Thus in spite of her physical mobility, Mansfield’s flâneuse is not free. She walks in the city but in her imagination, she remains a captive within her unrealistic dreams.

The year 1908, when Mansfield wrote “The Tiredness of Rosabel,” is a significant date in Mansfield’s own experience of metropolitan life.¹ It is the year when Mansfield, not yet twenty years old, sailed for London in order to become a writer. This was her second trip to London. She had studied at Queen’s College from 1903 to 1906, but after finishing her studies, she returned to New Zealand. During her days in Wellington, she wistfully remembered London and imagined it to be a site of her future happiness and fulfillment. A journal entry from 1907 reveals her discontent with the aggravating affairs of the home, such as “butcher’s orders or the soiled

linen,” and her fantasy of an alternative life in the city (21). In the young writer’s imagination, she was already in the city: “Here in my room, I feel as though I was in London. In London! To write the word makes me feel that I could burst into tears. Isn’t it terrible to love anything so much? I do not care at all for men, but *London*—it is life” (Murry 21).

However, by the time she wrote “The Tiredness of Rosabel,” Mansfield saw a different picture of the city. Her revised, more realistic image of London life for a single woman was based on her own experience during her stay at Beauchamp Lodge, in Paddington, a residence that offered accommodations for music students. (Mansfield played the cello). Antony Alpers, in *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, describes her struggle to become an artist, her complicated relationships with men, and her lack of money during these years.

The dreariness of a single woman’s urban life appears in the very first lines of the story. We see Rosabel in the middle of a busy London street as she walks home from the milliner’s shop where she works as an assistant. She earns her own income, but in spite of her economic independence, Rosabel’s consumer power is inadequate to her desires. Mansfield portrays her dissatisfaction viscerally, as hunger; Rosabel sacrifices a hearty dinner in order to buy flowers: “At the corner of Oxford Circus Rosabel bought a bunch of violets, and that was practically the reason why she had so little tea—for a scone and a boiled egg and a cup of cocoa at Lyons are not ample sufficiency after a hard day’s work in a millinery establishment” (3). Mansfield undermines the glamour of the city by the realism of the shop girl experience. Rosabel’s walking in the city is a far cry from the pleasurable exercise of the

Baudelairian flâneur. He, a man of wealth and leisure, walks to observe the urban spectacle. Her walk is an exercise in endurance. In the “blurred and misty” streets, Rosabel can hardly see; her feet and clothes are wet, “coated with black, greasy mud” (3). Both her observation and walking itself, the activities that define the flâneuse, are significantly limited.

Besides the mud and fog that preclude pleasurable walking and observation, there are other reasons for her discomfort. Rosabel is single and lonely. There is no mention of a husband, a lover, or even a friend. In the scene of her commute home by public transportation, Rosabel feels alienated, even repelled, by fellow passengers: “There was a sickening smell of warm humanity—it seemed to be oozing out of everybody in the ’bus—and everybody had the same expression, sitting so still, staring in front of them” (3). Thus Rosabel, alone in a crowd, perceives humidity instead of “humanity.” There is no eye contact. The passengers stare ahead, establishing no exchange with the city or with one another.

Rosabel is irritated by the advertisements that she sees from the bus window: “How many times had she read these advertisements—‘Sapolio Saves Time, Saves Labour’—‘Heinz’s Tomato Sauce’—and ‘the inane, annoying dialogue between doctor and judge concerning the superlative merits of ‘Lamplough’s Pyretic Saline’” (3). Ironically, Rosabel, as a working woman, is constantly reminded of domesticity. The advertisements she sees in the city picture a housewife’s concerns: food (tomato sauce), health (medicinal saline), and cleaning (Sapolio). The ideology of domesticity is ubiquitous. But also on display in the city is the mirror image of domesticity—romance. On the bus, Rosabel’s attention is briefly caught by a female passenger who

is absorbed in reading a romance novel, *Anna Lombard*. Here Mansfield points to the irony of a consumer culture that hints at the drudgery of domestic life and at the same time offers fantasies of escape. Clearly, Rosabel's fellow passenger, probably another working girl, finds in the book a way of escaping her lackluster reality. The escape to romance proves highly contagious; a short phrase in the book that Rosabel spots has a powerful impact on her: "She could not see very clearly; it was something about a hot, voluptuous night, a band playing, and a girl with lovely, white shoulders" (3-4). Rosabel is clearly aroused: "Oh, Heavens! Rosabel stirred suddenly and unfastened the two top buttons of her coat . . . she felt almost stifled" (4). Rosabel's overreaction to this short passage is significant. Her reaction to the obvious sensuousness the novel seems to signal her own buried sexuality.

Mansfield's naming of a real novel shows the importance she attaches to the influences of popular literature on working girls like Rosabel. *Anna Lombard* (1902) was a widely-read paperback novel, written by Victoria Cross (1868 – 1952), famous in her time as a writer of the so-called "New Woman" fiction. The novel directly addressed the social taboo of female sexuality. The rebellious heroine is sexually liberated, and claims a right to her own body.² Working women like Rosabel could afford these paperbacks and read them when commuting to work. Mansfield also shows that their influence on readers like Rosabel was complex. On one hand, Rosabel is invited by these novels to embrace her own sexuality and claim the freedom of a New Woman. On the other hand, these novels ultimately presented traditional narratives of romance. The liberation they promise as a means of mental

escape from the realism of city life only propels Rosabel into an imaginary space where women do not need to work, and where pleasure and romance fill their lives.

Rosabel is clearly eager to flee from the oppressive city after a hard day's work. Her overexcited imagination, ignited by the excerpt from *Anna Lombard*, colors her reaction to her own return home to her rented room. Outside her flat, when Rosabel sees "the stuffed albatross head on the landing, glimmering ghost-like in the light of the little gas jet, she almost cried" (4). This touch of the grotesque and Rosabel's reaction to it reminds us of Brontë's use of Gothic fear in *Villette*. Mansfield's juxtaposition of Rosabel's fantasy of new freedom and the fear it arouses provides a psychological portrait of Rosabel that is close to that of Lucy Snowe.

It is no surprise that Mansfield's letters from this time also reveal an intangible yet powerful fear of the future. Mansfield describes her own experience of the uncertainty of living as a single woman in terms strikingly similar to those of Lucy Snowe.³ Mansfield writes about the feelings of vulnerability that London provoked in her. In one of her letters, she describes "that frightful sensation of grief," writing, "It is like suddenly finding myself face to face with this ghost which terrifies me" (Alpers 70). Rosabel's own frightening, ghostly image suggesting her conflict between desire and her insecure position in society. Like Lucy Snowe, Rosabel experiences the Gothic anxiety of an unmarried woman who has no stable home and, if she remains single, must stifle her dreams and accept the very limited possibilities of her future.

Rosabel's rented room epitomizes this insecurity. She occupies a small, uninviting and shabby space. It is a room that invites her mental escape from reality.

Once inside it, Rosabel's fantasy life becomes more extreme. At first, she projects herself into a life of pleasure, luxury, and romance, inspired by a young rich couple, "hard to please" customers, whom she had served in the shop that day (5). The young woman with her fiancé taunted Rosabel to try one of the hats that they wanted to purchase. The memory of this event ignites a "sudden, ridiculous feeling of anger" that fuels Rosabel's imagination (5). She fantasizes that her life overflows with all that she lacks. "Suppose they changed places," Rosabel thinks, as she begins her long, rich dream of consumerism and romance (6). Rosabel imagines all the details of a luxurious life. Her mundane experience is transformed into images of careless shopping, leisure, and abundant male attention, set off by the girl's question, "What is it exactly that I want, Harry?" (5). This daydream abounds in images of excess. The ordinary violets that Rosabel has bought herself turn into Parma violets; Rosabel does not have to buy them herself but receives them from Harry: "'It is as you always should be,' said Harry, 'with your hands full of violets'" (7). The simple violets expand into a whole "bedroom with roses everywhere in dull silver vases" (7). Moreover, Rosabel is attended to by a French maid and her time is spent frequenting "the Opera, dinners, balls" where she consumes "oysters, and pigeons, and creamed potatoes, and champagne . . ." (7). Rosabel attracts the attention of the whole world. She is admired by "a foreign Prince" but decides to marry the domestic Harry (7). The world congratulates her: "all the world knew, all the world was shaking hands with her. . . ." (8).⁴

Rosabel's imagination fails to free her; instead, she becomes its victim, entrapped in a private universe of unrealistic dreams. The question of Mansfield's

view of Rosabel's imaginative potential has been debated by Mansfield's critics. Pamela Dunbar, for example, emphasizes the "derivative" nature of Rosabel's imagination, holding that her consumerist dream "is a product of happenstance and of commercial manipulation" (*Radical Mansfield* 5). Lisa Shapiro Sanders claims that Rosabel's imagination lacks transformative potential in spite of the fact that it is creative. While creativity, for Sanders, itself holds potential for "imaginative re-writings of everyday life," in Rosabel's case, it fails to help her (*Consuming Fantasies* 10).⁵

Mansfield's picture of Rosabel's fantasy seems to confirm this negative view. Mansfield gives a picture of a mind capable of fantasy and desire, but also immobilized by manufactured images. There is a sense of a failed potential in Rosabel's dreaming. The scene of her imaginative transmutation of drab London into dreamy Venice offers an example of an imaginative opportunity gone amiss.⁶

Wesbourne Grove looked as she had always imagined Venice to look at night, mysterious, dark, even hansoms were like gondolas dodging up and down, and the lights trailing luridly—tongues of flame licking the wet street—magic fish swimming in the Grand Canal. (4)

The imagery that Rosabel's mind generates is very rich. She sees the magic of the streets. This intensely vivid, lush imagery hints at a sense of adventure, signaling Rosabel's longing for faraway places. It seems for a moment that Rosabel, like Lucy Snowe, may realize her dreams and move to Venice. There, in a transformational space beyond the familiar, she could start a new life. However, Rosabel never ventures forth in search of such an adventure. Mansfield presents Rosabel as static. Instead of traveling to distant places, she remains in London. Unlike a *Bildungsroman*, in which a heroine's mind is expanded in response to new adventures

in the outer world, Rosabel's mind is merely obsessed with prefabricated travelogue exoticism.

Rosabel remains passive in spite of the creative moments of her imagination. Whenever Rosabel's desire to transgress beyond the domestic appears, it is immediately cut short and contained. This happens at several places in the story, especially when Rosabel looks out of a window. For example, when on the bus, "Rosabel looked out of the window; the street was blurred and misty, but light striking on the panes turned their dullness to opal and silver, and the jewellers' shops seen through this, were fairy palaces" (3). Again, the "blurred and misty" city is turned, in Rosabel's imagination, into something magical, even jewel-like. Thus her imagination, working in creative strokes just like the "light striking on the panes," paints a transformed picture of London. However, this London ultimately fails to work as a transformational place; its "fairy-tale" unreality only reinforces Rosabel's passive dreaming.

There is another moment in which Rosabel looks out of a window, this time in her room. Here, the window represents a screen that separates her from the world: "It was just seven o'clock. If she pulled the blind up and put out the gas it was much more restful—Rosabel did not want to read. So she knelt down on the floor, pillowing her arms on the window sill . . . just one little sheet of glass between her and the great wet world outside!" (4). Mansfield depicts the partition as very thin ("just one little sheet of glass"). In this way, Mansfield implies that the barrier could be broken. The language of the line that emphasizes the window's fragility seems to imply that Rosabel seeks to remove this obstacle in order to reach to the world outside. Again,

however, she fails to take that step, sinking more deeply into the hopeless fantasy of consumerism and romance.

While the Rosabel of the daydream leads an extravagant life, her sleep is not calm or restorative. Rosabel herself does not understand the pathos of her tiredness; in her view, it is caused by long hours of working in the shop. Mansfield, however, sees a deeper psychology. Not only has Rosabel lost her grip on reality, but her fantasy turns dark and dangerous. Mansfield presents Rosabel at the end of her day as a woman who has crossed the border from her daydream to hysteria from which it may not be easy to awaken. The signs of hysteria are highlighted by Mansfield's description of Rosabel as "laughing aloud" and grotesquely contorted: "The real Rosabel, the girl crouched on the floor in the dark, laughed aloud, and put her hand up to her hot mouth" (7). Thus in "real life" Rosabel keeps dreaming and hallucinating. Saved by no lover, yet fed by dreams of romance, instead she becomes a victim of passivity and paralysis: "So she slept and dreamed, and smiled in her sleep, and once threw out her arm to feel for something which was not there, dreaming still" (8). The story concludes with Rosabel waking in her gloomy room. In the final lines of the story, the narrative voice comments on Rosabel's heritage of optimism: "And because her heritage was that tragic optimism, which is all too often the only inheritance of youth, still half asleep, she smiled, with a little nervous tremor round her mouth" (8). Mansfield underlines the irony of Rosabel's "optimism" by showing the telltale "tremor" that accompanies it.

For Mansfield the optimism felt by previous generations of women who came to the city to be liberated turns out to be a problematic inheritance. For Rosabel,

Florence Nightingale's prescription for sanity, an exposure to real life that could save women from idle fantasizing and the "opium" of reading novels, has failed as a cure. Mansfield shows that for a working woman of the twentieth century, exposure to the city not only fails to bring rejuvenation but reinforces the flight into pre-manufactured fantasies. Rosabel's imagination is finally stifled by the same urban culture that has enabled it and her "heritage" becomes "tragic optimism" (8).

Jean Rhys: *Good Morning, Midnight*

On the level of plot, *Good Morning, Midnight* pictures a twentieth-century flâneuse lost in the city.⁷ Because of her intense but undefined desire for Parisian life, Sasha continually plunges into a city that eludes her. Between these encounters she seeks refuge in her hotel room where she both drinks and hallucinates. Unlike Rosabel, who still has hopes that her life can miraculously change, Sasha's dreams are nightmares of the hopeless, phantasmagorias of the displaced and dispossessed. Yet, in these states of altered consciousness, Sasha's imagination expands and Rhys is able to capture in a series of stylistic experiments a new flâneurial consciousness, a consciousness in which urban and private spaces interact and finally implode.

Rhys portrays a female urban experience that is even darker than Mansfield's vision. While Mansfield's flâneuse at least fantasizes about her future, Rhys's flâneuse has lost any constructive picture of her future. Sasha is a middle-aged Englishwoman who tries to rejuvenate her life in Paris after her failed marriage. She is not young and naïve like Rosabel; she no longer indulges in dreams of marrying rich, or even marrying at all. Unlike Rosabel, Sasha has no job, no income of her

own. Her poverty is therefore even more acute, and her hopes for the future bleaker. Like Rosabel, Sasha feels drawn to the urban crowd, but she is alone there, repeatedly disappointed in her failure to find a new relationship or even any meaningful human connection. Thus Sasha sinks into alcoholism, depression, and what at first appears to be madness. Her predicament is so severe, so debilitating that the flâneuse as Brontë imagined her, empowered by the city, seems to have disappeared from urban space.

Rhys's own life was full of difficult and unusual challenges—displacement, divided ethnic identity, and the struggle for recognition as a writer. Rhys was a white Creole, growing up in the Caribbean island of Dominica. In 1907, at the age of 17, Rhys came to England, only a year earlier than Mansfield's arrival at Beauchamp Lodge. In England, she always felt herself to be an outsider. Before the Second World War, Rhys led a bohemian life, wandering through various European countries, Holland, Austria, and France, temporarily joining artists' communities, but always on their periphery. In her writing, she was encouraged by Ford Madox Ford with whom she had a love affair while they were both married and who published her first story in his magazine *The Transatlantic Review* in 1924. Rhys published four novels before the war, all with city settings. *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) was the last of these urban novels, preceded by *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). After the war, Rhys lived obscurely in Cornwall and Devonshire. She was rediscovered in 1949 when *Good Morning, Midnight* was adapted for the theater and later, in 1957, performed as a play on BBC radio. It was the publication of her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), that finally gained her wide recognition. This novel, conceived as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*,

depicted the story of the first Mrs. Rochester, imagined by Rhys as Creole and thus a misfit in English society.

Much of Rhys's writing was inspired by her own experience as a woman and a foreigner whose life in mainstream society was precarious. In the foreword to Rhys's autobiography *Smile Please* (1979), Diana Athill comments on the interrelatedness of Rhys's life and work, explaining that Rhys saw in writing a form of therapy, a method for "the purging of unhappiness" (4).⁸ Typically, her protagonists cannot fulfill social expectations and are often shunned by society. Her novels often echo her own experience: her first husband's imprisonment for financial fraud is the subject of *Quartet*, her life as a touring chorus girl who becomes emotionally and economically dependent on her lover appears in *Voyage in the Dark*, and the tragedy of her first child's death is portrayed in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

While Rhys clearly used her own life for the outlines of her novels, the formal originality of her writing has often been ignored. In her effort to depict the disoriented minds of women who are stranded in the city, left only with fragments of their former lives and with selves that do not cohere, she was forced to reach beyond the conventional modes of story-telling. The *Bildungsroman*, with its assumption of a whole and coherent subject and some sense of a future, was not adequate to portray her subject.

