

EILEEN XIAOXI YU

*Forth and Back: Spatial Trespass and
Relapse in Mrs. Dalloway*

In her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf depicts the protagonist Clarissa Dalloway's shopping journey and her daughter Elizabeth Dalloway's urban adventure in central London. The female characters' experiences in the city have often been analyzed in relation to Woolf's feminist thinking regarding private and public spheres, female subjectivity, and urban mobility.¹ This essay extends existing scholarship by investigating the characters' spatial practices within the broader context of Woolf's feminist development, particularly the evolution of her feminism from the 1920s to the 1930s. Specifically, I explore what I call the characters' spatial trespass and relapse through the prism of British art historian Griselda Pollock's conception of "spaces of femininity," which theorizes how gender and class intersect to shape representation in women's artworks. With its emphasis on textual manifestations of women's social positioning, Pollock's theory enables us to foreground Woolf's gendered and class identities in analyzing her representations of the female characters in relation to space. As I will show, Woolf situates the characters within different physical spaces, through which she depicts their psychic spaces and enables them to break free imaginatively from the patriarchal ideology of femininity. But such trespasses are only temporary, followed by the characters relapsing into their feminine roles and domestic spaces. I argue that Woolf employs the forth and back of the characters strategically to

¹ See, for example, Rachel Bowlby, "Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter," in *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 69–84; Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 54–59; Tamar Katz, "Pausing, Waiting, Repeating: Urban Temporality in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*," in *Woolf and the City: Selected Papers of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Elizabeth F. Evans and Sarah E. Cornish (Liverpool University Press, 2010), 2–16; and Candis E. Bond, "Remapping Female Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Scenic Memory and Woolf's 'Bye-Street' Aesthetic," *Woolf Studies Annual* 23 (2017): 63–82.

criticize the patriarchy in a conciliatory way, manifesting her non-confrontational feminist stance of the 1920s.

“Spaces of Femininity” and Woolf’s Feminism of the 1920s

Following the “spatial turn” in Modernist Studies and in Woolf Studies, which directed critical attention to the spatial dimensions of Woolf’s works, scholars have increasingly placed in dialogue Woolf’s modernist interest in the characters’ subjectivity and her engagement with various types of external spaces.² Noting that Woolf’s novels “constantly play across the spatial borders of inner and outer” and that they manifest “how material spaces rely upon imaginative conceptualisation, and how the territory of the mind is informed by an interaction with external spaces and places,” Andrew Thacker has argued for a literary geographical approach towards Woolf’s modernist texts.³ Drawing upon French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s influential theory of “social space”—especially his contention that social space is produced by social practices and embodies social relationships⁴—Thacker analyzes how Woolf weaves together the urban geographies of London and the characters’ consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*, thereby revealing social and political implications.⁵

Building upon Thacker’s contention regarding the ideological underpinning of space, Candis E. Bond examines a specific type of space in this novel, namely, the

² Representative studies include Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester University Press, 2003); Youngjoo Son, *Here and Now: The Politics of Social Space in D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf* (Routledge, 2006); Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, eds., *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Suzana Zink, *Virginia Woolf’s Rooms and the Spaces of Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

³ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, 152–53.

⁴ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell Publishing, 1991). For Thacker’s engagement with Lefebvre’s theory, see Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, 16–22. For a more recent study in which Thacker uses Lefebvre’s perceived-conceived-lived triad to analyze Woolf’s and James Joyce’s writings, see Andrew Thacker, “Representation,” in *Space and Literary Studies*, edited by Elizabeth Evans (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 19–33.

⁵ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, 152–91.

“queer alleys, tempting bye-streets” that intrigue Elizabeth.⁶ By analyzing the character’s self-exploration in the space of the alley, Bond illustrates how gender and sexuality can be reimagined within certain material spaces. Nevertheless, despite her emphasis on the significance of the alley, Bond’s study is essentially about memory, especially how the “*scenic* act of remembering” enables Woolf to aesthetically represent the characters’ plural experiences of various times and places.⁷ Through her analysis of the trans-temporal and trans-spatial memories in the novel, Bond argues that Woolf utilizes memory to propose “a new model of female subjectivity” that would potentially “eradicate binary oppositions and instead create new, freer spaces for women [...] to exist on their own plural terms.”⁸ Diverging from Bond, I shall focus primarily on space, especially how Woolf oscillates between different psychic and physical spaces in rendering her female characters. While memory constitutes an important category of the characters’ psychic space, I will also attend to other categories such as imagination and daydreams. Contrary to Bond’s argument about the potential eradication of the “binary oppositions” between genders, I offer a less optimistic interpretation of Woolf’s approach, in keeping with Rachel Bowlby’s observation that feminist advance “from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is not so direct or progressive as it may at first have seemed.”⁹

Arising out of her analysis of Elizabeth, Bowlby’s statement pinpoints the ambiguity underlying Woolf’s feminism of the 1920s, which should be distinguished from that of the 1930s. Scholars including Alex Zwerdling and Julie Robin Solomon made this important distinction in the 1980s, juxtaposing Woolf’s two book-length feminist essays *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).¹⁰ As these scholars have helpfully demonstrated, what characterizes

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 208. Subsequent references to this edition are made parenthetically.