Rhys offers no culminating vision of life. Unlike nineteenth-century fiction, Rhys's novels remain relentlessly in the present. Brontë, although she altered the *Bildungsroman* form in *Villette* in order to reflect the difficulties of woman's urban experience, still presented a narrative of hope. Although her life was in turmoil, Lucy

Snowe nevertheless progressed toward her profession as a teacher. For Mansfield, a woman's progress becomes more problematic. She depicts Rosabel's future as a daydream rather than a reality. Yet this dream still appears as a meaningful form to structure Rosabel's imagination. We still see the contours of some future possibility in Rosabel's life; the dream drives her actions and Mansfield's short story itself, if only as a vehicle for irony.

For Rhys, however, any narrative form of development is absent since it could neither reflect the heroine's shattered life, nor Rhys's real subject. Instead of imagining Sasha's future, Rhys finds a creative opportunity in the fragments that are left, fragments that are here now. Rhys uses the city's fragmentary movements, collisions, and interactions to capture the reality of urban experience. In this incomplete and often frustrating form that leads to no happy ending, Rhys remains not only truthful to the female drifter's urban experience but also celebrates it. She exposes the interrupted moments of existence that allow for no progress but merely for fleeting moments of meaning, moments in which it is often impossible to distinguish between new possibilities and dead ends.

At first the novel appears to be structured as a sort of reverse *Bildungsroman* because Sasha narrates her life retrospectively. In the past, we learn, Sasha had relished her bohemian life in Paris—the street life, the people, the cafés, but her happiness did not last for long. After her child died and her husband Enno left her, her happiness disappeared and her life situation changed dramatically. We learn that Sasha returned to London, but did not stay there; on the advice of a friend, she decided to go back to Paris, the place of her former happiness. In this second visit,

however, nothing is the same. Her desperate way of coping with her shattered life is to engage in what she calls “the transformation act,” a scheme of planning every move in her encounter with the city (63). But her plan only reveals the difference between Paris then and Paris now. Paris now reminds Sasha of her past, especially when she finds that she is not welcome in most of the public places she knew. In spite of her repeated attempts to re-engage with the metropolis, Sasha spends most of her time warding off depression by drinking.

In the midst of her depression, Sasha repeatedly plans her “transformation act,” but it repeatedly fails her. One of the central themes of *Good Morning, Midnight* is the irony of Sasha’s planned recuperation. Rhys implies that “plans” are essential social and mental structures in life and cannot be discarded easily. Sasha in her earlier life has followed the female script of marriage and motherhood, but this plan fails when the child dies and her husband leaves her. Sasha’s second plan, her “transformation act,” to restore some resemblance to the past, is far more superficial. It mainly involves changing her looks and going to new cafés to bring luck to her life. However, the superficiality of her solution underlines Sasha’s desperation to cling to some illusion of the meaning and value that her fragmented life in the city will not allow.

Rhys critiques the impermanence of socially prescribed scripts for a woman’s life that revolve around the touchstones of marriage, children, or the responsibility of domestic life. Almost a century before, Charlotte Brontë had suggested the same critique, depicting Lucy Snowe as dismissing the gallery paintings of the four prescribed stages of a woman’s life (the young woman, wife, mother, old woman) as

lifeless and artificial portrayals. Brontë, as well as Mansfield and Rhys, recognized that these roles were rigid and hollow shells that operated in the past as roles for social survival. Rhys even more emphatically exposes the illusion of stability they offer to the modern woman adrift in the city. Sasha can no longer find meaning in her own past or in the heritage of past generations. She must create a new model for a life alone without the support of traditional roles.

In Rhys's novel we see the last rudiments of these old social patterns disappear. She pictures Sasha's many unpredictable exchanges with urban space. Her "affairs," as she calls them, are with cafés, streets, and hotel rooms. As she walks around Paris, she engages with the fragments of her past life, remembering incidents of her life piece by piece. However, walking in the city also brings new experiences and the fragments of Sasha's past start overlapping with those of her present. The fragmented narrative is so interspersed with flashbacks of her first stay that the boundary between the past and present almost disappears. As the past and present blur, the narrative stops unfolding according to a temporal development and instead dissolves into Sasha's present subjectivity. Rhys's achievement lies in capturing these unusual moments of dissolution and in re-envisioning new ways of engaging with the visual culture of city life. Ironically, as Rhys's flâneuse engages in dangerous encounters with urban space, encounters in which it is possible for the rational, stable self to be destroyed, her creative imagination remains intact. Sasha's new urban self is fabricated in the process of her disorienting physical and imaginative encounter with the city.

Rhys's presentation of the new woman in the city has understandably displeased a number of feminist critics. Rachel Bowlby, for example, calls Sasha a "negative flâneuse" (53).⁹ Bowlby laments that

Rhys's novels seem to give the lie, to mock as mere drawing-room fantasy, the bright hopes of new women's stories, or even the bright hopes of stories of progress at all. Her heroines drift around the cities of Europe in states of melancholy from which they seem unable to escape. They revolve in a mental universe where nothing seems to change, all times are the same, and their social world, a repeated succession of failed jobs, failed love and failing feminine appearance, seems perfectly fitted to reflect or to have produced this psychic predicament. (*Still Crazy After All These Years* 34)

Rhys has clearly situated Sasha in an impasse.¹⁰ An overwhelming sense of stasis pervades *Good Morning, Midnight* from its very first line: "'Quite like old times,' the room says. 'Yes? No?'" (9). This opening dialogue between Sasha and the voice of her room suggests that she is hearing voices. But it is in Sasha's dialogue with her room, with inanimate objects, and with the city itself that a new urban consciousness emerges. It is the remarkable aliveness of Sasha's voice that characterizes the novel. While Sasha compares herself to "one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm," we see her imagination released into a flow of creative talk (44). The depressing external facts of her life and her physical stasis give rise to a mental world of conversations with things and places—"a complicated affair," as Sasha says:

My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (46)

While Sasha's "affairs" with the city fail to bring happiness or resolution, her conversations more fully capture the dark side of a modern woman's interior life in the modern city than the writing of any other twentieth-century author.

Despite her desperate situation, Sasha never stops walking in her imagination.

Her physical engagement with the city takes a mental, interiorized form:

When I go out into the Place de l'Odéon I am feeling happy, what with my new hair and my new hat and the good meal and the wine and the *fine* and the coffee and the smell of night in Paris. I'm not going to any beastly little bar tonight. No, tonight I'm going somewhere where there's music; somewhere where I can be with a lot of people; somewhere where there's dancing. But where? By myself, where can I go? I'll have one more drink first and then think it out. (71)

The language of this passage seems to intentionally confuse Sasha's physical and mental position. Although she has withdrawn from the outside world into the isolation of her room, she says "I am feeling happy" as if she is already in the Place de l'Odéon. In her mind, she is walking in the city. However, her imaginary feeling of happiness in the Place de l'Odéon, followed by her plans to go dancing, is abruptly arrested by the fear of venturing out alone. Thus Sasha is stirred by a longing for urban experience, but her situation as a solitary woman precludes acting on that impulse. Nevertheless, her conversation with herself, no matter how it distorts reality, shows that Sasha is, after all, mentally alive in her "dead center."

The dynamic of outer stasis and inner restlessness is pervasive throughout the novel. Sasha's withdrawal from the city is nevertheless accompanied by her continued efforts to reach out to the city in her imagination. She becomes a parody of the city walker. I would argue that Rhys abandons Sasha as a character who acts.

What remains is Sasha as a mental flâneuse. Rhys sacrifices Sasha as a realistic character in order to preserve Sasha as a fragmented modern mind.

The transformation Rhys envisions for Sasha as a flâneuse is far more radical than nineteenth-century fiction could allow, even considering Brontë's use of dreams, drugged states or hysteria to chart her heroine's mental dislocation. Rhys explores the psychology of Sasha's transformation. While Sasha's own plan of transforming her life, her "transformation act," fails, it only fails if transformation is understood as a reconstruction of a realistic character's life. Rhys, however, takes a different turn. Instead of a reconstruction, she intensifies the process of destruction. Indeed, Sasha finds no new husband or career. Sasha ceases to exist as a character that can be grasped as a whole. I argue that Rhys must kill Sasha as a whole character in order to re-imagine her on new terms, as a flâneuse, a mental wanderer in the city.

How does Rhys achieve this feat? First, Rhys vacates the major markers that conventionally define a fictional character. Even Sasha's name is a construction:

Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner, in the Rue Victor-Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? It was then that I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder—calling myself Sasha? (12)

The conventional markers of identity become meaningless. They take the form of other urban phenomena, scraps of surfaces that float around. For Sasha a name is a matter of luck, and just like a piece of clothing, it is a surface that can be put on or off at any time. In a similar way, Rhys erases other markers of identity, such as belonging. Although Sasha states, "I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere," she hardly laments her lack of roots (44).¹¹ Sasha

takes dislocation for granted and other figures who appear in the novel seem equally blasé about their identities. For example, Sasha meets two strangers and they make a game of guessing the national origins of each other:

We stop under a lamp-post to guess nationalities. So they say, though I expect it is because they want to have a closer look at me. They tactfully don't guess mine. Are they Germans? No. Scandinavians, perhaps? No, the shorter one says they are Russians. (46)

Nationality as a marker of identity is only a game. Even if their nationality is revealed, their Russian-ness carries no significance in the novel beyond the actual moment of the guessing game.

Other figures in the novel, urban dwellers in Paris, share an unstable identity and are elusive, almost ghost-like. Among them, two figures stand out. René is a gigolo seeking Sasha's company, the other one is completely anonymous. Sasha provisionally calls this man "a commis-voyageur," "a commercial traveler" (32). Sasha fears his frightening, ghost-like countenance as he creeps around the hotel hallways, harassing her. At one point in the novel, he makes an uncanny appearance as a father-figure in Sasha's dreams and hallucinations. In the novel's puzzling end, Sasha faces this urban ghost who enters her room. These "non identities, without-identities," as Bowlby calls them, seem to work as a necessary prerequisite to the new flâneuse's subjectivity (41). The destruction of any real social life sets Sasha's imagination into motion, enabling her mental mobility and interiority.

In significant ways, Sasha's new female urban subjectivity builds on Brontë's flâneuse whose encounters with urban space endanger her wholeness. In *Villette*, these moments are short-lived and the flâneuse emerges from them restored as a character. In Mansfield's short story, as well, the moments of self-dissolution

dominate but at the story's end, the integrity of Rosabel's character is reclaimed, albeit ironically, on the basis of her youthful optimism. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the process of destruction of character is both exposed and embraced as a stage in the process of a new construction of a new sensibility.

Rhys's destruction of temporal continuity is as striking as her erasure of identity. Understandably, if Rhys seeks to articulate a new subjectivity, one that is created in conversation with urban space, she must explode subjectivity as a graspable whole whose story unfolds from the past toward the future. Thus Sasha's story is told in a zig-zag fashion. The narrative happening in the present is often truncated and the past steps in:

I get up into the room. I bolt the door. I lie down on the bed with my face in the pillow. Now I can rest before I go out again. What do I care about anything when I can lie on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket? Back, back, back. . . .

. . . I had just come up the stairs and I had to go down them again. (57)¹²

The first part of the passage above happens in the present. But in Sasha's mind, she goes "back, back, back" to the past. She remembers having to walk up the stairs into a similar room while being pregnant years ago. In this act of remembering, the present overlaps the past. At the same time, however, the blank space between these two fragments of experience indicates their separation, the pulling apart by some centrifugal force that disrupts the narrative's unfolding. Rhys exposes the blank space between the fragments as a free space that offers itself to the creative experimentation with the fragments of experience.

Rhys reflects the concern with the artificiality of the conventional representation of time that was felt by many modernist writers. Virginia Woolf's use

of associational thinking in *Mrs. Dalloway* to show the mind's abrupt and often illogical shifts from present to past is a famous example. For Sasha, all of the Paris she experiences in the present is available to trigger simultaneous memories of the past. Sasha describes her "plan" of transformation as rigorous, airtight: "The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no 'Here this happened, here that happened'. Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if I can help it" (15). Sasha painstakingly strives to erase "chance" and "gaps." However, contingency, or space for the unexpected, returns in a different form. As Sasha speaks, "chance" and "gaps" keep showing up – indeed, they even show as her own words. Thus her own voice, the language that she uses, betrays her.

The language that betrays Sasha's "story" in turn constructs the flâneuse's consciousness. The plan that is intended to erase contingency—possibilities in Sasha's life, chance encounters, serendipities—instead abounds in them. We can see this paradox at work in another passage in which Sasha describes her plan: "Planning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminous. Sleep. Just sleep - no dreams" (16). In this passage, the suppressed contingency rises to the surface – perhaps not obviously, but as a possibility created by the narrative style. The individual stages of the plan are so curtailed that they seem interchangeable. In this way, short sentences, even reduced to single words, invite creativity. The more segments, the more slices of language there are, the more there may be possibilities for their creative re-shuffling, their re-arranging into new sentences.

In order to describe Sasha's transformation from a character to a flâneuse of the mind, Rhys disposes of linearity because it is simply inadequate. A linear narrative relies on some development toward the future, and thus it hardly fits the flâneuse's life in the urban vortex, her mental play with fragments. Thus Sasha's "transformation act," which may be understood as representing the linear narrative of her life and of the novel itself, constantly invokes some future happiness but this future never arrives: "Tomorrow I'll be pretty again, tomorrow I'll be happy again, tomorrow, tomorrow. . . ." (57). This plan is then not a plan in the true sense but rather a process of planning that remains contained in the present moment. Indeed, it is an "act." The future is evaded because Sasha, as an urban subject, takes shape only in the present moment.

The flâneuse's story can only be told in the present moment. In this respect, Rhys treats the present moment as a remedy that may revise Sasha's "old," now obsolete story. When this remedy is applied, the past seems as if currently happening in the present. The narrative of the past is disjointed into small segments of the story; once again, it even crumbles down to individual words. These fragments are arranged haphazardly, opening the narrated past incident to further interpretation. For example, Sasha remembers an event from her past stay in Paris, during which she worked as a shop assistant. Asked by her former employer to speak German, Sasha's mind goes blank (incidentally, his name is Mr. Blank), but at least she manages to recall some basic German phrases. Sasha's memory of this event does not make conventional sense but captures the flexibility of memory and the mind:

I at once make up my mind that he wants to find out if I can speak German. All the little German I know flies out of my head. Jesus, help me! Ja, ja, nein,

nein, was kostet es, Wien ist eine sehr schöne Stadt, Buda-Pest auch ist sehr schön, ist schön, mein Herr, ich habe meinen Blumen vergessen, aus meinen grossen Schmerzen, homo homini lupus, aus meinen grossen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder, homo homini lupus, (I've got that one, anyway), aus meinen grossen Schmerzen homo homini doh ré mi fah soh la ti doh. . . . (24)

The memory of an unpleasant moment in the past loses its linearity and is turned into a mélange of phrases in different languages, a whirling of words that cannot be quite placed in time. It can be said that this verbal vortex, supposedly happening in the past, is not a verbatim recording of it but an act of creation by Sasha's mind in the present. Such mobilizing of the fragments of the past, that is, such setting them astir, challenges our understanding of the story. It is hard to say whether this verbal vortex happened in the past or is being created in the present. In this way, Rhys shows how to extricate a past incident from the past, thus releasing it in the present. In other words, she shows that it is possible to re-write Sasha's story into the continuous "now" of Sasha's mind.

Some critics have tried to describe Sasha's mind as mad. Mary Lou Emery, for example, points out the "social meaning in Sasha's madness" (*Jean Rhys at World's End* 30). Emery uses the label of "madness" to describe what I see as the process of Sasha's expanding imagination (30). Elizabeth Abel, seeing in Sasha's character a "split between the true self and the world," also pathologizes her mind, labeling it as schizophrenic ("Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys" 158).¹³ However, I would argue that Rhys's objective is to achieve something different than a picture of psychological breakdown or mental illness. In my view, Sasha's expanding imagination cannot be pathologized because in these moments she is not constructed to work as a character any more. Her disordered imagination

corresponds to new forms of perception characteristic of modern culture, and thus reaches beyond the realm of individual mental illness. Rhys instead presents a picture of a mind in exchange with the city, revealing the flâneuse's imagination in motion, in a process that is not final or defined and thus a process that cannot be easily labeled. Instead of madness, these disjointed states of mind reveal the creative possibilities of the urban subject's mind.

An important part of Rhys's creation of the new urban mind is her emphasis on the visual. Sasha's subjectivity can be said to be created by the visual. Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* offers a helpful insight into shifts in visual perception in modernity. Crary argues that the spectator's consciousness is affected by a "psychic flux" that disrupts his or her normative social self (94). Instead, the spectator's "subjectivity is a provisional assembly of mobile and mutable components" that can no longer be ordered to conform to a norm (97). These "floating detached elements, free to make new connections," manifest themselves especially in the workings of the subconscious, traversing the range of states from trance, hysteria, and hallucinations to dreams, daydreams, and reverie (100).¹⁴ Crary's analysis helps us understand the construction of Sasha's subjectivity as a flâneuse whose self is not coherent. This is especially evident in the scenes of Sasha looking into mirrors. Rhys depicts the act of mirror-looking not as a simple act of observation but as an unsettling experience.¹⁵ Sasha's gaze fails to yield a realistic, normative image of her self, but generates instead a dissolution of self by unleashing a flux of memories, experiences, and images. In this way, Rhys disrupts the perceptual unity of Sasha's self, but simultaneously points to

the construction of a new kind of urban self as a creative process involving new constellations and juxtapositions of fragments.