⁷ Bond, “Remapping Female Subjectivity,” 67 (*italics* original).

⁸ Bond, “Remapping Female Subjectivity,” 79.

⁹ Bowlby, “Thinking Forward,” 74.

¹⁰ See Alex Zwerdling, “Anger and Conciliation in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*,” in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (University of California Press, 1986), 243–70; Julie Robin Solomon, “Staking Ground: The Politics of Space in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*,” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 16, no. 3–4 (1989): 331–47.

Woolf's feminism of the 1920s is her insistence on women's access to better material circumstances, as emblemized by the "money and a room of [one's] own" that Woolf famously demands for the sake of women's creativity.¹¹ In other words, during this decade, Woolf still maintained "private hopes of eventually securing a female footpath across the male sward," seeking to address women's disadvantaged situation in a patriarchal society without destabilizing or overthrowing the male-dominated norm.¹² But in the 1930s, with the triumph of fascism and the inevitability of the war—militarism that Woolf associates with masculinity—she saw little hope for redressing gender issues through the progress of existing systems. The seeming inevitability of the war also gave rise to Woolf's more confrontational, aggressive feminist stance, as reflected in her anti-war treatise *Three Guineas*. Jane Marcus thus contrasted Woolf's two essays as the "propaganda of hope" and "propaganda of despair" respectively.¹³ In this light, we can say that during the time Woolf was writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in the early 1920s, she still lacked a certain edge in criticizing the patriarchy. The lack of metaphorical edge in Woolf's feminism of this period finds evidence in the forth and back of her female characters, as they negotiate with spatial edges or borders. By employing Pollock's theory of "spaces of femininity"—as it pertains to physical space, spatial devices, and the implied viewer/painter—I shall illustrate Woolf's non-confrontational feminism as registered in her forth and back strategy for depicting her characters.

An important link between Woolf and Pollock consists in the visual arts: whereas Pollock—as an art historian—grounds her theory on her exploration of Impressionist paintings, Woolf often takes cues from visual media in her literary

¹¹ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth, 1978), 6.

¹² Solomon, "Staking Ground," 336. For critical discussion of Woolf's reserved, indirect, and non-confrontational feminist articulations in *A Room of One's Own*, see, for example, Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *Women, Writing and Teaching* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18–30; Elaine Showalter, "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny," in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton University Press, 1977), 263–97; Jane Marcus, "Art and Anger," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (1978): 69–98; Tracy Seeley, "Flights of Fancy: Spatial Digression and Storytelling in *A Room of One's Own*," in Snaith and Whitworth, *Locating Woolf*, 31–45.

¹³ Marcus, "'No More Horses': Virginia Woolf on Art and Propaganda," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4, no. 2–3 (1977): 277.

experiments.¹⁴ Focusing on Mary Cassatt's and Berthe Morisot's works, Pollock examines the artists' representational approaches as shaped by their lived experiences as bourgeois women. Pollock argues that, because of the deep-rooted ideology of gendered spatial divisions in bourgeois culture, Cassatt and Morisot experienced the spaces of modernity differently from their male counterparts in late-nineteenth-century Paris, and she further suggests that such different experiences are registered in their paintings. Significantly, Pollock observes that domestic, private spaces—dining rooms, drawing rooms, bedrooms, balconies/verandas, private gardens—feature extensively in their works.¹⁵ These physical spaces mark the first layer of Pollock's theory of "spaces of femininity." Pollock then analyzes the spatial devices that Cassatt and Morisot deploy—juxtaposition of different spatial systems, proximity and compression—to illustrate how such devices enable them to articulate women's social confinement imposed by the bourgeois ideology of femininity. This constitutes the second layer of Pollock's conception of "spaces of femininity," which extends beyond the physical dimension:

The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as a positionality in discourse and social practice. They are the product of a lived sense of social locatedness, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of seeing and being seen. Shaped within the sexual politics of looking they demarcate a particular social organization of the gaze which

¹⁴ A number of studies have addressed the close connection between Woolf and the visual arts, including painting, photography, and the cinema. Influential works include Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography, and Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 2003); Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Rutgers University Press, 2005); Maggie Humm, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Diane Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Syracuse University Press, 1988); Diane Gillespie, ed., *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf* (University of Missouri Press, 1993); Laura Marcus, "The Shadow on the Screen: Virginia Woolf and the Cinema," in *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 99–178.

¹⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (Routledge, 1988), 56.

itself works back to secure a particular social ordering of sexual difference. Femininity is both the condition and the effect.¹⁶

If the “condition” corresponds with the physical spaces open to women, the “effect” manifests itself in women’s lived experiences in a broader sense, especially in how patriarchal ideology regulates their “social locatedness, mobility and visibility.” In this vein, Pollock adds a third layer to her theory, which includes discussions of the implied viewer/artist of paintings featuring women in the public sphere. Although Pollock argues that bourgeois women were largely excluded from public life, she does not rule out their existence in public arenas. Instead, she indicates that they occupied the public sphere, but only partially, “in spaces above a decisive line.”¹⁷ By analyzing Cassatt’s and Morisot’s paintings of bourgeois women in socially acceptable public spaces, such as gardens and theatres, Pollock illustrates how the women artists challenge the dominant masculine mode of representation, which often assumes a male spectator. One persuasive example that serves to illustrate the multilayered matrix of Pollock’s conception of “spaces of femininity” is Cassatt’s *At the Opera* (1879) (Fig. 1), to which I shall return when considering Woolf’s literary representation of Clarissa in urban space. Pollock’s matrix is pertinent to the discussion of Woolf’s novel in that Woolf can be seen as comparable to Cassatt and Morisot in terms of both her gender and her privileged social class. By analyzing the spatial practices of Clarissa and Elizabeth—the two female characters of different generations—in *Mrs. Dalloway*, I shall demonstrate how Woolf depicts their forth and back strategically, as a way to articulate her feminist concerns with women’s domestic situation as an upper-middle-class woman writer.

Clarissa in Bond Street

The novel opens with the famous line, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3), followed by her shopping journey to the florist. By situating the upper-middle-class protagonist Clarissa within urban public space, Woolf invokes the issue of women’s relationship to space, especially the *flâneur* debate, which hinges on the legitimacy of women’s access to urban space. Janet Wolff has argued that narratives of modernity represent the experiences of men, for

¹⁶ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 66.

¹⁷ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 75.

women cannot be represented walking freely in public spaces.¹⁸ Following Wolff, Pollock also rules out the possibility of the female *flâneur*, or *flâneuse*, for women were “never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch.”¹⁹ Instead, women were “positioned as the *object* of the *flâneur*’s gaze.”²⁰ For Pollock, the *flâneur* embodies a gender-specific gaze, which turns the urban sphere into “spaces of sexual exchange,” where women’s activities reflect both their social class and the socially structured ideology of spatial divisions.²¹ Wolff’s and Pollock’s arguments have, however, been critiqued by scholars who maintain that women could occupy public spheres despite their different positionality from men in society.²² Thanks to the rise of consumerism, leisure-class women began to leave their homes, to stroll urban streets and department stores as shoppers during the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ The phenomenon became increasingly common in the early years of the twentieth century, when more middle-class women, like Clarissa in Woolf’s novel, began to appear as consumers in the city. Nevertheless, there is still no denying that women’s engagement with public space was far from equal to that of men.²⁴

¹⁸ Janet Wolff, “The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3 (1985): 37–46.

¹⁹ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 71.

²⁰ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 71 (*italics original*).

²¹ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 70.

²² Notably, Elizabeth Wilson and Deborah Parsons have argued against Wolff’s and Pollock’s contentions from different perspectives. See Elizabeth Wilson, “The Invisible *Flâneur*,” *New Left Review* 191 (1992): 90–110; and Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

²³ For studies of women’s engagement with spaces of modernity as consumers, see, for example, Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920* (Princeton University Press, 1981); Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (University of California Press, 1982); Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (Routledge, 1985); and Mica Nava, “Modernity’s Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store,” in *The Shopping Experience*, edited by Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (Sage Publications, 1997), 56–91.