Sasha looks in the mirror, as she says, in “the interval when drink makes you look nice, before it makes you look awful” (170). In these liminal moments, the image of her whole self is blurred; it almost disappears:

I watch my face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller. Never mind. ‘While we live, let us live,’ say the bottles of wine. When we give, let us give. Besides, it isn’t my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. (43)

The mirror ceases to be a reliable means of reflection. Sasha does not see her self realistically reflected because her personality dissolves. Sasha sees parts of her own face but this face yields no deeper meaning. Sasha even renounces it as a mere mask, a flat image without content.

Observation as a basic act of visual perception ceases to function according to expected conventions. Sasha does not simply observe herself in the mirror but becomes a creative spectator, engaging with the mirror in various exchanges.¹⁶ Another mirror scene provides an insight into the creativity of these exchanges that reveal, in visual terms, Sasha’s experience of the continuous present:

This is another lavatory that I know very well, another of the well-known mirrors.

‘Well, well,’ it says, ‘last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren’t you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one – lightly, like an echo – when it looks into me again?’ All glasses in all lavabos do this. (170)

Instead of a reflection of Sasha’s image, we see a conversation between Sasha and the mirror. In this scene, Rhys underlines the mobility of Sasha’s mind, the continuous mental talk. However, it is not just an interior monologue but a conversation, a

dramatic exchange between Sasha and the personified mirror, an inanimate object that is given a voice.

Moreover, in this scene, Rhys proposes a new, modernist method of dealing with the past in a momentary visual exchange with the mirror. The mirror tells Sasha about the ghost faces it stores, the past faces that it juxtaposes to the present ones. In this way, it extends the simultaneity of the present into the past. The mirror image holds Sasha's past and mixes it with the present during their conversation so that Sasha engages with her past and present simultaneously.

These ghosts of the past that haunt the present moment are reminiscent of Brontë's method. As in *Villette*, the Gothic element in *Good Morning, Midnight* is used in the moments when the heroine negotiates her uncertain position in life in relation to her past memories and future uncertainty. When dealing with these borderline states of consciousness in which the past, present and future simultaneously appear in the heroine's mind, Brontë did not have the tools of modernism at her disposal. She relied on the Gothic element of ghostly presences to express Lucy Snowe's uncertainty of the future. Rhys's contribution lies in the way that she expresses the past in visual terms and transposes it into the present. She projects the Gothic element of ghost faces on the screen of the mirror, thus turning the Gothic into a cinematic experience that is happening in the present time. In Brontë's novel, memories are frozen in time, thus haunting Lucy; in Rhys's novel images appear in front of Sasha's eyes, but they lose their power to intimidate her. The past blends with the present, and therefore, it can be negotiated anew. Instead of haunting Sasha, the past becomes a vital part of her present life.

In order to present Sasha's story as happening in the present, Rhys breaks the narrative convention based on a temporal unfolding of events, and instead uses the form of cinematic montage. In the montage, images of experience and of the city are layered on and juxtaposed to one another. In the same way, Sasha's subjectivity operates in terms of this new art form. Indeed, she calls it a "film-mind" (176). Fueled by memories as well as present experiences, the reel in Sasha's head unwinds, often involuntarily. While Sasha often dreads these moments—"My film-mind. . . ('For God's sake watch out for your film-mind. . . .')"—the "film-mind" also creates an opportunity for Sasha to become the active agent of her imagination (176).¹⁷ By engaging with the images in her mind, Sasha achieves a degree of creative and self-crafting agency. To some extent, Sasha takes control of her "film-mind." If not exactly directing it, she manages to distance herself and situate herself as a spectator, thus controlling her own position in the "film." When we consider her looking in the mirror from the perspective of the "film-mind," then Sasha can manipulate the surfaces – for example, she says in the passage quoted before that she can "take off" the mask of her face, and "hang it up on a nail."

Although the "film-mind" often presents images that may frighten her, Sasha seems to embrace this newly discovered imagination. When Sasha talks to René, she labels herself as a "cérébrale," a woman who cannot stop the reel in her head, but who could write a book about it:

‘I’m no use to anybody,’ I say. ‘I’m a *cérébrale*, can’t you see that?’
Thinking how funny a book would be, called ‘Just a *Cérébrale* or You Can’t Stop Me From Dreaming’. Only, of course, to be accepted as authentic, to carry any conviction, it would have to be written by a man. What a pity, what a pity! (161)

Sasha recognizes the transgressive potential of her imagination since cerebral activity is the social prerogative of the male mind.¹⁸ She wryly objects to the gendering of the mind's activity, a question that Virginia Woolf addresses in *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

Sasha's urban imagination shows power not only to transgress social norms, but also to rejuvenate life that may be controlled by them. These effects of urban imagination are manifested in the scenes of Sasha's resistance to the ideology of progress, to all prescribed ways of being in the city that harness the city walkers' imagination. Sasha seeks her own, individual way of walking and dreaming in the city, her own way of relating to it. Therefore, Sasha resists public spectacles, such as urban exhibitions, because she approaches them as normative social impositions, impeding the unruly creativity of the present moment. Resisting the ideology of progress as a prescribed direction of one's physical as well as imaginative movement, she is haunted by the concept of the urban exhibition. Sasha visits the World Exhibition currently taking place in Paris in her "real" external life, but it also appears in her dream as blended with her memories of London:

I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, this Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition – I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This Way to the Exhibition. (13)

In this dream, the crowd carries Sasha forward against her will. This direction becomes an order that she does not want to obey: "I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: 'Just like me – always wanting to be different from other people'" (13). Her nightmare is of being disempowered by the Exhibition that

represents the society driven by pre-packaged and manufactured imagination. This crowd is dehumanized as people capable of focusing on a single direction only; their bodies are no longer human but machine-like, made of steel, and fragmented into parts that conform to the order to follow a single direction: “The steel finger points along a long stone passage. This Way – This Way – This Way to the Exhibition. . . .” (13). Thus Sasha refuses to lose her individuality in the phantasmagoria of the ordered, machine-like crowd.

In order to better understand the social and psychological phenomena entailed in public spectacles, we may find helpful Anne Friedberg’s analysis of twentieth-century visual culture. In *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Friedberg explains that public spectacles, ranging from urban exhibitions to movie theaters and shop windows, move the spectators’ imagination into a “virtual” reality that is distant from the present moment and location. The spectators’ imagination is transported into an artificial universe that is ultimately consumerist; for example, city walkers imagine themselves in new clothes on display. Their imagination thus must be “mobilized” in order to turn them into consumers.¹⁹

Rhys portrays Sasha as moving beyond the mass psychology of modern visual experience. Sasha, as an urban mind freed from personality or character, resists spectacle as a gateway to some future consumerist fulfillment. She is mobilized differently than the citizens of Friedberg’s construction. In her urban peregrinations, Sasha does not become a conventional consumer of pre-fabricated images but instead absorbs the sheer spectacle of urban life. Thus Rhys takes Sasha’s mind away from the future expectations of marriage and bourgeois domesticity, or the unrealistic

fantasies of romance and consumerism fed to the urban dwellers portrayed in Mansfield's short story. Rhys depicts Sasha as embracing her own imagination, no matter how "mad" it may appear to others. Her way of relating to urban space resonates with Michel de Certeau's ideas expressed in his seminal essay, "Walking in the City." In this essay, he focuses on a pedestrian's resistance to the planned city, "the Concept-city" as he calls it, organized by urban planners (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 95). He suggests that the act of walking is a way of negotiating differently the city mapped by urban planners, a way of escaping the mechanisms of power imposed by "the Concept-city," a way of reinventing urban space as "lived space" (96).

Rhys shows how Sasha's imagination, open toward and actively creating such "lived space," has power to free her from the impasse in her life. In her mind, the nightmare of being caught in a single-file procession to the Exhibition turns into a creative, and thus liberating, experience of the present moment. When Sasha awakens from her dream of the Exhibition, she overhears the voice of a street singer that penetrates from the outside street into her room: "I wake up and a man in the street outside is singing the waltz from *Les Saltimbanques*. 'C'est l'amour qui flotte l'air à la ronde,' he sings" (13). Sasha realizes that she is no longer dreaming but listening to a song. Importantly, it is the voice of the singer and the song itself that have the final say, carrying an important message: No matter how nightmarish the dream, it always turns into the music of the city.

Toward the end of the novel, Rhys presents another defining moment, when Sasha humanizes the machine of the city. When René leaves, Sasha, finding herself in

yet another dead end of her life, contemplates the questions of finality. She thinks: “Venus is dead. Apollo is dead; even Jesus is dead” (187). However, Rhys shows that Sasha’s urban imagination, her “film-mind,” exerts a rejuvenating impulse in this dark moment. Rhys emphasizes that although important actors on the stage of Sasha’s life may have left, Sasha’s imagination never stops: “But I know quite well that all this is hallucination, imagination” (187). Thus although Sasha’s hallucination is about the end of her world as she knows it, her vision is of a world machine that in spite of being made of metal is still alive, still moving:

All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes – others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. (187)

In this extraordinary implosion of private and the public spaces, images of Sasha’s memory mix with those of her recent experience. She remembers her real visit to the World Exhibition in Paris with René. She remembers the mass spectacle of the world’s progress as empty, its very monumentality rendering it lifeless: “‘The building is very fine,’ I say, in a schoolmistress’s voice” (164). Thus Sasha’s tone of voice expresses her mockery of the prescribed spectacle. However, in Sasha’s urban fantasy the lifeless machine of the city is turned into a live organism whose parts are animated, even fashionably adorned with mascara. The hollowness of the display and the monotony of Sasha’s voice culminates in a different acoustics when the scene concludes with melody and the rhythm of the street: “Like this: ‘Hotcha – hotcha – hotcha. . . .’ And I know the music; I can sing the song. . . .” (187).

Rhys leaves all these images floating and colliding, refusing to order them into a linear narrative. This lack of order is portrayed as a visual experience. Rhys situates Sasha in the midst of this vortex as a *flâneuse*. She thus maintains Sasha's continuous *flânerie*, situating her amidst the flow of disordered fragments of the city and life, amidst the fragments "left" in the world. Rhys implies that this new perception of the world as the world of floating fragments makes her urban experience uniquely intense. At the end of the novel, Sasha may have long disappeared as a character but her extraordinary, modernist perception of the city has only been more sharply defined. Her relentlessly creative urban presence emanates from the last pages of the text. Sasha comes forth as ferociously alive, as a *flâneuse* whose mind "know[s] the music" and "sing[s] the song" of the city.

Sasha's urban experience thus moves from a narrative space to an independent universe of her mind. It is the experience of the present, of the urban phantasmagoria that cannot be approached in a conventional narrative. For Rhys, the present moments remain just that: moments. Rhys extricates these moments from temporality by severing ties to narrative continuity and finally even to causality. There is no continuity of time and development, no future that arises from the moment, no promise, no hope, but also no loss. These moments can be compared to erratic footsteps as de Certeau describes them: "They are a myriad, but do not compose a series" (97). Thus Rhys's innovative contribution lies in the recreation of the rebellious individuality of the present.

It is in this independent universe of the present that we need to consider the last scene of the novel. It is the scene of Sasha's last encounter with the commercial

traveler, the fiend of hotel hallways who occupies the borderline space between the real and the unreal. After Sasha's conflict with René, who has left her, the commercial traveler unexpectedly enters her room. In this enigmatic and highly unpredictable finale, Sasha consents to his advances:

I don't need to look. I know.

I think: 'Is it the blue dressing-gown, or the white one? That's very important. I must find that out – it's very important.'

I take my arm away from my eyes. It is the white dressing-gown.

He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering.

He doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time. . . .

Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: 'Yes – yes – yes. . . .' (190)

From the perspective of conventional storytelling, Sasha's repeated "yes" to the commercial traveler is surprising.²⁰ However, this scene may be considered through the same lens as Sasha's previous hallucination of urban life as a machine with eyes and steel limbs, perhaps a living organism that is simultaneously threatening and life-enforcing. In light of Rhys's experimental narrative method, the encounter between Sasha and the commercial traveler is thus not between two realistic figures, two characters, "her" and "him," but happens in Sasha's "film-mind" that revitalizes what seems dead or fixed. In her imagination, she engages with what is "left"—the commercial traveler himself. He comes as a substitute for René, the inevitable next lover, grotesquely presented as a counter-lover. He represents Sasha's urban experience, a ghost of Sasha's initial romance with the city.

Even to all this, Sasha repeats her "yes." As a flâneuse open to the city, the walls of her private space are permeable, the door to her room is left open. Her "last"

act is thus a gesture of welcome.²¹ Sasha invites into her universe the erratic flow of fragments of the now, the game that leaves everything open to chance. Perhaps we can say that the commercial traveler finally comes to represent the city itself, a city that Sasha no longer fears. When embracing this urban ghost, Sasha not only embraces the dangers of the city but also creates a new “romance” with it.

Sasha’s final “yes” is also Rhys’s. It is a gesture of an artist who bravely embraces the principle of uncertainty in her rewriting of the urban novel.

Notes

¹ The story's original date remains inconclusive. It was only dated after Mansfield's death by John Middleton Murry, her husband, and Ida Baker, her friend. See Antony Alpers: *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*.

² Set in India, it is a story of a love triangle involving a woman's sexual freedom, interracial marriage, and even infanticide. Cross caused much scandal because she presented these matters in a non-judgmental manner. For a contemporary critical response, see the Introduction to the novel by Gail Cunningham.

³ Alpers states that during her first stay in London at Queen's College, Mansfield read voraciously, making a long list of books that she liked (she marked them with an asterisk) and those she did not in her notebook. Without stating the reason, Mansfield did not enjoy reading Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.

⁴ The tension between the domestic and the foreign in this fantasy seems to replicate the pattern from *Anna Lombard*. Anna is wooed by two lovers, a native man and an Englishman. She finally decides in favor of the latter. Like Anna, Rosabel seems drawn to the unfamiliar and the foreign but remains contained within the familiar and the domestic.

⁵ Sanders argues: "In the end, Mansfield shortchanges her protagonist by refusing to allow for fantasy as anything other than an escape from reality" (10). As a contrast to the passive Rosabel, she gives an example of Margaret Bondfield, a shop girl and a political activist, who "exposed the dangers of fantasy as a form of false consciousness, and rewrote the story of the shopgirl to emphasize the need for collective action and political change" (*Consuming Fantasies* 10).

⁶ When turning London into Venice, Mansfield was probably inspired by her life in Paddington, the part of London called "Little Venice."

⁷ In a highly acclaimed biography of Rhys, Carol Angier writes: "*Good Morning, Midnight* is her masterpiece of self-knowledge, and a very great novel. The only question is whether you can bear it; if you can read it at all, you must admire it. You can't feel about Sasha as you can about Marya [the protagonist of *Quartet*], even about the others – simply irritated by her incompetence, her self-pity, her excuses. For she irritates herself; she takes the words out of our mouths, and is crueller to herself than we could ever be. And there's neither self-pity nor excuses left. There is no more hiding, no more pretending. Sasha is to us as she imagines being to René at the end; not indeed 'simple and unafraid', but herself. *We can look at her if we want to*. It is an extraordinary achievement, for Sasha is as awful as she fears. And yet we like her." (*Jean Rhys: Life and Work* 405).

⁸ Rhys claimed that negative life experience had no power over her any more because "much of her life had already been 'used up' in the novels" (4). Athill further explains

Rhys's view of the interrelatedness of life and novels and gives an interesting example of it: "They were not autobiographical in every detail, as readers sometimes suppose, but autobiographical they were, and their therapeutic function was the purging of unhappiness. Asked during a radio interview whether she had come to hate men, Jean Rhys replied in a shocked voice, 'Oh, no!' The interviewer said this surprised him, because most of the unhappiness in her life must have come from men. Jean answered that perhaps the reason was that the sad parts of her life had been written out. Once something had been written out, she said, it was done with and one could start again from the beginning. Much of the material she would have to consider in an autobiographical book had been disposed of in this way, so that raking over its remains would be unbearably tedious." (*Smile Please* 4)

⁹ For Bowlby, this negativity stands out especially in comparison to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

¹⁰ Sasha is depicted as stuck in the "old times" as well as in the same old space that is a dead-end street, literally and metaphorically speaking: "The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse" (9). Bowlby analyzes this "impasse" as a characteristic feature of this novel: "In a phrase that occurs in *Good Morning, Midnight* at the confluence of personal nightmare and public urban directive, there is simply no 'way out' from something whose difficulty cannot even begin to be named" (*Still Crazy* 34). She further explains: "In rhetoric, an 'impasse' defines a structure where the proposition includes assumptions which are contrary to those of the addressee, who is thus unable either to reply according to the same terms, or to deny something on which s/he has not been directly challenged" (57). For Bowlby, *Good Morning, Midnight* thus works also as a "rhetorical impasse" since "all its positive terms are already excluded with the force of impossibility (once there might have been hope for change, for a long time there has been none)" (57).

¹¹ In *Jean Rhys at "World's End,"* Mary Lou Emery points to Rhys's own multiple exiles as a woman, a woman writer, and a colonial "other."

¹² Rhys's frequent use of the ellipses is part of her stylistic method to show the nature of Sasha's mind.

¹³ Although both Emery and Abel reach the same conclusion that Sasha is mad, they see her differently. Emery sees Sasha as relating to the world of others. She valorizes the overlapping of languages, "the movement between private and public language" in which "the simultaneous sense and nonsense of phrases in different languages [are] juxtaposed to one another" (*Jean Rhys at "World's End"* 29). In this way, Emery argues, Sasha "breaks through the enclosed privacy of the isolated self and joins the world of public, literary discourse. The private fragments of thought, image, sound, song . . . make sense as she reorders them within a social and intersubjective world" (31). Abel, in contrast, sees Sasha as a schizophrenic who is detached from others:

“The schizophrenic . . . feels that his or her true self is split off from both body and world and unable to interact in meaningful ways with either. Because of this split between the true self and the world, the schizophrenic experiences the physical world as flat and empty, a two-dimensional stage setting through which the body wanders (“Women and Schizophrenia” 158).

¹⁴ Crary sees an important shift away from a one-way perception of the world by the spectator: “The eye ceases to be a window . . .” (*Suspensions of Perception* 83). He argues that the singular vision of the world and of the self produced in the process of the “perceptual synthesis” that the mind provides when encountering multiple of visual stimuli is constantly undermined by the failure of this process, by the “dissociation” of vision (92). Crary analyzes this shift in “the perceptual logic of modernity” by using an example of Edouard Manet’s paintings, especially *The Balcony* and *In the Conservatory*.

¹⁵ This is the reason for Bowlby’s claim that mirrors represent “nothing but negative confirmation” (47).

¹⁶ Rhys complicates the conventions of visual culture through slippages of meaning between “mirror” as a reflecting surface and “glass” as a transparent surface. The glass surface is unreliable. It is impossible to determine whether it is strictly a mirror, a drinking glass, a private window or a shop window. In this respect, Paula Le Gallez points out ramifications of the meanings of the term “glass” in another Rhys novel, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). First, “To look at something through a glass implies that a difference of perception will be caused by the effect of the alcohol which had originally been in the glass” (*The Rhys Woman* 108). Second, Le Gallez underlines the replacement of the term “mirror,” connoting reflection, for “glass,” connoting “transparency” of a “window pane” and thus “the lack of reflection” (109).

¹⁷ Bowlby interprets Sasha as a spectator in her own movie theater, watching her past from the present position: “In the case of a division between times, Sasha in the present is spectator to the movie of Sasha then” (*Still Crazy* 51).

¹⁸ In *The Worlding of Jean Rhys*, Sue Thomas explains the concept of a “cérébrale” in history: “The cérébrale and the dreaming woman were late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century types of the ‘sexless’ woman, of the modern woman disordered by her intelligence and education” (130). As Thomas further emphasizes, “The sexological, evolutionary, and literary discourses that circulated in the early twentieth century around the cérébrale and the dreaming woman, types of the ‘sexless’ intellectual woman, are, to date, unrecognized intertexts of the novel” (116). Sasha, obviously, represents a prototype of a demonized “dreaming woman.” Her imagination trespasses into the territory of cerebral activity, traditionally marked as a male domain.

¹⁹ According to Friedberg, modern public spectacles invite two kinds of gaze, both occurring at the same time, the “mobilized” and the “virtual gaze” (*Window Shopping* 2). The spectators’ gaze is “mobilized,” transported into an imaginary, “virtual” reality. For example, when looking in a shop window, shoppers project themselves into the observed product, desiring to acquire a new identity represented by that product. In her consumerist dream, Mansfield’s Rosabel, for example, fantasizes about a more wonderful life than the one she experiences now. Thus it seems that in spite of the allurements of the consumerist spectacle, the spectators as customers lose something essential of the urban experience because they cannot engage with the city in the now. For example, in Brontë’s description of the Crystal Palace, the spectators were stimulated by sights yet remained completely silent as they were being imaginatively transported into some virtual, exotic space.

²⁰ Sasha’s “yes” to the city seems to be a parody of a famous literary moment, Molly Bloom’s “yes” in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), an ironic affirmation of life, its counter-vision. This concluding word has drawn various and often conflicting responses. Bowlby, for example, holds: “The impasse has perhaps ceased to serve as a block, and the narrator has made her way somewhere else, returning to the same room differently. For here she is, after all, with a lover, speaking the lines of Molly Bloom’s affirmation at the end of *Ulysses*” (*Still Crazy* 35). However, Bowlby warns that “in the light of the double occurrences of ‘he doesn’t say anything’ and ‘for the last time’, the triple ‘yes’ offers no sense of a positive interaction” (35). Delia Caparoso Konzett offers another interpretation of Sasha’s final embrace: “Rhys’s concept of a posthumanistic mass identity similarly foregrounds a modern ‘homelessness’ not unlike that of Chaplin’s wandering tramp. In order to reach this ‘imaginative and reflexive horizon’ and realize the potential of mass identity, Rhys’s heroine discovers that she must rid herself of the traditional concept of a stable and sheltered identity. Her final embrace of the repulsive traveling salesman indicates an acceptance of the new social order of the *Angestellte* and its combative zones of day-by-day survival” (*Ethnic Modernisms* 165).

²¹ In *Smile Please*, poignantly subtitled *An Unfinished Autobiography*, Rhys relates an interesting anecdote from her life: “When I first came here, I always left my door open because, after all, I’ve nothing to steal, and he’d often remark: ‘You ought to be more careful. There’re a lot of strangers about.’ Though I knew perfectly well that he and his wife call people from the next village strangers, his repeated warnings had an effect. Now I always lock up, though thinking sometimes of that very frightening ghost story about the solitary woman who has just turned the key and shot the bolt for the night, when she hears a voice behind her saying: ‘Now we are alone together.’” (147-8). This report of Rhys’s conversation with her driver in Devonshire resonates with the novel’s ending. Here Rhys makes an ironical statement on the notion of solitude. Both the ending of the novel and this anecdote imply that for Rhys, solitude is an illusion. The locking of the door is pointless because one can never be alone, free of the ghosts, fears, and voices that populate one’s mind.

Chapter 4

The Flâneuse in Company in Virginia Woolf's Urban Writing

Virginia Woolf turned to the city as a woman artist engaged in the pursuit of new ways of writing and conceptualizing the modern experience. Throughout her life and oeuvre, Woolf was deeply fascinated and inspired by London. Hermione Lee, Woolf's biographer, writes that "London was a centre for emotions and memories, a site of social satire, and a celebration of 'life itself'" and that "her pleasure in walking through the city alone never diminished" (552-3). The streets of London were the source of newness and regeneration for Woolf not only in her private life but also in the public arena in which she was active as an artist and a social thinker. Lee writes: "How to read the polyvalent city was always a test case for her. London was her own past, which she traced and retraced, meeting her previous selves as she went. It was her key to the culture. It unsettled identity, turned her from a writer, wife, sister, aunt, friend, woman, into an unobserved observer. And it was a challenge to the writer" (553).

Woolf was not alone in understanding the city as such a challenge. With Brontë, Mansfield, and Rhys, the other writers in my study, Woolf shared a fascination with urban life saturated with possibility. It can be said that they pursued a common, artistic task of turning their urban experience into literature. Woolf's work echoes Brontë's turn to the city as a liberating space, an alternative to the enclosed space of the home, and the challenging of everything familiar, such as the boundaries of the self or the conventions of gender. In this respect, Lucy Snowe's peregrinations

anticipate the mobility of Woolf's urban walkers and their venturing into the unknown.

With Mansfield and Rhys, Woolf was a contemporary. Woolf knew Mansfield personally, considered her a talented rival, but Mansfield died young, in 1923, just when Woolf's modernist, experimental style took off and started to flourish, and when her ideas on modern art and the role of artists, especially women writers, formed into the shape we know today. Woolf and Mansfield explored similar urban themes, such as the relationship between women and commercialized urban space. Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" (1923), a short story preceding Woolf's later novel, depicts a woman's trip to the city in order to buy not flowers but gloves. Like Mansfield, Woolf explored the affinity between a woman and a shop window, but Woolf's privileged customer, unlike Mansfield's, is economically empowered and able to participate in the commercial exchange of the city.

Woolf was also Rhys's contemporary but their personal and artistic paths never intersected. Rhys's novels of late 1920s and 1930s came after Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and after Woolf's manifestos on modern writing, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923) and "Modern Fiction" (1919). They both searched for a new, modernist kind of imagination corresponding to the instability of modern urban life. Both of them derived their new aesthetic from momentary urban encounters, both challenged narrative conventions and experimented with style, reflecting an urban drifter's imagination in a non-linear narrative form. However, besides Woolf's more optimistic outlook on women's urban experience, a view that certainly reflects her relatively secure social and economic status, the difference between these authors lies

in the focus of their artistic experimentation, namely, in how they define the focal point of urban disorientation. While Rhys is interested in questioning the stability of the literary character in modern urban life, Woolf examines the stability of the authorial “I” in the writer’s encounters with the city. Rhys’s central character is a flâneuse who reaches a series of dead ends in her urban life while Woolf’s flâneuse is predominantly a narrator who uses the instability and incompleteness of urban encounters as a new start from which new stories can unfold. In these new stories, moreover, female flâneurs-as-narrators form alternative collectivities with anonymous passers-by. For Woolf, the urban crowd is never a lonely place.

Outsiders in the City: Reciprocity, Curiosity, and Writing-as-Catching

Woolf employs the principle of reciprocity in the construction of self in relation to urban space.¹ She renders the “I” of the observer in an interactive way. This observing “I” belongs to the persona of an observer who writes a story of the observed and thus becomes an author. Moreover, this writing “I” may not refer to a realistic persona. In this point, Woolf, like Rhys, moves away from depicting the urban self as a realistic character or narrator and focuses instead on the mechanics of urban exchanges between the observer and the observed, in which they both can be re-imagined. In Woolf’s urban writing, the narrator-observer takes shape only in the moment of interaction between the observer and the observed. Thus it can be said that the “I” gives up its own personal story in order to tell the story of others.

The principle of reciprocity is important for Woolf’s critique of women’s role in the private sphere and for the articulation of her new vision for future women

artists. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf explains that the systematic erasure of women's talent that causes their absence or invisibility in the Western literary tradition is the result of women's position as outsiders in public space. When Woolf's narrator deliberates on women's restricted access to public space epitomized by the restrictions of conservative social institutions, she comes to a surprising conclusion. Pondering "how unpleasant it is to be locked out," she thinks of a much worse alternative, "how it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (24). Thus in the first chapter of *A Room*, Woolf strives to overturn the position of women as outsiders. She encourages women to step out into the streets, literally and metaphorically. By embracing the outsiders' position, saying that "the outside of these magnificent buildings is often as beautiful as the inside," Woolf re-casts this disadvantaged position into a position of power (8). Thus the flâneuse's position outside the university, whose walls ward her off, turns into a new point of departure, as the narrator walks out into the very life of London streets. In the remaining parts of the text, Woolf shows how the position of an outsider, literally and metaphorically "without" the public sphere, may become in the future the very position from which to transform the urban self as well as the art of writing.

Woolf's flâneuse can turn her outsider's position to her advantage and become a writer once her imagination is ignited by public space. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923), Woolf chooses the public environment of a train compartment as a site of stimulating encounters. In this public space, the flâneuse-as-narrator meets an unknown woman. Woolf renders this moment of two anonymous people meeting in public space as a stimulus that instigates a narrative in which both involved parties,

the narrator and the protagonist, are being constructed. While observing the woman, the narrator imagines the story of the woman's life; simultaneously, the narrator becomes implicated in this story, exposing herself as one who imagines, constructs, and delivers the story.

The narrator, revealing no specific clues as to her own identity, constructs an imaginary Mrs. Brown and simultaneously constructs herself as a narrator.² The unknown figure "impresses" her: "Mrs. Brown and I were left alone together. She sat in her corner opposite, very clean, very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely. The impression she made was overwhelming. It came pouring like a draught, like a smell of burning" (100 -101). This exchange between the observer and the observed, the "overwhelming" impression by somebody encountered for the first time, is crucial. The reference to smell even suggests the visceral aspect of this experience. This strong impression is what constructs the narrator whose writing "I" is conceived solely in relation to the observed.

The observed, the "non-I," provides a shape for the "I," and delivers its imprint to the world through the narrator. The "I" becomes a narrator only in the moment of meeting the observed – in other words, the narrator does not precede the observed. However, the process of impression runs in both directions: the observed constructs the narrator, turning her into an artist and the author of the story in the frame of which, simultaneously, the narrator creates the story of the observed. The observer and the observed are thus co-dependent.

The story of the observed—in this case, the story of Mrs. Brown—is not a typical fiction. First, there is no linear plot, no development toward a resolution.

Second, it is not “realistic.” The story’s protagonists lack stable identities because they are produced by the imagination of the narrator turned into a writer. They lack concrete identities, being colored by the narrator’s imagination and circumscribed by the moment of the chance encounter.

In conceiving these urban figures made of urban fabric, Woolf uses a technique similar to Rhys’s. Rhys goes beyond the traditional realistic literary character in order to re-imagine the character as an urban mind created and re-created within an urban vortex. Woolf dismantles the literary narrator in a similar fashion and following the same aim. She imagines the narrator not as a persona with an identity but as a mind open to the city. The narrator can be described as a *flâneuse* but this is not a stable identity. Woolf’s *flâneuse* is more unstable than the *flâneur* as we know him from Baudelaire or Poe, as a figure temporarily affected by the urban crowd. Woolf’s *flâneuse*, when she becomes a narrator in her encounter with the urban crowd, loses a personal identity altogether. Her name, nationality, occupation, or personal history are unimportant for the story that she tells. It is the observed that claims the spotlight and who turns the observer into an author whose sole function in the story is to make the observed come to light: “Here is a character imposing itself upon another person. Here is Mrs. Brown making someone begin almost automatically to write a novel about her. I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite” (102). Considering this stimulating pressure, Woolf suggests that it is practically impossible for the *flâneuse* to avoid being transformed into an artist every time she opens her eyes to the city.

In order for the flâneuse to gain life as an author, curiosity is essential. In the voice of her narrator, Woolf emphasizes that the flâneuse must draw attention to all that can be observed in the city, to all that can feed her imagination:

In the course of your daily life this past week you have had far stranger and more interesting experiences than the one I have tried to describe. You have overheard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement. You have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings. In one day thousands of ideas have coursed through your brains; thousands of emotions have met, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder. (118)

Here Woolf suggests that the states of “amazement” and “bewilderment” are the very points of departure for urban writing. It is curiosity awakened by the “overheard scraps of talk” that makes imagination flourish. In another groundbreaking essay, “Modern Fiction” (1919), Woolf makes a related point. She proposes that the “proper stuff of fiction” is non-heroic: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (150).

This comment may express Woolf’s idea that a “small” story about a “small” urban encounter is as interesting as a long *Bildungsroman* trying to cover an entire life.

Thus Woolf encourages her readers to pay attention to small segments of life, become curious about “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” in the city (149). “The mind” so exposed, she writes, “receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms . . .” (150). Consequently, the mind, stimulated by the “myriad impressions,” responds by accumulating these impressions: “Myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas crowd into one’s head on such occasions . . .” (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” 101). The flâneuse’s persistent curiosity stands thus at the core of

her relationship to the city. It is the catalyst that enables the flâneuse to turn her outsider's position into an opportunity for writing.

The always curious spectator sees the city as always mysterious. The mystery of encounters between passers-by creates imaginative space resistant to closure. Both the identity of Mrs. Brown and that of the narrator remain obscure, but it is the kind of mystery that Woolf embraces. It creates a hinge in the story that stimulates the narrator's imagination. Furthermore, imagination growing out of the perspective on the city as a space full of mystery has a rejuvenating effect. In the narrator's imagination, the observed is infinitely transformable. Thus the narrator sees Mrs. Brown as "an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what" (119). In this capacity, she has the power to rejuvenate the spectator every time she appears.

I have analyzed various instances of urban mysteriousness in my previous chapters. In these instances, the flâneuse's imagination expands in encounters with the new and unfamiliar stimuli received in urban space. Woolf uses urban mysteriousness, such as that which envelops the encounter with Mrs. Brown, in a similar way. The element of mystery fertilizes the narrator's imagination and rules out any finality or closure and thus works against the expectations of realism.³ There is nothing that the narrator or readers "really" know about someone like Mrs. Brown. The narrator concludes: "And I have never seen her again, and I shall never know what became of her" (101). The observed phenomenon works here as a figment of imagination, as a phantom who cannot be imaginatively trapped by the writer or the

reader: “I let my Mrs. Brown slip through my fingers. I have told you nothing whatever about her” (112). After Mrs. Brown gets off the train, putting a full stop to the exchange between the narrator and the pursued phantom, “The story ends without any point to it” (101). The story of Mrs. Brown remains unfinished. The “point” to the story is the pursuit itself. For Woolf, the writing inspired by the city is not motivated by the hope of reaching a conventional narrative closure, a revelation or a “truth.” Woolf suggests that there is no unveiling of the mystery but only its unfolding.