²⁴ In her fascinating book, which blends memoir and cultural criticism, Lauren Elkin writes specifically about the *flâneuse*, or women wandering in the urban space of different

While it seems as if Woolf endows Clarissa with much mobility in public, closer scrutiny shows that the protagonist does not enjoy much more freedom than social conventions could allow for. Clarissa embarks on her shopping journey with the clear goal of getting flowers for her party, a goal which alludes to her feminine role as a “perfect hostess” (9, 10), as her former lover Peter Walsh calls her. Throughout the journey in central London, Clarissa does not appear as a female version of the *flâneur*, or *flâneuse*, who freely strolls or actively observes in the urban streets. Instead, she is preoccupied mostly with her inner monologues, inspired by the public surroundings. Even her unexpected encounter and brief conversation with her old friend Hugh Whitbread function—at least in part—as a trigger for her memories of the past. In a way, Clarissa can be seen as occupying not so much the public urban space as her private psychic space. Nevertheless, it is by relocating Clarissa from her domestic residence to urban streets that Woolf enables the character to reflect upon her own life and to rediscover herself. For at home, she must play her conventional feminine roles as a wife, a mother, and a hostess. The relocation from domestic spaces to urban streets allows Clarissa to imagine a life detached from domesticity, through which Woolf destabilizes the character’s fixed feminine roles and refashions her relationship to space as an upper-middle-class woman. But such trespassing experiences are only momentary, and after them Clarissa will lapse back into her social realities. Hence, Clarissa frequently oscillates between her inner and outer spaces. For example, following her encounter with Hugh, Clarissa falls into memories of her old days with Peter, until she reaches the Park gates, at which point Woolf describes the character’s almost paradoxical feelings:

She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. [...] 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. (11)

cities. See Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

At age fifty-one, Clarissa feels both “very young” and “unspeakably aged.” While her memories of being an eighteen-year-old girl with Peter might have inspired her feeling of youth, it seems more likely that the paradoxical feeling mirrors the contrast between her domestic and public experiences as a woman. On the one hand, Clarissa has certainly been through a great deal in her fifties; on the other hand, most of these experiences are associated with her fixed domestic roles. She thus feels she has grown old while assuming domestic duties to meet social expectations. Meanwhile, she cannot help having a profound sense of loss and incompleteness. In this respect, her illusory feeling of youth can be interpreted as a regretful lack of fulfillment.

Occurring on her way to the florist, Clarissa’s reflection upon life evokes Woolf’s conception of “moments of being,” a phrase she coins in her memoir.²⁵ According to Woolf, the separate “moments of being” represent the “exceptional moments” that stand out from the “cotton wool” of daily life, which she describes as “non-being.”²⁶ In contrast to the “moments of non-being” often associated with homogeneous, mundane activities, “moments of being” refer to the significant events, or revelatory experiences, that are lived more attentively, as exemplified by Clarissa’s subjective contemplation in urban London.²⁷ The fact that Clarissa is depicted as a self-contained subject, absorbed in her inner world at this moment, evokes Cassatt’s painting *At the Opera* (Fig. 1), which Pollock analyzes to illustrate her theory of “spaces of femininity.” The painting portrays a bourgeois woman as a female spectator in a theatre box, looking through her opera glasses, while being looked at by a male member of the audience. Because the woman is “pictured so actively looking,” and thus figures as “the subject of her own look,” Pollock argues that Cassatt enables the woman to avoid or subvert the objectifying male gaze.²⁸ In this respect, the way Woolf renders Clarissa’s subjective

²⁵ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, edited by Jeanne Schulkind (Hogarth, 1985), 61–159.

²⁶ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 71.

²⁷ Lorraine Sim has discussed “moments of being” as an important concept in Woolf’s life and works, featuring both her fictional and non-fictional writings. Lorraine Sim, “Moments of Being: Little Daily Miracles,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience* (Routledge, 2010), 137–60.

²⁸ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 76.

experiences in the urban public sphere can be seen as having achieved similar effects.



Figure 1. Mary Cassatt, *At the Opera*, oil on canvas, 1879, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Woolf's description of Clarissa's contemplation in the above-quoted passage also serves to illustrate her approach towards female characters in relation to space: Whereas Clarissa "sliced like a knife through everything," she is meanwhile

“outside, looking on” (11). The juxtaposition of Clarissa’s inner and outer experiences indicates that Woolf attends to both the character’s interior and exterior spaces. By exposing Clarissa to the external world, Woolf describes her imaginary journey of “being out, out, far out to sea” (11). In this mental image of her solitary voyage out, Clarissa is able to momentarily abandon her domestic identity and society as a whole, so that “she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (11). In other words, she is liberated from her feminine roles as she imagines herself trespassing into a territory unregulated by established social conventions. But the imaginary trespass is soon interrupted by her action of “walking on” to buy flowers for her party (11), which returns the character to her role as a hostess. By moving Clarissa in and out of her psychic spaces—memory, daydream, and imagination—Woolf demonstrates her forth and back strategy for depicting the character, further exhibiting her feminist stance underlying the approach. Like the room of one’s own, female subjectivity provides Clarissa with a private space where she enjoys moments of liberation from the patriarchy that regulates her daily life. Much as Woolf is critical of the patriarchal ideology of gendered spatial divisions, what she calls for is more room—in both physical and metaphorical senses—for women within the established social order, rather than overthrowing social conventions entirely. The conciliatory strategy for addressing women’s social realities is also manifested in Clarissa’s perceptual engagement with the urban sphere, which illustrates the female mode of seeing and being seen that Woolf is interested in.