Baudelaire considered the state of constant curiosity as the flâneur’s defining characteristic, even “the mainspring of his genius” (“The Painter of Modern Life” 7). The flâneur’s curiosity secures his freshness of perception, comparable to a child or a convalescent. Baudelaire’s famous example of the way such a quintessential curiosity works concerns Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840). Baudelaire emphasizes, “Curiosity had become a fatal, irresistible passion,” one that turned Poe’s observer into a seeker of urban mystery. The narrator’s “pursuit of an unknown, half-glimpsed countenance that has, on an instant, bewitched him,” turns into a detective story (7).

The same kind of curiosity drives Woolf’s flâneuse to pursue the mysteries of the city. However, Woolf makes it imperative that they should remain mysteries. A full disclosure of some truth behind the façade would be detrimental for the flâneuse’s imagination because it would stop its unfolding. In her short story, “The Mark on the Wall” (1919), Woolf writes:

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our

eyes. And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality out of their stories . . . (85-6)

Woolf is intrigued by these phantoms of inspiration although they always remain beyond reach like Mrs. Brown. The observed cannot be fully contained and described as it is always escaping. Woolf makes a corresponding observation in *The London Scene*. Here Woolf writes, “The charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass” (19). In other words, London’s charm leaves the observers of London continually intrigued.

For Woolf, it is not important to discover the truth or to describe the reality of London, Mrs. Brown, or one’s own self, but to investigate these reciprocal relationships that expand one’s imagination.⁴ Woolf implies that these phantoms are the guardians of imagination because they ignite and advance it. Woolf’s urban observers as narrators maintain the perspective on the city as urban mystery because they seek to maintain their curiosity as a prerequisite for their writing of urban fiction. The state of the mystery’s permanent irresolution does not lead to frenzy or hallucination, so typical for the narrator driven by the desire to resolve the mystery, well captured in Poe’s story, but serves as a positive impetus to writing.

At the same time, Woolf’s urban phantoms differ radically from ghosts that appear in Brontë and Rhys. In *Villette*, the Gothic element, such as the ghost of a nun, represents the recurrent threat of prescribed lack of mobility that bars Lucy from overcoming the fear of the unknown and thus stands in the way of reaching her maturity and independence. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the uncanny figure of the commis voyageur represents Sasha’s past that haunts her present life. Although the

commis is an urban ghost, representing a danger for women in urban space, he is nevertheless connected to Sasha's personal history, to her self. Woolf's phantoms, in contrast, stand entirely outside the self. They neither reflect the narrator's fears or feelings, nor are they a part of her past. They arise only within a short-lived moment of their encounter with the narrator; they lack a temporal continuity. Their past or future is unimportant for the story and their connection to the narrator is only that of imaginative fertilization.

The dynamic between the *flâneuse*-as-writer and phantoms of the city is significant for understanding Woolf's experiments with the notion of the authorial "I" and with narrative form. This dynamic can be called "catching." The catching of a phantom like Mrs. Brown epitomizes an exchange between the observer and the observed, between an artist and the city. The process of writing the story of Mrs. Brown, who epitomizes urban life full of change and contingency, means to enter into a relationship with that which is always escaping. Mrs. Brown introduces herself by clearly stating that the constant pursuit of the unknown is the way to know her: "My name is Brown. Catch me if you can" (94).⁵ This urban phantom, nonmaterial yet pressingly tangible, allures her potential writer in a "seductive and charming way" and invites her to write about their encounter (94). This seduction yields no trophy in the form of a "truth" or a satisfactory explanation: "Few catch the phantom; most have to be content with a scrap of her dress or a wisp of her hair" (94). The appeal, "catch me if you can," encourages the narrator as well as the readers to pursue modern life with the aim not to explain but to expand its mysteries. With each step or stimulus, the pursuit can take different directions, requiring new negotiations between

the flâneuse and the city. This strategy does away with any finality and linearity. The “catching” of Mrs. Brown remains in a continuous form. The story of the pursuit is thus non-linear and open-ended.

In other words, stories in which the narrator engages in the process of writing-as-catching must inevitably remain “unwritten.” In a way similar to “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf’s short story “An Unwritten Novel” (1920) renders the narrator as an anonymous observer, intrigued by mysterious figures in another train compartment. The narrator develops a story of catching the pursued phantoms, but leaving their mystery unresolved. The narrator’s imagination yields a number of stories about her fellow passengers. At the same time, the narrator self-reflectively comments on her precarious and contingent position determined by this short-lived encounter. In this way, the narrator constructs herself as limited by her own story. When the train reaches the station, the story ends and so does the need for the narrator.

The story begins with the narrator speculating about what hides behind the façades of fellow travelers. This process involves specifically examining “faces opposite” displaying no emotions but only their “reticence” typical of the look of passengers on public transportation (112). The narrator’s attention is, nevertheless, arrested by a woman’s face showing an “expression of unhappiness” (112). In a way similar to the case of Mrs. Brown, it is this moment of impression that constitutes the flâneuse’s writing “I.”

Interestingly, the narrator expresses her dissatisfaction with the picture of life she gets from mass media, represented here by *The Times*. This newspaper at first

seems promising for the flâneuse's curiosity: "'Take what you like,' I continued, 'births, deaths, marriages, Court Circular, the habits of birds, Leonardo da Vinci, the Sandhills murder, high wages and the cost of living—oh, take what you like,' I repeated, 'it's all in *The Times*!'" (112). But in spite of these sensational stimuli, the newspaper fails to ignite the flâneuse's imagination. The stories in *The Times* are already written and the readers thus become only passive consumers. Instead of opening the lives of others to further speculation, the newspaper works as a "protection" against life (112).

Therefore, Woolf's flâneuse rejects the influence of mass media. Her approach resonates with that of Rhys's protagonist whose interactive and unpredictable "film-mind" produces mental images incommensurate with those fabricated by the media. Woolf's narrator likewise seeks inspiration in life outside the media, seeing them as institutions that leave no room for individual imagination. The unhappy unknown woman catches the narrator's attention precisely because she seems to refuse being contained within a fixed identity that can be turned into a product and sold. The woman stands outside the crowd because instead of reading *The Times*, she "does nothing at all," only "looks at life" without putting up a façade for others, without "play[ing] the game" (112). The woman seems to resist the consumerist game. Thus in this story, Woolf gestures toward the advantages of being an outsider, the premise that she later develops in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

The flâneuse-as-narrator starts "reading" the woman instead of the newspaper: "I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze" (114). The

narrator becomes “impressed” by her: “But she had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison . . .” (114). The narrator and Minnie Marsh, as the narrator names her, share the same compartment, the urban space in which reciprocity between its occupants may give rise to fiction. This reciprocity is here expressed as a “shared secret” or “poison” that establishes an imaginative exchange between the narrator and the observed figure.

The process of “catching” the phantom of Minnie starts with the narrator’s speculation: “What she rubs on the window is the stain of sin” since Minnie probably “committed some crime” (115). Consequently, the narrator composes Minnie’s story, a sequence of events leading to an imagined crime:

A crime . . . They would say she kept her sorrow, suppressed her secret—her sex, they’d say—the scientific people. But what flummery to saddle *her* with sex! No – more like this. Passing down the streets of Croydon twenty years ago, the violet loops of ribbon in the draper’s window spangled in the electric light catch her eye. She lingers—past six. Still by running she can reach home. She pushes through the glass swing door. It’s sale-time. Shallow trays brim with ribbons. She pauses, pulls this, fingers that with the raised roses on it—no need to choose, no need to buy, and each tray with its surprises. ‘We don’t shut till seven’, and then it *is* seven. She runs, she rushes, home she reaches, but too late. Neighbors – the doctor – baby brother – the kettle – scalded – hospital – dead – or only the shock of it, the blame? Ah, but the detail matters nothing! It’s what she carries with her; the spot, the crime, the thing to expiate, always there between her shoulders. ‘Yes,’ she seems to nod to me, ‘it’s the thing I did.’ (115)

At first, the narrator picks for Minnie a crime story as if cut out from the newspaper:

“I have my choice of crimes” (115). Minnie’s crime story, however, is hardly sensational and the narrator evaluates it as “a little commonplace” (116). It depicts Minnie as a woman blaming herself for the act of trespassing from the role of a caretaker to that of a careless consumer. Despite Minnie’s imagined guilt, her only crime is that of escaping the home and becoming a free urban walker for a moment.

However, the narrator is dissatisfied with the story as it is being unfolded in her imagination as if on a page of a newspaper, that is, told as a chain of traceable events leading to a final disclosure. Although the narrator's imagination is influenced by the style of the newspapers, she realizes that Minnie's story cannot be grasped through a cause-and-effect sequence. Such one-directionality, Woolf believes, erases the mystery and contingency of modern life. Therefore, Minnie's story told in the form of a crime story is finally unacceptable for her. The narrator states that Minnie's personal "crime" does not hold a key to her "secret" and refuses to put such a closure on it.

Instead, the narrator offers a different, more open-ended form for Minnie's story. This form is inspired by Minnie's action, by her "dropp[ing] little angular fragments of eggshell – fragments of a map – a puzzle" (117). As the title of Woolf's story, "An Unwritten Novel," implies, this kind of fragmented text, symbolized by the dropped eggshells that only offer a "puzzle," will remain "unwritten." Importantly, Woolf embraces what seems to be an imperfection at first sight. The kind of writing that exposes the fragments of life maintains both writers' and readers' curiosity and expands their imagination into uncharted areas, but has no traditions to guide it. Thus in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf's manifesto in defense of modern writing, Woolf asks her readers not to reject such experimental texts, professing that "we must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments" (117).

Finally, when the train stops at the Eastbourne station, the story ends. Minnie Marsh explains to the narrator that the young man waiting for her is her son. The narrator, dejected by this finding that puts an end to her imaginative adventure,

laments: “Well, my world’s done for! What do I stand on? What do I know? That’s not Minnie. . . . Who am I? Life’s bare as bone” (121). However, the story does not end in despair. The narrator feels rejuvenated by the very adventure of flânerie: “the last look of them . . . brims [her] with wonder – floods [her] anew” (121). The narrator concludes by embracing the inconclusiveness of modern life:

Wherever I go, mysterious figures, I see you, turning the corner, mothers and sons; you, you, you. I hasten, I follow. . . . If I fall on my knees, if I go through the ritual, the ancient antics, it’s you, unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it’s you I embrace, you I draw to me – adorable world! (121)

Thus the narrator not only accepts but also celebrates the element of urban contingency because stories inspired by chance encounters keep the mystery of the protagonists alive. This is essential for the art of storytelling that creates a continuous conversation with readers without turning them into consumers of texts as ready-made products.

Woolf’s strategy of writing-as-catching renders the flâneuse-as-narrator in a constant pursuit of urban stimuli, assembling and re-assembling different characters and stories in which the narrator herself is implied as one of the protagonists. At the same time, this kind of writing cannot happen in the familiar space of the home. In a later essay, “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” (1927), Woolf shows how this kind of pursuit leads not only to writing but also enables a new kind of collectivity that is possible only outside of the home. In this “essay/adventure,” as Rachel Bowlby calls it, an ordinary walk changes into a carnivalesque adventure (*Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* 210).⁶ The flâneuse-as-narrator sets out to buy a lead pencil, which is only a pretext for her walk. The adventure itself turns out to be more important than the goal. Woolf’s street hunter holds that “to

escape is the greatest of pleasures” (35). What the flâneuse desires is to “indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter—rambling the streets of London” (20).

In the city, the flâneuse leaves her familiar identity behind:

We are no longer quite ourselves. As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six, we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one’s own room. For there we sit surrounded by objects which perpetually express the oddity of our temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience. (20-21)

In order to see with fresh eyes, the narrator strives to eliminate the interference of the familiar. The narrator’s self is “shed;” it is rid of the “shell-like covering” (21). She acquires a wandering, “enormous eye,” compared here to “a central oyster of perceptiveness,” that replaces a conventional center of perception, the familiar “I” left at home (22).⁷

In the beginning of the street adventure, the eye stays only on the surface of things, claiming only to pursue beauty: “Passing, glimpsing, everything seems accidentally but miraculously sprinkled with beauty . . .” (27).⁸ The narrator-as-flâneuse seems to seek the beauty of the new which is possible only if it is not translated into familiar frames of reference, into “our temperaments,” and “memories of our own experience.” The eye stays only on the surfaces since “The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream; resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks” (22). Thus the flâneuse’s eye, in contrast to the eye of a detective, does not look behind the façade: “it creates; it adorns; it enhances” the canvas of the urban scene (27). This canvas is being constantly painted by the observer, but the picture is never final – like Minnie’s

story, it is unfinished and the flâneuse's observation leads to the perpetuation of the urban mystery, that is, to more surfaces, speculations, and stories.

When the flâneuse happens to be “in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves,” she seeks to restore the mystery by trying “to compose these trophies in such a way as to bring out the more obscure angles and relationships” (23). She focuses on urban phenomena that are unfamiliar, on that which stands out in the urban crowd. Although the flâneuse deliberately moves her attention from surface to surface without “digging deeper,” her wandering attention pauses when she spots a company of three women, one of whom is visibly different from the other two. The narrator calls her a dwarf:

Hence after a prolonged diet of this simple, sugary fare, of beauty pure and uncomposed, we become conscious of satiety. We halt at the door of the boot shop and make some little excuse, which has nothing to do with the real reason, for folding up the bright paraphernalia of the streets and withdrawing to some duskier chamber of the being where we may ask, as we raise our left boot obediently upon the stand: “What, then, is it like to be a dwarf?” (23-24)⁹

The flâneuse reaches toward the dwarfed woman via her curiosity. When asking, “What, then, is it like to be a dwarf,” the flâneuse forms an imaginative link between them, trying to see the street from the dwarfed woman's perspective and simultaneously observe the whole street changed by this woman's view. The flâneuse wonders how individual perspectives, when engaging with others, change the urban scene, how they create and re-create it together. The perspective that the narrator seeks is thus not singular but multiple, consisting of interactions between different perspectives.

In the flâneuse's view, the city may be compared to an ever-turning kaleidoscope. Like Mrs. Brown and Minnie Marsh, the woman makes an impression

on the flâneuse but, in comparison to them, she has a more far-reaching effect: she impresses the whole street. As the narrator observes, “But she had changed the mood; she had called into being an atmosphere which, as we followed her out into the street, seemed actually to create the humped, the twisted, the deformed” (25). In this way, importantly, the narrator’s imagination produces not only an individual story of the dwarfed woman but the story of the whole street.¹⁰ In this moment, the story becomes about a street dance in which everybody participates: “Indeed, the dwarf had started a hobbling grotesque dance to which everybody in the street now conformed . . .” (25). The narrator thus imagines a specific kind of urban collectivity formed on the basis of a temporary sharing of the deformed woman’s world.

The “truth” of the spectacle is never fully available to the observer; any final interpretation of the scene, a final truth, would be an unacceptable imposition, the closing of the urban mystery. Thus the flâneuse speculates about the lives of others but refuses to claim absolute knowledge of their experience. For her as a writer, it is crucial to ask questions that trigger her imagination, launch the process of writing-as-catching. Final answers would immobilize imagination and thwart the very process of writing.

Woolf’s flâneuse strives to describe her encounters with modern phantoms that arise from the strangeness and incompleteness of urban experience, standing at the beginning of urban adventures that finally remain inconclusive. These figures cannot be “materialized” to create a platform for social action without destroying their mystery. As urban phantoms, they ultimately remain a mystery. For Woolf, the continuous process of imaginative “catching” these urban phantoms is the most

honest artistic way of getting closer to the hidden, individual, and immeasurable “truth” of their lives, lives that cannot be known merely by observation.

This kind of *flânerie* represents a modernist view of the differences between life and art. The artistic eye catches experience in all its mystery as the raw material which may finally be ordered into art. As the narrator of “Street Haunting” concludes, *flânerie* leads to literature and eventually to the second-hand bookshop, the reservoir of provisionally ordered views of life. In the circulation of books and their exchange with generations of readers, the *flâneuse* can pause, finally reaching her destination. In the second-hand bookshops, where past writings live, “we find anchorage in these thwarting currents of being; here we balance ourselves after the splendours and miseries of the streets” (29). After the street adventure full of contrasting stimuli, the second-hand books enable a provisional reconciliation of these contrasts and thus provide the *flâneuse* with some provisional understanding of humanity.

Woolf’s narrator reminds her readers at the end of her urban adventure that she is a writer in need of her instrument, the lack of which made her go out into the winter afternoon. Importantly, “the only spoil” that she has “retrieved from all the treasures of the city” is not a consumer item but a small tool for changing the world, “a lead pencil,” symbolizing the act of writing itself (36).

The Collective Urban Presence, the Self in Company, and Women Writers

If Woolf’s *flâneuse* renounces a direct access to the observed, then we might ask about her own self. The narrator leaves the old self behind in order to get a fresh experience of the city, the experience unencumbered by old, familiar meanings. The

flâneuse treats the self as an entity that can be re-invented. The narrator observes: “Let us put off buying the pencil; let us go in search of this person – and soon it becomes apparent that this person is ourselves” (33). Thus the urban adventure results in a self that is unpredictable and complex. Glimpses caught at separate moments present to the eye different kinds of selves. This unsettling experience does not seem to cause any discomfort to the flâneuse. She even seems intrigued by this process:

Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? (28-9)

In the city, the flâneuse arrives at a new vision of her self as multiple and discontinuous. Importantly, there seems no pressure to commit to any one of these selves. Liberated from the idea of the self as single and functioning within a temporal continuity, the narrator leaves the question of the self open; literally she leaves the self in the form of a question.

The initial “I” turns into “we” who “go street rambling” (20). The formation of the collective “we” requires that one’s individuality is temporarily suspended as we “become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one’s own room” (20-1). If there is no lasting “I,” then there cannot be any lasting link to the outside; there is no singular, permanent “I” that can relate to others on a permanent basis. Woolf states in *A Room of One’s Own*, “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (4). The “truth” of one’s being lies for Woolf in what can be called urban presence—in fleeting, precarious, and provisional relationships that the self forms with other selves. Such

fleeting alliances between urban dwellers are formed by the flâneuse in “Street Haunting.” By the same token, these alliances can be formed through second-hand books between the protagonists, the writers, the readers, as well as occasional customers who browse through them.

This kind of friendship thrives only in the external world, outside the private sphere of the home. The books in the second-hand bookstore reflect the flâneuse’s own, albeit temporary, homelessness. These books are “wild” and “homeless” and “have come together in vast flocks of variegated feather, and have a charm which the domesticated volumes of the library lack” (29). However, “in this random miscellaneous company we may rub against some complete stranger who will, with luck, turn into the best friend we have in the world” (29). Rachel Bowlby notes that in “Street Haunting,” the urban anonymity between strangers is surprisingly desirable: “The friends are associated with the house that is being temporarily left; but then it turns out that pleasant companionship (‘agreeable’ ‘society’) is actually to be found out of doors and among the ‘anonymous’” (*Feminist Destinations* 210). Similarly, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” Woolf calls the anonymous public a “travelling companion” (113). Thus Woolf, like Rhys, conveys a sense of permeability of walls that separate urban subjects once the flâneuse’s imagination expands. Rhys is interested in undermining the solitude of the self in an isolated room by populating that room with voices holding a conversation with the self. Woolf draws on a similar idea of the mind as populated with others when she declares: “A writer is never alone. There is always the public with him—if not on the same seat, at least in the

compartment next door” (113). Thus Woolf’s flâneuse finds not only inspiration in the anonymous urban crowd but also companionship.

Baudelaire describes the male flâneur’s fantasy of transgressing the border between oneself and the crowd. The more porous border makes the urban crowd more accessible to the artist who can then draw from it material for his stories. Baudelaire’s famous short prose poem “Crowds” is a prime example of this fantasy:

Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet. The man who is unable to people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a bustling crowd.

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or some one else, as he chooses. Like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man’s personality. For him alone everything is vacant; and if certain places seem closed to him, it is only because in his eyes they are not worth visiting. (*Paris Spleen* 20)

Urban crowds undoubtedly inspire both male and female flâneurs for the same reasons of igniting and advancing their imagination. However, Baudelaire’s fusion of “multitude” and “solitude” to the point that these terms become “identical” and “interchangeable” yields fruits for art but no collective. The poet may imaginatively visit others, moving in and out of their bodies, but they leave no mark on his “wandering soul.” “They” are always separate from “him.” In “Street Haunting,” on the contrary, “one” is re-defined into the all-inclusive “we” (or “ourselves”). In this way, Woolf envisions “a sense of collectivity” that “is apparent in [her] shifts between ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘me’ (but not ‘I’),” as Jane Goldman argues in *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (49). In short, for Woolf one cannot be alone in a crowd because one immediately becomes part of it.

Woolf had been exploring the idea of the relationship of the individual to the crowd from the earliest days of her career. In her unpublished short story, “The

Mysterious Case of Miss V.,” written as early as 1906, we can see the evolution of her thinking. In this story, Woolf pictures the alienation of the modern observer of the city, showing the conventional theme of loneliness in the midst of the crowd: “It is a commonplace that there is no loneliness like that of one who finds himself alone in a crowd; novelists repeat it; the pathos is undeniable; and now, since the case of Miss V., I at least have come to believe it” (31). In the story, the narrator searches for an unknown woman whom she provisionally calls Miss V. In the narrative of the pursuit of this urban phantom, “a story [that] is scarcely possible except in London,” the narrator rather surprisingly discovers that Miss V. is not singular but multiple (30). Miss V.’s multiple urban presence cannot be contained by the singularity of her name: “one name seems instinctively to do for both—indeed one might mention a dozen such sisters in one breath” (30). Thus the narrator uses only one letter “V” to name the phantom, but the personal pronoun referring to Miss V. is plural, not “she” but “they”: “They have been gliding about London for some years; you were to find them in certain drawing-rooms or picture galleries” (30-31).

The “case” of Miss V.’s identity, as well as the question of the narrator’s relationship to her, is thus impossible to solve using conventional logic. As the story proceeds, the narrator declares to have developed a special kind of connection between herself and the woman (or women), a special kind of kinship: “A tie of blood—or whatever the fluid was that ran in Miss V.’s veins—made it my particular fate to run against her – or pass through her or dissipate her, whatever the phrase may be—more constantly perhaps than any other person, until this little performance became almost a habit” (31). Their reciprocity symbolized by the indefinable “fluid”

makes their individual boundaries porous. Previously “running against” each other, these urban figures are now able to “pass through” each other. Their selves become arranged in a new collective constellation that may be termed a “self in company.”

In the moment of constructing a “self in company” in lieu of a solitary self, it becomes impossible for the *flâneuse* to hold a singular, detached spectatorial position. Once the boundaries between the narrator and Miss V. are “dissipated,” Miss V. suddenly seems to have disappeared from the narrator’s view, “ceas[ing] to haunt [her] path” (31). The narrator finally interprets Miss V. not as a separate figure but as a presence graspable only in terms of their common situatedness within urban space.¹¹ In relation to the multiple urban presence of Miss V., the *flâneuse* becomes inseparable from urban space. She feels crucially connected with the crowd and thus feels no longer lonely in it.

Although the narrator experiences a sense of loss whenever she detaches herself from the crowd, that is, whenever she uses her singular pronoun “I”— for example, when lamenting, “So I shall never meet her shadow any more,”— the separation of the narrator’s “I” is sometimes necessary (32).¹² It is certainly useful for the narrator to preserve a singular vantage point, a singular voice and thus the personal pronoun “I,” in order to tell a story. However, this “I” is hard to maintain because the story of the narrator is simultaneously a story of others. The narrator thus oscillates between her singularity and multiplicity. The singular self in Woolf’s rendering is transformed by the collectivity that it enters, and it temporarily becomes a self in company. The term, “company,” however, differs from the conventional idea of comradeship. It implies the urban presence of others and acknowledges that the

selves interacting in urban space become open to each other in these interactions, and thus the narrator uses the plural rather than the singular.

But how is it possible to preserve one's independent self if exposure to urban experience results in being a part of a collective we? If the shadow-like, collective presence of Miss V. is typical of the female flâneuse's experience, is it even possible for her to be alone? And what are the characteristics of female solitariness, if it is different from its male counterpart?

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf calls for women's independence, financial as well as social. In this respect, Woolf calls for the kind of solitariness that would free women from the Victorian ideal of a woman who is never alone, always in the presence of someone else, or always present for others. Achieving independence thus requires solitude. Woolf suggests that having a room of one's own should enable independent observation, thinking, and writing. As the flâneuse's identity becomes more collective and public, however, she runs the risk of losing her solely private space, her room of her own. Michael Tratner even argues that Woolf, together with Joyce, Eliot, and Yeats, "concluded that there is no private realm, not in the house and not in the mind" (*Modernism and Mass Politics* 6).¹³ However, Woolf does not dispense with the idea of private space altogether; she re-imagines this space so that it matches the self in company. If the self is re-imagined as the self in company, then the challenge for a writer lies in re-drawing, in re-thinking the very architecture of the room as the space of that self.

Woolf suggests that the space in which the self in company dwells must be open and combine both private and public spaces. Thus in the story of "Miss V.," for

example, the phantom's self in company cannot be reduced to a private space with a private address, a space divided from the surrounding urban space. Miss V. occupies neither private nor public space alone because she occupies both of them simultaneously: she is "both out and in" (32). From the perspective of a self in company, the two spaces, private and public, cannot stay separate from each other.

This merging of the public and private spaces becomes a political move in *A Room of One's Own*. In this manifesto, Woolf introduces Mary Carmichael, an imaginary woman writer epitomizing the generation of women artists who break free from false ideals of womanhood that preclude their artistic creativity and public life as artists. In spite of showing how women were enslaved within domestic space and erased from public space, Woolf suggests that the path to emancipation leads through reclaiming private space. For the new women writers, as Woolf proposes, it is necessary to redefine private space, to claim "rooms of their own." She renders this move as the first step toward making their mark in public life.

If *A Room* tells a story of a writer, the writer's "I" is needed as well as the space that belongs to this "I." However, Woolf makes it imperative that Mary Carmichael's room does not seal her in. Mary Carmichael constantly looks out of her window like a flâneuse: "Mary Carmichael, I thought still hovering at a little distance above the page, will have her work cut out for her merely as an observer" (88). By opening Mary Carmichael's room onto a street, Woolf implies that women artists must look outside of their rooms, and thus outside of their own selves. Their flânerie challenges the boundary between the outside and the inside of their rooms that they nevertheless keep in order to safeguard their creative space. Therefore, Mary, as well

as the narrator of the text, can be only partially, provisionally, and temporarily singular for the purposes of keeping the narrator's "I" intact so that she can thus tell a story: "Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance) . . ." (5). The "I," or Mary Carmichael, or Mary Beton, bears a striking resemblance to the narrator of the story of Miss V. It can be said that the "I" is in the company of Mary Carmichael, as well as in the company of Mary Beton and Mary Seton.

As a self in company, Mary Carmichael is thus characterized by a non-singular self. As such a complex self, she is also a complex *flâneuse*. If she is always in the company of others, she cannot permanently maintain a privileged position separate from others, but she always strives to be a part of the observed. Mary C. is thus neither completely isolated from the street, nor completely subsumed by it. As a spectator, she oscillates between these two positions. In this way, the *flâneuse* is able to maintain her mental connection with the city that she observes. For example, in the scene of observing a man and a woman getting into a taxi, the *flâneuse*, who observes the scene from her window, enters into the scene not as a detached observer, an extraneous element, but as an observing mind that is connected to the scene, impressed by it. In this scene, observation works as a channel of communication established between the observer and the observed: "the sight two people getting into a cab had the power to communicate something of their own seeming satisfaction" (96). Thus Woolf suggests that the observer is not separate; she is not alone even when she is in her room alone, observing the street from the window. The *flâneuse's* self becomes a part of the observed scene.

Regarding this scene, Bowlby points to another implication of the flâneuse's connection with the observed couple. The flâneuse's intervention (by observation only) into the observed scene complicates an easy interpretation of the couple as existing in their own, perfectly sealed-off universe:

The harmonious 'man-womanly' couple, in the street, in the room, in the writer's mind, is put at the distance of a satisfying scene for the narrator looking on. It is thus not simply represented as completeness, but set in the form of a *fantasy* of completeness and complementarity—between the sexes, within the mind, in the work of literature. The apparently simple duality of masculine and feminine is disrupted in this superimposition of the third element, the spectator. (*Feminist Destinations* 37-8)

In *A Room*, Woolf models the self of a future woman writer on such open space and her mind on that of an urban observer, one who uses the process of observation to enter into a significant relationship with the observed. This mind, like the observer herself, is situated both without and within urban space:

It [the mind] can separate itself from the people in the street, for example, and think of itself as apart from them, at an upper window looking down on them. Or it can think with other people spontaneously, as for instance, in a crowd waiting to hear some piece of news read out. It can think back through its fathers or through its mothers, as I have said that a woman writing thinks back through her mothers. (97)

The mind that Woolf describes here is situated within urban space, working always in relation to it. It can even be understood *as* such an urban space. Although the flâneuse's "I" can be separate, posited at a window above the scene, her mind also creates collective relations.

The modern mind then works as a solitary yet open space. Similar to a room of one's own, such a private space is open to the public. For modernists like Woolf, Tratner argues, "The mind is not an internal substance that can be molded to conform

to a stable set of moral and intellectual principles; it is rather a space through which pass numerous streams of contradictory words, images and feelings, most of which never even become conscious” (25). Like a room of one’s own, the mind then is autonomous but not homogenous. Indeed, Woolf proposes to re-examine the concept of “the unity of the mind”: “What does one mean by ‘the unity of the mind,’ I pondered, for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being” (*A Room* 97). Tratner argues that “many modernist literary forms emerged out of efforts to write in the idiom of the crowd mind” (2). He even states, “Modernism was not, then, a rejection of mass culture, but rather an effort to produce a mass culture, perhaps for the first time, to produce a culture distinctive to the twentieth century, which Le Bon called ‘The Era of the Crowd’” (2). Tratner presents an example of Bernard, one of the characters of *The Waves* (1931), who “describes himself as escaping the militarizing effects of education precisely because he always sees himself as a relatively indistinct part of a crowd” (236).¹⁴ Bernard “chooses the perspective of a ‘third-story window,’ where people are slightly blurred, neither reduced to an undifferentiated sea, as they would be from the roof, nor perfectly defined as individuals, as they would be in a relationship of one man and one woman. He prefers the perspective of the crowd” (Tratner 236). Thus Bernard bears the characteristics of Woolf’s self in company, claiming, for example: “To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people’s eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is myself” (*The Waves* 116). Interestingly, Bernard also oscillates between a collective identity and standing alone,

outside of it: “I am not part of the street—no, I observe the street. One splits off, therefore” (*The Waves* 115).

Importantly, Woolf employs this modernist strategy of “splitting” vis-à-vis the crowd to expose as well as overcome gender-biased assumptions of a woman’s place in society. This is especially true in *A Room* where Woolf calls for the re-imagining of the boundary between public and private spaces by situating the self in both of them simultaneously and establishing a channel of communication between them, which frees the mind to imagine new terms of women’s emancipation. She also uses this idea in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a novel that carries the message of emancipation as the transformation of the self less directly. The heroine of the novel, Clarissa, is rendered as an observer who is both an outsider and an insider of public space: “She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Picadilly. She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on” (8). The oscillation between the outsider’s and insider’s position makes Clarissa a flâneuse with a self that is not only open to the city but also a part of it.¹⁵

For Clarissa, moreover, this oscillation enables a different kind of knowledge that comes from observing the city: “She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (8-9). The reading of a book or learning of a language, the traditional knowledge that women were prevented from acquiring, is

juxtaposed here to reading the city and learning the language of passing cabs.

Clarissa's city knowledge, importantly, leads to another perception of her self. She can circumvent the understanding of her self as only a subject limited in time and space. Instead, she can situate her self in relation to transient "this" or "that" of the city, simultaneously taking these selves on and off. Her "I" is not solid, neither "this" nor "that." These two demonstrative pronouns, supposedly securing a stable point of reference, instead point to something fleeting and insecure, yet more vital for Clarissa. She is both "this" and "that," having the subjectivity of a street haunter whose walk in the city leads to encountering multiple manifestations of the unexpected and allowing herself be transformed by them.

Nevertheless, the way Clarissa situates herself vis-à-vis the street differs from Bernard's. The difference lies in the gender-specific terms of women's position in the male-oriented public sphere. Both Bernard and Clarissa "split off" as observers of the street; they are detached from the street but they also feel themselves to be part of it. But for women, the splitting does not end there. Unlike Bernard who "splits off" in order to occupy both positions above the street and in the street simultaneously, a woman's detachment from the street is more complicated. Woolf argues that "if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilisation, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical" (*A Room* 97). Thus a woman's position vis-à-vis the street is more complicated because as an observer, she can be situated in the street, but as a woman she is excluded from that street.

Although her mind may be flexible, "always altering its focus, and bringing the world

into different perspectives,” she must always add the perspective of an outsider reflecting the world from the vantage point of exile (*A Room* 97). The flâneuse must always situate her self both inside and outside of “civilisation.” This double situatedness vis-à-vis the street that represents “civilisation,” society, culture, and art exposes the flâneuse’s crucial difference from her male counterpart: if a flâneur is a modern figure, then a flâneuse is modern twice.

Woolf’s ideas on the political implications of women’s position as both insiders and outsiders in culture, history, society, and the public sphere are developed in *Three Guineas* (1938). In this later work, Woolf elaborates her famous concept of “the Outsiders’ Society” that joins “educated men’s daughters” (106). This society is “anonymous and elastic” as it renounces any official title or territory (106). The outsider says, “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (109). Woolf suggests that re-imagining and re-writing women’s marginal position can best be accomplished from the margin, from the perspective of those excluded. Those who stand “outside society” hold “the same ends” as those who are “inside society,” but they strive “to achieve them by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach” (113). Referring to the complexity of this challenge, Anna Snaith writes:

The issue which Woolf so often addresses, then, is how women should enter literal and metaphorical public spaces. The Society of Outsiders in *Three Guineas* is one possible answer. The Society is a way of negotiating between the public and the private: entering the public world yet retaining the importance of privacy in the face of ceremony and publicity. The Society is a way of both participating or entering, yet changing and transforming. (*Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* 12)

Woolf thus envisions an important critical strategy of claiming women's presence in the public sphere while simultaneously re-imagining that presence by re-writing the very dichotomy of the private and the public. Stressing the "dialogic" nature of "outsiders," "with one economic foot in and one ethical foot out of the dominant ethos," Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues: "Outsiders who are not integrated into the institutions of assimilation and social control are depicted by Woolf as more disinterested, less seduced by reward systems of power hierarchies, not obedient to the rituals of power and privilege" (*Writing Beyond the Ending* 170).