Soon after Clarissa embarks on her shopping journey, she is exposed to the male gaze of her neighbour Scrope Purvis, who knows her “as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster” (4). Woolf’s description suggests that Scrope’s knowledge of Clarissa is derived mostly from her appearance: “A charming woman [...] a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness” (4). What is worth noting here is that the short episode ends with Clarissa “never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright” (4). That Clarissa is preoccupied with her own business of shopping for flowers, and thus evades the objectifying power of the male gaze, again recalls Cassatt’s *At the Opera* (Fig. 1). Compared to the previously discussed scene of Clarissa’s “moment of being,” this episode further resonates with Cassatt’s painting, in that it involves a male spectator, namely, the neighbour Scrope. Akin to the painting, which—as Pollock argues—indicates that

public spaces are “policed by men’s watching women,” Woolf’s description of Clarissa alludes to the unequal relationship between genders in terms of seeing and being seen, looking and being looked at.²⁹ Like Cassatt, who portrays the bourgeois woman as a subject rather than an object, Woolf strategically enables Clarissa to walk in public streets without reducing the character to an object for the male viewer’s pleasure.

In a later scene where Clarissa stops on the pavement to look at a picture in a shop window, Woolf further develops her strategy by relating Clarissa’s urban engagement with material spaces to her interior experiences:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (14)

Here, Woolf’s literary portrayal of Clarissa contemplating her own image parallels Morisot’s painting *Psyché* (1876) (Fig. 2), also analyzed by Pollock to exemplify how “spaces of femininity” shape the bourgeois woman artist’s work. Addressing Morisot’s representational strategy for dealing with the “voyeuristic potential” offered in the painting, Pollock observes that “the pictured woman is not offered for sight so much as caught contemplating herself in a mirror in a way which separates the woman as subject of a contemplative and thoughtful look from woman as object.”³⁰ Likewise, in Woolf’s novel, Clarissa is engrossed in her own actions of looking and thinking. Similar to her non-responsiveness to the neighbour’s look in the previous scene, Clarissa’s attentive engagement with her own image reflected in the shop window prevents her from being objectified in public.

²⁹ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 76.

³⁰ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 81.



Figure 2. Berthe Morisot, *Psyché*, oil on canvas, 1876,
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

The way Clarissa contemplates her own reflection, which largely resists objectification, also leads to a transition from the external world to her inner thoughts, an internalization that dissolves the public surroundings. As Clarissa further dissociates herself from society and her fixed social identities, she comes to the feeling of being “invisible; unseen; unknown.” With “no more marrying, no more having of children now”—in other words, by being emancipated from her social roles in this momentary, imaginary trespass—she is able to explore the possibility of being herself in her internal private world. But again, Clarissa’s

search for an alternative private identity ends abruptly as she continues with her walk “up Bond Street,” where she immediately falls back into her conventional role of “Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (14), which, Suzette A Henke argues, serves “as an outer skin covering the invisible, ineffable core of private identity.”³¹ Here, the distinction between her given name, Clarissa, and her married identity as Mrs. Dalloway parallels her oscillation between inner and outer spaces. If Clarissa’s inward voyage allows her to escape from her conventional feminine roles, these ephemeral moments are followed by immediate lapses back into her domestic identity of Mrs. Dalloway.

The forth and back in Clarissa’s spatial practices is intertwined with the character’s privileged social class, which Woolf herself shares. It is this shared social status that largely shapes Woolf’s approach towards the character in relation to space. In a way, Clarissa must relapse into Mrs. Dalloway to sustain her class position. As Clarissa—or more precisely Clarissa Parry, daughter of Justin Parry—she lives in the country house of Bourton. Throughout the novel, Clarissa frequently recalls her early life at Bourton, testifying to Peter’s thought that “women live much more in the past [...] They attach themselves to places; and their fathers” (83). However, she can no longer go back to Bourton, for it passed to other owners after her father’s death. Instead, she relocates to London following her marriage to Richard Dalloway. The seemingly natural transition in her role from a daughter to a wife within a patriarchal society evokes Woolf’s early short story “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), in which the two eponymous young women, having escaped from Kensington, complain about their lives: “We are daughters, until we become married women.”³² In both the short story and the novel, Woolf criticizes the social convention of marriage, which makes women subordinate to men. Nevertheless, Woolf does not describe Clarissa as resenting her marriage, despite her subjective contemplation of domestic oppression. Instead, Clarissa is appreciative of her marriage, her middle-class lifestyle, and “Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it” (43). Therefore, it can be said that Clarissa has chosen to be Mrs. Dalloway, because she cannot do without

³¹ Suzette A. Henke, “Mrs. Dalloway: The Communion of Saints,” in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Jane Marcus (Macmillan, 1981), 130.