Moreover, when Woolf draws on women's collective exile within the male-oriented public sphere, she offers an important perspective for rethinking women's emancipation. The status of an exile vis-à-vis the "civilisation" of her own country, paradoxically, needs to be both refused and retained. Woolf encourages women to struggle for their place in the public sphere on the one hand. On the other hand, Woolf turns the tables on "civilisation." Being an outsider is a skill that enables one to dismantle the illusion of its coherence and stability. Woolf importantly metaphorizes "civilization" as an urban street in order to expose its fragmentariness, transience and contingency. And those who are able to engage with it are also able to advance "civilisation" and themselves within it.¹⁶

Woolf shows how the re-imagining of the flâneuse's self in relation to the city may also work as a method of rescuing women from obscurity, the predicament that the outsider's status entails. Woolf shows how this method works on individual and collective levels in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room* respectively. Clarissa alternates between two selves, the singular, domestic self that must die and the open, multiple

urban self that rejuvenates her. In this regard, an important challenge for Clarissa is to re-think the significance of her own mirror reflection. Observing her face in a mirror, Clarissa thinks to herself: “That was her self—pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman . . .” (37). The mirror image offers a momentary unity but there is no such singular Clarissa. As Bowlby says, the novel “makes visible the absence of unity behind the centred façade of ‘a woman’ deemed to be the emblem of such pacific completion . . .” (*Feminist Destinations* 83). This unity may perhaps be achieved but only for a moment; it is a process that requires directed effort to “compose” all the “incompatible” fragments of self into some kind of provisional unity that bears the name Clarissa Dalloway.¹⁷

In a lesser known short story, “The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection” (1929), Woolf deals with a similar theme. She juxtaposes imaginative speculation to mimetic reflection as two opposing ways of constructing subjectivity. The narrator tries to unveil the true self of a mysterious Isabella Tyson in a way similar to the “catching” of Mrs. Brown. Typically for Woolf’s urban writing, the narrator decides that “one must prize her open with the first tool that came to hand—the imagination” (223). Thus the narrator speculates about the imaginary Isabella’s identity in relation to the surrounding objects that “seemed” they “knew more about her than we . . .” (222). Instead of providing reliable leads, however, the environment enveloping Isabella seems to have a life of its own, one that exists only outside the mirror reflection. Objects, the “creatures” of her drawing room, are alive when they are not

scrutinized and reflected: “lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling” are “things that never happen . . . if someone is looking” (221). In contrast, however, “in the looking-glass things had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality” (222). One-directional reflection provided by a “looking glass” kills, so to speak, the otherwise unnoticed life of the surroundings. The reflection provided finally by the mirror offers only a dead truth:

At once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth. It was an enthralling spectacle. Everything dropped from her . . . Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. (225)

The mirror here transfixes the images and thus precludes further imagination. Because Isabella lacks an element of mystery, she turns out to be an unexciting figure: “Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody” (225). The “truth” provided by the looking-glass precludes imagination because it kills the mystery. The story begins and ends with the phrase that contains an ironical warning: “People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms,” a mistake compared to leaving open “letters confessing some hideous crime” (221).

Relying on mirror reflection, based on one-to-one correspondence, simply yields no satisfactory answers to the questions of modern urban subjectivity. As we have seen, Brontë questioned the power of the mirror to reflect the truth in several places in *Villette*—for example, when Lucy sees herself from the point of view of others. Rhys’s protagonist Sasha is challenged by mirrors, provoked by them to negotiate the fragmentation of her self.

Besides using the mirror to challenge the truth of a singular reflection of the self, Woolf shows how the imaginative potential is unleashed once Clarissa stops looking into the mirror and walks out into the streets. When Clarissa leaves the confines of her private space, she is free to imagine herself anew. As we have seen at the very beginning of the novel, Clarissa's self is singular whenever she experiences her domestic self. However, she realizes the falsity and fragility of this domestic self, named "Mrs. Richard Dalloway," the self that she says makes her "invisible, unseen; unknown" (11). When at home, this self seems to be her prison, firmly fixed on her. When in the city, however, this prescribed self loses its power over her. It suddenly seems disposable like a garment that may be taken off. There is hope for rejuvenation in Bond Street.¹⁸ Once she arrives there, we see a different Clarissa: "Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on an iceblock" (11). In the Bond Street scene, similar to the scene when Clarissa steps out of her house to "buy the flowers herself," the boundary of her individual self as a solitary shopper is dissolved by her relationship to the street (3). Now even Clarissa's thoughts of the finality of her life, her own mortality, loosen the house's former grasp on her:

what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches

as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.
(9)

The sense of being invisible in the city translates here into the continuity of life.

Clarissa believes that “the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . (153). Thus the “unseen” part of Clarissa “spreads wide,” attached to the company of urban subjects, such as Peter, who remembers her “transcendental theory” (153). In this way, Clarissa’s “odd affinities” literally return her “I” to the “non-I,” to other people, to trees, or places, in short, to life itself (153).

In order to resurrect Clarissa from her “attic room,” where her bed, symbolizing her marital self estranged from her husband, is ever “narrower and narrower,” Woolf takes Clarissa into public space (31). Like a street haunter enchanted by the urban mystique that renders the self opaque and out of reach, Clarissa feels revived as she thinks of her self as a part of limitless urban life. However, Woolf simultaneously re-imagines Clarissa’s private space. Opening the windows of private rooms out into streets, as I have argued before, corresponds to opening one’s mind to negotiate all possible perspectives and relationships arising within the ensuing exchanges. Besides implying the act of looking, windows thus play a vital role as venues of communication between the world inside and outside. Consequently, Clarissa’s opening of her private window opens her mind so that she can see herself anew within new relations and perspectives.

Clarissa claims that she is neither “this” nor “that.” However, her self does not disappear in a void between these two points but instead surfaces in their company.

This process of the surfacing of self in the company of others is manifested, for example, in Clarissa's relationship with an old lady in the opposite window. In several passages, Clarissa observes this anonymous woman in the opposite window. In these passages, their individual boundaries blur, but they keep their separate rooms and thus their private selves. Connected yet separate, they form an alliance. Clarissa considers herself as the old lady's anonymous companion:

And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that—that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it—but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. (126-7)

The question of the “privacy of the soul” arises precisely in the moment of Clarissa's forming this relationship. Although Clarissa protects her own privacy, never visiting or talking to the observed woman, she becomes transformed into a self in company when she looks out of her window.

In spite of this alliance, Clarissa respects and recognizes the division between their private spaces and worlds. She knows that they will always be a mystery to each other:

that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she could see going from chest of drawers to dressing-table. She could still see her. And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love? (127)

Thus Clarissa believes that the relationship between herself and the old lady, who remains anonymous, is the urban “mystery” that needs to be preserved. She even calls

it a “miracle” that established frames of meaning, neither “love” nor “religion,” relying on conventional renditions of separate subjectivities, can “solve.”

Clarissa observes the old lady again at the end of the novel: “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” (186). However, now their eyes meet for a moment: “She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her!” (185-6). This fleeting moment of their mutual observation culminates in the concluding question that destabilizes the referent of the personal pronoun “she:” “Could she see her?” (186). But who is now “she” and who is “her”? Does “she” refer to Clarissa or to the old lady? Who sees whom? Thus through the interplay between these two windows, simultaneously separating and connecting these two distinct private spaces, a special kind of urban collectivity is formed, transforming Clarissa’s separate self into a self in company.

As Woolf re-writes separate subjects into selves in company, Clarissa and the anonymous lady reach out for yet another member of the urban collective. As they are looking at each other, Clarissa suddenly thinks of the news of Septimus’ death:

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! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (186)

In the darkness of her private space, Clarissa realizes her “odd affinity” to the anonymous Septimus.¹⁹ Her thoughts shed light on the interconnectedness of all

urban subjects. This “odd” collectivity counteracts the suffocating darkness of Clarissa’s private room by engaging her, albeit indirectly, with the lives of others. Clarissa is thus connected to the whole city, even to those she never meets. This kind of collectivity in which one subject is crucially affected by others works in a similar way to that of “Street Haunting,” in which one urban subject changes the “mood” of the whole street.

Still, the question of an individual’s uniqueness seems of high importance to Clarissa, as she asks: “Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? (126). Clarissa’s singularity is not dissolved but surfaces within the collectivity in the links that Peter Walsh remembers as her “odd affinities”:

But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not ‘here, here, here’; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns. (152-3)

Thus Clarissa’s “I” is being revamped within company. Only within the collective, paradoxically, can the distinctness of her individual self shine forth. This idea of singularity that acquires its shape only when in company marks a development in Woolf’s work. In her later novel *The Waves* (1931), Woolf builds on *Mrs. Dalloway* by bringing fragmented, multiple selves into similar collectivities that recognize the self’s uniqueness and expand it in terms of its engagement in the world.

Separate selves forming the collective of selves in company nevertheless manifest their uniqueness by their surfacing from the crowd as distinct urban presences, simply as “themselves.” Clarissa’s walk in London displays several such occasions. For

example, there is a crowd in front of the Buckingham Palace, waiting for the mysterious car to go by. This crowd, hoping to spot the Queen, is suddenly portrayed as consisting of individuals: “Joined by an elderly gentleman with an Aberdeen terrier, by men without occupation, the crowd increased” (19). A specific individual self (the “elderly gentleman with an Aberdeen terrier”) influences the collective as the crowd “increases.” Within the crowd, individuals merge into a mass, yet there is no doubt they also exist as separate selves:

Little Mr. Bowley, who had rooms in the Albany and was sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately, sentimentally, by this sort of thing—poor women waiting to see the Queen go past—poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War—tut-tut—actually had tears in his eyes. (19-20)

These individuals become “unsealed” within the crowd. They surface from the crowd, yet simultaneously, they never leave the crowd, remaining integral parts of it. This process is even more legible in the skywriting passage: “Every one looked up,” as the crowd of public spectators watches the plane writing letters in the sky (20). The crowd thinks in unison, raising questions: “But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps?” (20). The questions are collective but the responses are individual as the crowd disintegrates into separate members: “‘Glaxo,’ said Mrs. Coates . . . ‘Kreemo,’ murmured Mrs. Bletchley . . . ‘It’s toffee,’ murmured Mr. Bowley” (20-1). Thus from the collective of spectators, individuals appear one by one like the separate letters popping up in the sky: “Every

one looked up” (20). This is not a formless crowd of everybody but a collective of “every one”— every distinct one.

The sky-writing passage is followed by Clarissa’s return home, asking her maid: “What are they looking at?” (29). Clarissa’s question suggests that she may not have seen the plane. But if Clarissa’s self is understood as a self in company, she remains an integral part of the crowd that holds her in its midst. Thus paradoxically, Clarissa can be said to share the spectacle in spite of her possible absence from the sky-gazing crowd. Like Miss V., she is inseparable from the urban space. However, once the door of her house shuts on her, the urban Clarissa makes a stark contrast to the domestic Clarissa: “The hall of the house was cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand 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” (29). This interconnectedness, the collectivity of selves in company, is only temporary. Whenever Clarissa is called upon by her domestic duties, she must cut herself off from the circuit and take on her singular self. Inside her house, Clarissa is separate, alone. Indeed, she “has left the world.” Feeling like a nun – none, her social and spatial enclosure shuts communication between the parts of her self that transgressed the boundaries of public and private spaces.²⁰ The “shutting” of her exchange with the city is accompanied by Clarissa’s “rais[ing] her hand to her eyes” against the darkness of the “vault”-like hallway of the house.

Woolf resurrects Clarissa by means of enabling her to overcome the sense of her self as singular and thus mortal and become a part of the immortal city. In *A*

Room, this strategy works on a collective level. Woolf turns to the city to resurrect anonymous women by re-imagining their “unrecorded life” (89). The question is, who will write this history? Can it be written by a self in company? In this regard, Woolf suggests employing the street haunter’s imagination. Thus “with the eye of imagination,” Woolf’s narrator sees two women crossing the street, thinking what they would answer if asked, “what were you doing on the fifth of April 1868, or the second of November 1875?” (89). The answer of an anonymous voice, as the narrator imagines, speaks for all: “she would look vague and say that she could remember nothing. For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children set to school and gone out into the world” (89). These observations lead the narrator to a powerful conclusion: “Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie” (89).

But in order to make the prospects less bleak, Woolf encourages women to turn to the streets of London:

All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael as if she were present; and went on in thought through the streets of London feeling in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life, whether from the women at the street corners with their arms akimbo, and the rings embedded in their fat swollen fingers, talking with the gesticulation like the swing of Shakespeare’s words; or from the violet-sellers and match-sellers and old crones stationed under doorways; or from drifting girls whose faces, like waves in sun and cloud, signal the coming of men and women and the flickering lights of shop windows. All that you will have to explore, I said to Mary Carmichael, holding your torch firm in your hand. (89-90)

Woolf refuses to present the absence of records of women’s lives as a void. On the contrary, “the accumulation of unrecorded life” even creates a “pressure.” Woolf asks

Mary Carmichael to work with this accumulated mass, which, like an evanescent steam, can be turned into a powerful force. As the passage above shows, the individual lives of women cannot be recorded individually, as they are interwoven with each other, especially in terms of their public identities. The forgotten women do not surface from the undifferentiated mass as individuals yet. However, they already begin to show as clusters of public identities, as the violet-sellers or the match-sellers. As the passage continues, the narrator's observation zooms in on an individual woman: "Mary Carmichael might well have a look at that in passing, I thought, for it is a sight that would lend itself to the pen as fittingly as any snowy peak or rocky gorge in the Andes. And there is the girl behind the counter too—" (90). Here Woolf uses the strategy of bringing the characters to the surface as she does in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The life of "the girl behind the counter" surfaces from the anonymous urban crowd and makes a public appearance. She is anonymous and her life is so far unwritten—an anonymous woman as Mrs. Brown or Minnie Marsh. However, her hope lies in her attachment to the city, to other sellers as well as to the narrator with whom they create a collective presence.

Like Mrs. Brown, the anonymous shop girl ignites the narrator's imagination. The curious narrator expresses a wish to know more about her, thinking: "I would as soon have her true history as the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon or seventieth study of Keats and his use of Miltonic inversion which old Professor Z and his like are now inditing" (90). However, it seems insufficient to record her life without recording the narrator-observer's relationship to the world around her:

Above all, you must illumine your own soul with its profundities and its shallows, and its vanities and its generousities, and say what your beauty means

to you or your plainness, and what is your relation to the everchanging and turning world of gloves and shoes and stuffs swaying up and down among the faint scents that come through chemists' bottles down arcades of dress material over a floor of pseudo-marble. For in imagination I had gone into a shop. (90)

The public space of the shop overlaps with the private space of Mary Carmichael's soul. These two spaces are in constant flux. Mary hardly upholds her detachment as a singular spectator. She is constantly becoming a part of the urban collective. There is an "odd affinity" between the narrator, the imaginary Mary Carmichael, and an anonymous girl behind the counter. As such a self in company, Mary must write her self in relation to the hard-to-catch world of others, the "everchanging and turning world."

Woolf predicts the future of the woman writer represented here under a singular yet collective pronoun "she": "She will be a poet, I said, putting *Life's Adventure*, by Mary Carmichael, at the end of the shelf, in another hundred years' time" (94). Interestingly, this vision, concluding Chapter V of *A Room*, is followed by the opening lines of Chapter Six: "Next day the light of the October morning was falling in dusty shafts through the uncurtained windows, and the hum of traffic rose from the street. London then was winding itself up again; the factory was astir; the machines were beginning" (95). Thus Woolf extends Mary Carmichael's world well beyond the scope of a shop. The relationships she must "illumine" run well beyond it. In this way, Woolf cements the union between the industrial city and a woman artist. Like London, with its machines and factories, a new poet is "astir" and "beginning."

Mary Carmichael's collective self corresponds well to Woolf's belief that all art is inevitably collective. Woolf proposes that "masterpieces are not single solitary

births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice” (65). In other words, every “single voice” speaks from “the experience of the mass behind” that voice. Moreover, she adds that “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (76). Thus paradoxically, Woolf looks back in time in search of future poets. If Mary Carmichael “will be a poet,” it means that she is one already. It can be said that there is no shortage, no void or lack of poets that women now must fill. On the contrary, there have always been women poets who are now forgotten and need to be resurrected. In spite of the lack of official records of their lives, Woolf suggests that the resurrection—or resurfacing—of these poets is possible through imagination. Thus Woolf imagines, which coincides with remembering, Shakespeare’s sister Judith. She predicts that “the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born” (114). By writing about Judith, Woolf expresses her own relationship to this figure. Within this relation, the anonymous artist who “died young—alas, she never wrote a word,” acquires a concrete, individual name and recognition (113).²¹

Furthermore, Woolf suggests that Judith Shakespeare creates an essential presence without whom Woolf, nor any other female artist, could not emerge. Resurrecting Judith Shakespeare works as a way of paying tribute to those anonymous artists whose absence becomes an inspiring presence, and who continue to accompany the artists who follow them. But besides their inspiration and influence,

these forgotten women are linked to present and future artists so that they enable the individuality of present artists to surface, to be visible and available to themselves and to others. Without their company, it can be said that one becomes none.