³² Virginia Woolf, “Phyllis and Rosamond,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Dick (Hogarth, 1989), 27.

her upper-middle-class identity, as further reflected in the specific street she chooses to shop for her flowers: “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” (15). Notably, Bond Street is not a randomly chosen street in London. It is not, for example, Oxford Street, where “there are too many bargains, too many sales, too many goods marked down to one and eleven three that only last week cost two and six,” as Woolf put it in her 1932 essay “Oxford Street Tide.”³³ By contrast, Bond Street is an upmarket commercial space, which caters to high-end consumers with fine, exquisite taste.³⁴ Hence, it is in her role as Mrs. Dalloway, the upper-middle-class hostess, that Clarissa can feel the fascination of walking down Bond Street. In this regard, David Bradshaw has correctly remarked on Woolf’s intention for choosing Bond Street: “if in offering to ‘buy the flowers herself’, Clarissa seeks to break free from the restrictions of her class, by choosing to shop in Bond Street she reveals how deeply and damagingly she is bound to them.”³⁵

Clarissa’s choice of Bond Street corresponds with Woolf’s own preference, particularly her “deep respect for social order and her strong aesthetic sense.”³⁶ The resemblance between the writer and her character finds evidence in Woolf’s diary entry on 13 May 1926: “I went to my dressmaker, Miss Brooke, & found it the most quiet & friendly & even enjoyable of proceedings. I have a great lust for lovely stuffs, & shapes. [...] now I’m free of the fret of clothes, which is worth paying for, & need not parade Oxford Street.”³⁷ Like Clarissa, Woolf enjoys an

³³ Virginia Woolf, “Oxford Street Tide,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5: 1929–1932, edited by Stuart N. Clarke (Hogarth, 2009), 283.

³⁴ Reginald Abbott briefly addresses the significance of Bond Street in the development of consumerism in “What Miss Kilman’s Petticoat Means: Virginia Woolf, Shopping, and Spectacle,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 38, no.1 (1992): 193–216.

³⁵ David Bradshaw, “Woolf’s London, London’s Woolf,” in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, edited by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 236–37.

³⁶ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Virginia Woolf, Life and London: A Biography of Place* (Cecil Woolf Publishers, 1987), 125.

³⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3: 1925–1930, edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (Hogarth, 1980), 85–86.

upper-middle-class lifestyle, which not only saves her from the fuss of shopping on Oxford Street, but also provides her with “money and a room of her own,” with the material means that she considers essential for women writers.³⁸ More importantly, her social identity largely defines the way she addresses women’s social confinement in her writings. In other words, it is from the perspective of a privileged woman writer that she tackles the issue of gendered space. By oscillating between Clarissa’s psychic spaces and the material spaces of urban London during the character’s shopping journey, Woolf both endows the female character with moments of emancipation and pays due tribute to the established social order. Thus, the forth and back enables Woolf to articulate her feminist concerns with women’s restricted social situation, without confronting the patriarchy upfront. Corresponding with Pollock’s contention that women artists’ representational approaches register the intersection between their gender and social class within a patriarchal culture, Woolf’s literary strategy bears the mark of her gendered and class identities.

While Clarissa’s frequent crossing between inner and outer spaces illuminates Woolf’s forth and back strategy, it is not only in representing the protagonist alone that Woolf deploys the method. To illustrate the generational differences between Clarissa and her daughter Elizabeth, Woolf depicts Elizabeth’s more adventurous urban experiences. Unlike Clarissa, who loves walking on Bond Street, Elizabeth is more interested in travelling on an omnibus “up the Strand” (206), which further inspires her professional aspirations that contradict established social conventions. Despite the progressive effort to reform women’s relationship to space manifested in Elizabeth’s urban engagement, Woolf implicitly denies Elizabeth a promising future, suggesting instead that she is more likely to follow in her mother’s footsteps. As we will see, the way Woolf represents Elizabeth demonstrates the same strategy, pointing to her ambivalent criticism of the patriarchy, as shaped by her class-based feminism.

Elizabeth at the Strand

If Clarissa’s social identity is registered in Bond Street, where she can find fancy shoes and gloves, Elizabeth—who “cared not a straw for either of them” (15)—is aligned with the Strand, which represents a more inclusive street that witnesses all

³⁸ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 6.

walks of life. As Lisbeth Larsson remarks of the Strand—among other areas in central London, such as Fleet Street and Victoria Embankment—in Woolf’s works: “This is where people of various sorts will meet, lose their composure, abandon their old habits, taste freedom and think new thoughts.”³⁹ Larsson also addresses the significance of these urban areas for Woolf’s feminist outlook:

This is where she has the dream of the future materialise: that of the New Woman as well as of the liberated encounter between men and women. [...] These are open spaces. The gender order, the established mechanism of discrimination and exclusion, is suspended, but not, however, replaced by a new one, and there is diversity and the possibility of something new.⁴⁰

By situating Elizabeth in the Strand, Woolf differentiates the character from Clarissa and, by extension, from the older generation. Unlike Clarissa, who goes into the city to buy flowers for her party, Elizabeth sets out on her bus ride without any particular purpose: “It was so nice to be out of doors. She thought perhaps she need not go home just yet” (204). In this regard, Elizabeth appears more like a *flâneuse*, in that she simply wants to be outdoors, away from domesticity, to take pleasure in the urban experiences. But the pleasure comes at a cost, especially for a seventeen-year-old girl of her social background. As Elizabeth ventures into the city—“in her very well cut clothes,” which signify her privileged social status—she already feels the impending pressure of being, or having soon to become, a woman: “even as she stood there [...] it was beginning ... People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it made her life a burden to her” (204). The random comparisons and superficial descriptions, which can be interpreted as social discourse that aligns Elizabeth with traditional ideals of young womanhood, make her feel life to be a “burden.”⁴¹ Among the numerous eyes on her in the public space, there

³⁹ Lisbeth Larsson, *Walking Virginia Woolf’s London: An Investigation in Literary Geography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 18.

⁴⁰ Larsson, *Walking Virginia Woolf’s London*, 12.

⁴¹ Melissa Bagley parallels these descriptions of Elizabeth with the prevailing social discourse: “To claim that a critique of such language is a critique of social discourse finds support in the fact that Elizabeth, as Clarissa did earlier, identifies the exact parts of the natural world by which she will be qualified, knowing the tree (poplar) or flowers (lilies, hyacinth) or the kind of water (running, a river) to which she will be compared; her

also exists the objectifying male gaze—"Every man fell in love with her" (204–5)—which alludes to the masculine nature of the urban domain, as further illustrated by Elizabeth's spatial trespass at the Strand:

She walked just a little way towards St. Paul's, shyly, like some one penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder. (208)

By comparing the urban street to the private property of a male owner, Woolf explicitly associates the urban public sphere with masculinity. As Anna Snaith insightfully observes, describing the shift between public and private spaces in this scene, "The public city becomes male private space, not only a home, but the extreme privacy of the bedroom, because of women's exclusion from it. Here, for Elizabeth, the city is not yet public for women."⁴² Hence, Elizabeth's exploration around St. Paul's can be seen as a trespass, which establishes the character as "a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting" (208). The contrast between Clarissa's shopping journey and Elizabeth's urban adventure demonstrates a generational shift in women's relationship to the public sphere.

Elizabeth's physical trespass mirrors her interior rebellion against social conventions, as she develops during her bus ride along the Strand. For Elizabeth, the Strand appears quite different from Westminster, where she resides, because it gives her "the feeling of people working" (207), marking what Eleanor McNees describes as "the border between her world of Westminster and the professional world of the City."⁴³ As such, it further inspires her contemplation of a possible career:

diction matches that of those watching, and marks her comprehension as socially mature." Melissa Bagley, "Nature and the Nation in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 14 (2008): 41.

⁴² Snaith, *Virginia Woolf*, 40.

⁴³ Eleanor McNees, "Public Transport in Woolf's City Novels: The London Omnibus," in Evans and Cornish, *Woolf and the City*, 35.

So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer. Animals are often ill. She might own a thousand acres and have people under her. She would go and see them in their cottages. [...] In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament, if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand. (206–7)

At first glance, Elizabeth's professional aspiration shows her desire to break free from male-dominated social conventions, which largely confine women within domestic spaces. But closer scrutiny reveals that the career options that Elizabeth has in mind manifest both her class consciousness and her deep respect for the patriarchal social order.