Unsurprisingly, one has to go to the city to find Judith Shakespeare. Woolf describes her urban grave:

She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. (113)

Thus Woolf suggests that Judith's individual embodiment, her private body and self, can be encountered again if she is re-imagined as a self in company by a self in company. As "continuing presences," Shakespeare's sister and Mary Carmichael create a relationship comparable to the busy urban intersection "where the omnibuses now stop." At this stop, Woolf urges everybody to get on board. This stop presents an opportunity to reflect on one's own relations to the anonymous passers-by as well as to those who have already passed away, the urban phantoms who are companions of future generations of women artists. Finally, Woolf encourages her readers to take up this challenge: "This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her" (113). Thus Woolf's conclusion works as an invitation in the form of a conversation with her readers. If this "power" is "yours," then it is necessary to understand this pronoun on both an individual and collective level, as a singular pronoun different from "her," but one that is simultaneously plural and yet includes "her." In this way, Woolf's final lines work as an invitation to get on board that bus.

Notes

¹ In “Mrs. Dalloway and the Female Vagrant,” Leena Kore Schröder argues that Woolf, like Bakhtin, sees “the condition of the world as being essentially dialogic” and that this “dialogic view of experience necessarily takes in otherness as a determinant of meaning”(330). Always in relation to its public “other,” the boundaries of identity can be destabilized by exposure to a shower of stimuli when walking in the city. Moreover, Schröder stresses the “incongruity” of the modern urban scene (encompassing crowds, houses, sounds, smells, etc) in which Woolf’s characters are steeped. (326). Such “incongruous” stimuli ignite artistic imagination. Hermione Lee makes a corresponding observation: “The more violent and strange the sights, the better pleased Woolf was” (553). In her autobiographical essay “A Sketch of the Past,” written in 1940, Woolf declares, “the shock-receiving capacity makes me a writer” (72). She writes that the “scenes” that she “receives” in the city are “representative” of the “reality” which “floods in if “the sealing matter cracks” on us, since “we are” just “sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality . . .” (142). Here Woolf asks herself, “Is this liability of mine to scene receiving the origin of my writing impulse?” (142).

² I am using feminine personal pronouns to refer to Woolf’s narrators although they are mostly anonymous voices without a determined identity and gender. *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* have specifically female narrators.

³ According to Bowlby, Woolf’s “putting the novelist into the carriage with her subject” and “using the public space as a sign of strangeness rather than predictability” challenges the expectations of contemporary realist fiction in spite of the commonplace, realistic setting, making thus an argument “*against* realism” (*Feminist Destinations* 5).

⁴ In this way, Woolf resists the tradition of mystery and detective fiction. In this tradition, as Carl D. Malmgren argues, “The investigator takes the haphazard and confusing clues of the story of the investigation and invests them with sequence and causality, bringing the story of the murder to light,” thus “secur[ing] mystery’s dominant sign—truth—by showing how all the case’s seemingly wayward signs bespeak it” (*Anatomy of Murder* 24). The characteristic feature of mystery fiction is “the desire to see the mysteries engendered in the hermeneutic code solved” (24). Malmgren draws on Todorov’s *Poetics of Prose*.

⁵ “Catch me if you can” are originally Jack the Ripper’s words addressed to Scotland Yard.

⁶ Rachel Bowlby argues that Woolf’s “different turn” lies in her “think[ing] of writing itself as like walking” (*Feminist Destinations* 199). Deborah Parsons makes a related point, emphasizing a specific advantage of the urban walker’s mobility: “the act of

walking denies the observer a totalizing, constant perception and a self-absorbed subjectivity" (*Streetwalking the Metropolis* 72).

⁷ In Woolf's work, there are interesting slippages between the "eye" and the "I." Regarding "Street Haunting," Emily Dalgarno points out: "The narrator is an eye that is not an 'I,' and in fact refuses the use of 'I' that is customary in the code of representation" (*Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* 12). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf uses the term "the eye of imagination" that well expresses the imagination of the flâneuse who is a narrator using an "I" that tells the story of the observed, but who is not necessarily a conventional, realistic narrator (89).

⁸ Interestingly, Bowlby contrasts Woolf's eye's pursuit of beauty to the practice of conventional male flânerie (represented here by Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust), in which beauty is "added as the missing, 'complementary' part to make a whole of what would otherwise be just the fragmentary vision" (*Feminist Destinations* 202).

⁹ Some of Woolf's critics have expressed concern about the flâneuse's insensitivity toward the disabled or the poor in "Street Haunting." Bowlby is critical of the flâneuse's "deliberate indulgence in purely visual pleasures at the expense of all else" (212). She adds that these scenes inevitably "haunt the harmless pleasures of window shopping" (214). Susan M. Squier is even more critical of the flâneuse for her lack of social reflection, pointing out that the street haunter does not "examine her own privilege" (*Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* 46). In Squier's words, "The stroll through London leaves her [the narrator] neither morally, spiritually, nor politically changed, but merely entertained" (47). It is true that the flâneuse does not answer the question, "What, then, is it like to be a dwarf," but she does notice the incongruity of privilege and suffering that exist side by side in the urban spectacle: "this maimed company of the halt and the blind," unfortunate "derelicts" who "choose to lie not a stone's throw from theatres," and "close to those shop windows where commerce offers to a world of old women laid on doorsteps, of blind men, of hobbling dwarfs, sofas which are supported by the gilt necks of proud swans" (26-7).

¹⁰ Bowlby notices that "odd trios" are pervasive in "Street Haunting" (214). Moreover, she adds that such incongruity actually challenges traditional gender symmetries, arguing: "Like Aristophanes' three sexes, Woolf's curious trios and types show up the normal orders in an unfamiliar light," exposing "the inadequacies of the habitual binary division" (*Feminist Destinations* 216).

¹¹ Here I draw from Pamela L. Caughie's interesting discussion of "the observer's *situatedness*." She argues against misunderstanding what could be termed Woolf's "narrative uncertainty," which "is usually interpreted as Woolf's belief that we can never know another being because all experience is relative and subjective." (*Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism* 69).

¹² The story has an ambiguous ending. The narrator decides to “call on Mary V. in person,” a “strange fantastic plan” to “track down the shadow, to see where she lived and if she lived, and talk to her as though she were a person like the rest of us!” (31). Upon reaching her flat, however, the narrator neither meets Miss V., nor finds more clues. Instead, she finds a “signboard” that “stated ambiguously – like the rest of us – that she was both out and in” (31). The maid informs the narrator that Mary V. “had died yesterday morning, at the very hour when I [the narrator] called her name” (32). Interestingly, Susan Dick, the editor of a collection of Woolf’s short fiction, includes the original ending of this story that exposes the difficulty of positing a final solution to Miss V.’s case: “I walked straight in and saw Mary V. sitting at a table” (295). The problem of two endings, however, can be solved by interpreting Miss V. as both dead and alive. Miss V.’s death may symbolize the end of a singular self that is possible to isolate from the urban crowd. In contrast, Miss V. can be still alive if she is understood as connected to the flâneuse. She remains alive as a self in company— a part of a provisional urban collectivity, the common urban presence.

¹³ Tratner continues: “This does not mean that they did not feel strong desires to escape politics, to live private lives, to think private thoughts; they all expressed such desires. But the new developments in politics and the new disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and sociology convinced these modernists that vast social forces permeate and shape private relationships, private thoughts, and even the desire for privacy” (6).

¹⁴ Tratner refers to a passage in which Bernard confesses to have survived “because it is the panorama of life, seen not from the roof, but from the third story window that delights me, not what one woman says to one man, even if that man is myself” (*The Waves* 242).

¹⁵ Caughie terms this double situatedness as Clarissa’s “intimacy-yet-detachment” (74).

¹⁶ DuPlessis argues that it is outsiders who are “critical inheritors” (*Writing Beyond the Ending* 170).

¹⁷ In *The Singing of the Real World*, Mark Hussey argues that Woolf renders modern identity as “a flux of sensations and attributes that can be drawn together by an effort based on such a security-ensuring stimulus as the sight of one’s body in a mirror” (26).

¹⁸ Reginald Abbott provides a short history of Bond Street that he deems as “actually a lesson in the growth of modern consumerism” (198). First, Bond Street was a “man’s street,” specializing in “expensive goods and services for men about town” (198). But later, Bond Street “opened up to offer expensive, custom-made goods and

services to women” too, thus being slowly changed by “the democratizing rules of the new marketplace” (“What Miss Kilman’s Petticoat Means” 199).

¹⁹ The lines from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* connect Clarissa and Septimus throughout the novel. Clarissa reads the lines “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/ Nor the furious winter’s rages” in a shop window on her walk early in the day.

²⁰ In my chapter on Brontë’s *Villette*, I interpret the trope of a nun as “none” in a similar way, as referring to women’s exclusion from male-oriented public space.

²¹ In her argument about London’s crucial role in Woolf’s thinking about women’s writing, Squier focuses on the contrast between Judith Shakespeare and Mary Carmichael: “The London she portrayed shifted from an environment hostile to women (like the city Judith Shakespeare encountered) to a later city like that experienced by Mary Carmichael, which at least held the possibility for the emergence of authentic female—even feminist—voices and values” (4).

Conclusion

The flâneuse figure that takes shape in the works of women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century represents a new female urban subjectivity, one that flourished in modern urban settings that challenged the imagination of these writers. In my study, I have focused on ways in which this response to urban modernity sets the flâneuse apart from the perspective of the male flâneur. Although the flâneuse's freedom to stroll, look, and explore the city was limited because of the conventional gendering of space, the women writers of my study responded to these challenges with surprising energy and creativity, finding new ways to express the urban experience.

Their exploration of urban space was thus a journey into the unknown, one that included brave encounters with the unfamiliar, negotiations with the uncertainty of city life, and the pursuit of urban mystery. While the scholarship on urban modernity shows that women were limited by the restrictions of public space, I show that the flâneuse developed precisely because of these restrictions. I argue that negotiating the challenges of this unprecedented journey transformed the woman in the city into an urban subject.

In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette*, she envisions a heroine whose story is not determined by romance and marriage but by her imaginative mobility beyond the boundaries of all that is familiar—beyond the circle of her family, beyond the images of Victorian womanhood, and finally, even beyond her own country. Despite her Gothic fear, she develops a new sense of independence and self-definition.

In the twentieth century, Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys show a darker side of urban experience. They explore the lives of women who in spite of their outward emancipation lack the security provided by marriage or wealth. These writers focus on their protagonists' mental space, the border between the mind and the city. In their fiction, the spaces of the flâneuse's mind and the city overlap. As the experience of the flâneuse becomes increasingly interiorized, a new urban imagination is set in motion.

In order to explore this new subjectivity, Mansfield and Rhys move away from realism toward a modernist sensibility about the fragmented self. Mansfield's Rosabel is a prisoner of her fantasies of consumerism and romance. In spite of her independent income, Rosabel cannot satisfy her inner longings and Mansfield depicts her as a character defined by her dreams rather than her daily life. Rhys's Sasha is a drifter, truly lost in the city. There is no certainty in her life and she is trapped by the memories of her happier past. Despite this portrait of deterioration, Rhys offers a new understanding of Sasha's urban mind, of its flexibility and creativity. As the realistic sense of character breaks down, the urban mind surfaces in all its richness and complexity. Rhys foregrounds Sasha's conversation with the city, her mental talk with urban space. For this new flâneurial mind, Rhys coins a new term, a "film-mind," emphasizing the flâneuse's engagement with the images of the city, her creation of a montage from city fragments, and thus a provisional ordering of the disorderly urban experience.

Woolf paints a more hopeful picture of a flâneuse who gains new life in the city. Woolf's flâneuse treats urban encounters as opportunities for re-imagining her self, redefining the "I" as it opens to the "non-I" of urban multiplicity. Thus Clarissa Dalloway experiences impending death inside her house, but is fully alive in the streets of London. There she feels liberated from the restrictions of her domestic role, free to make new connections to the flux of urban life. These connections, their vitality and their mystery, have the power to rejuvenate her.

In the process of opening her mind to the city, Woolf's flâneuse inevitably becomes an artist. The urban dwellers that the flâneuse observes—in the street, on a train, or from her window—have such an impact on her imagination that she cannot resist creating stories about them. Thus in Woolf's early essays, the flâneuse becomes a narrator as well as a character. Woolf imagines her engaged in a two-way creative process: besides using urban encounters as opportunities for writing, the narrator herself is reciprocally created by what she sees and thus becomes a literary character within her own story.

The urban self engaged in such reciprocal encounters is not separate from what she sees. As the flâneuse meets other urban dwellers, she creates imaginative affiliations with them. Their individual urban selves temporarily merge. For such a self I use the term "self in company" to emphasize the shared urban connection between the observer and the observed. Such a shared and collective experience makes the flâneuse a more confident citizen of the city. No matter how provisional and contingent the ties between anonymous urban dwellers may be, she feels no longer threatened or alone in the urban crowd.

Woolf uses this collectivity to articulate a new position for a woman writer. In *A Room of One's Own*, she suggests that women writers, as outsiders in public space, can use these imaginative encounters and affiliations in order to re-claim this space. Woolf thus overturns women's originally disadvantaged position as outsiders to public life. When Woolf's narrator opens her window onto the street, she invites the city into her own room, thus overlapping these public and private spaces. The city becomes a part of the flâneuse's creative process, a fruitful resource as well as a partner in her future writing.

The new tradition of the flâneuse in literature, as these writers envision it, has a different significance than the tradition of the male flâneur. The flâneuse represents more than a mere register of modernity, an artist with an eye on the city. The male flâneur is inspired, perhaps even challenged by the city, but is never radically transformed by it. Experiencing the city as a female urban walker, however, means a radical transformation of one's optics, and of the self, the imagination, and one's life journey.

The writers of my study show that this transformation is worth the challenge, but also that it comes at a price, one that the male flâneur does not have to pay. In order to envision a new path and claim a new self, the flâneuse must see and go beyond the old, restrictive social patterns. In the fiction of these authors, this unprecedented venture leads to a specifically female perspective on modernity. The tumultuous path toward an uncertain goal engenders an imaginative mobility, the very characteristic that defines female modern subjectivity.

When Brontë speaks of sacrificing the old and the familiar, she emphasizes the contradictory nature of the process, its life-threatening aspect, but at the same time its potential to lead Lucy Snowe to a new kind of life and empowerment. Sacrificing the old self is still a central issue for the twentieth-century flâneuse, as we have seen in Mansfield's story of Rosabel who dreams of marriage, or in Rhys's novel that culminates with Sasha's hallucination about the gigolo's return. Mansfield and Rhys intensify the drama of the journey toward a new self. They do not shy away from exposing their protagonists' feelings of disorientation, mental illness, and loss of agency. At the same time they offer an equally intensive vision of a new urban self, wavering but vibrant with possibilities.

It can be said that in the fiction of these twentieth-century writers, the flâneuse grows stronger. This strength lies in the power of her imagination rather than in a smooth development toward a bright future. It lies in the flâneuse's creativity, resilience, and enhanced mental capacity to engage with the contingency and uncertainty of a solitary life in the modern city. This resilience and resolve of the female urban walker connects all the writers of my study. Their uncertain path may be full of successes and failures, right and wrong steps, but they never question the very first step and never doubt that they must make another. Thus in Rhys, we see a painful, yet powerful gesture of affirmation. Sasha's "yes" to the commis voyageur symbolizes the flâneuse's embrace of the city that is hostile yet still worthy of her love.

These authors claim the creativity of the flâneuse's mind as the only certainty. This creativity is also the basis of their provisional optimism. This is most clearly

seen in Woolf because she sees the female urban experience as the primarily source of woman's creativity. Urban mysteriousness and uncertainty yield creative impulses that turn the flâneuse into an artist who casts her self anew in conversation with urban life. She represents the creative mind as making literature in encounters and conversations with the everyday phantoms that become her companions on her artistic path.

I interpret the optimism of these writers as their way of paying tribute to the city, to the condition of urban modernity where it is difficult but possible for a woman to redefine her self and her relationship to the world. This optimism is reflected in the literary techniques used by the writers of this study who have made important contributions to the way that urban experience is expressed in modernism. As early as mid-nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë dared to employ graphic psychological and literary terms to describe her heroine's altered states of consciousness. Katherine Mansfield found ways to show Rosabel's dream life in expressionist terms. Rhys, perhaps the boldest experimenter among these writers, found original ways to express the hallucinatory mind as a collage of fragments, but at the same time captured the creativity of the modern mind. Finally Woolf, in throwing off the tradition of realism, discovered a new kind of storytelling. Her storyteller is herself created by the city each time she engages with it.

These writers, as well as their ferociously alive protagonists and narrators, continue to speak to a modern-day audience. They inspire us by their innovative artistic vision as well as by their unyielding struggle to claim new forms and meanings of women's subjectivity and new ways to express the urban experience.

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