Akin to her preference to be outdoors, Elizabeth envisions a career in the country where she could "own a thousand acres and have people under her" (206). Elizabeth's vision is noteworthy on two fronts. Firstly, what she aspires for is not a working-class occupation. Instead, as Jennifer Breen has correctly pointed out, "Her fantasy of visiting the farmworkers in their cottages implies a dream of authority and class superiority as much as of social service and intellectual creativity."⁴⁴ Secondly, Elizabeth's passion for a profession in the country implies her identification with her father, the patriarchal figure Richard Dalloway. For although Elizabeth prefers the country to the city, her vision of liberation is not just a life of "being left alone to do what she liked in the country," but one of "being alone in the country with her father and the dogs" (204). The claim that Elizabeth identifies with her father finds evidence in her other career option, to "go into Parliament" (207), which more directly links Elizabeth to Richard, since Richard serves as a member of Parliament.

Elizabeth's meditation on her professional ambitions is associated with another important character, her history teacher of the lower middle class, Doris Kilman, who has told her that "every profession is open to the women of your generation" (206). Despite her admiration for Miss Kilman as a working woman with a college degree, Elizabeth does not want to take up her working-class profession. In a way,

⁴⁴ Jennifer Breen, *In Her Own Write: Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction* (Macmillan, 1990), 38.

Elizabeth can be seen as being situated between Clarissa and Miss Kilman.⁴⁵ If the upper-middle-class Clarissa represents traditional ideals of femininity, the working-class Miss Kilman is “the one character in the novel who embodies and enunciates feminist principles.”⁴⁶ Because Woolf—in her role as an upper-middle-class writer—does not want to risk confronting the male-dominated social culture, she neither renders the radically feminist Miss Kilman as a likeable character, nor makes Elizabeth identify with her. Ultimately, Woolf even denies the possibility that Elizabeth could have a profession at all. By ending Elizabeth’s career dream with the narrator commenting that “she was, of course, rather lazy” (207), Woolf indicates that Elizabeth is unlikely to fulfill her dream of a professional career, being more likely to follow in her mother’s footsteps and fit into a domestic, feminine role. This is reaffirmed in Elizabeth’s subsequent contemplation: “It was the sort of thing that did sometimes happen, when one was alone” (207–8). Elizabeth’s thought that she could only imagine a career in solitude indicates that the character is aware that her dream could only reside with her subjective experience, in the form of “a revelation” (208).

As Elizabeth contemplates the unrealistic nature of her career dream, she also lapses back into her social realities, as reflected in her thought of her mother’s party: “She must go home. She must dress for dinner. But what was the time? – where was a clock?” (208). Although it seems natural that a young woman of her

⁴⁵ Karen Kaivola has argued that Woolf distinguishes Elizabeth from both Clarissa and Miss Kilman by representing her distinctive physical feature, which Clarissa considers “an Oriental mystery.” According to Kaivola,

Elizabeth’s “Oriental mystery” becomes a way to suggest both a transformed femininity and lesbian desires; these qualities separate her from both her mother—who represses her own lesbian sexuality—and the greedy, unattractive, masculine Doris Kilman of German ancestry, upon whom Clarissa (and Woolf) seem to project all the ugly lesbian stereotypes. Situated between the conventionally feminine, upper-class Clarissa and the masculine, lower-middle-class Doris, Elizabeth is thus symbolically androgynous.

Karen Kaivola, “Revisiting Woolf’s Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 18, no. 2 (1999): 250.

It is not my intention to discuss Elizabeth’s oriental appearance, lesbian desires, or androgynous possibilities. But Kaivola’s observation about Elizabeth’s “transformed femininity” and about her position between Clarissa and Miss Kilman is relevant to my argument.

⁴⁶ Vereen M. Bell, “Misreading *Mrs. Dalloway*,” *Sewanee Review* 114, no. 1 (2006): 100.

age is obliged to return home when it gets late, Elizabeth's decision also implies her adherence to social order. This is already foreshadowed in an earlier scene, where Miss Kilman painfully acknowledges that "Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed" (201), after she has tried in vain "not to let parties absorb her" (199). Despite Miss Kilman's attempt to dissuade Elizabeth from Clarissa's party, Elizabeth decides to return and to dress up for it, because "her mother wanted her to go" (199). Between Clarissa and Miss Kilman, Elizabeth chooses Clarissa. The decision can be interpreted as Elizabeth's alignment with her mother, the upper-middle-class hostess, and as alluding to her possible future as the next hostess of the Dalloway family. In this respect, Elizabeth's destiny is further implied in the way she appears at Clarissa's party.

While we read previously that Elizabeth "cared not a straw" for fancy commodities like shoes and gloves (15), at Clarissa's party she shows up "in her pink dress, wearing the necklace Mr. Dalloway had given her" (252), "with her hair done in the fashionable way" (257), thus manifesting feminine qualities as a nascent woman. As such, she is not immediately recognized by her father, Richard, who for one moment wonders, "Who is that lovely girl?" (295). The fact that Elizabeth impresses Richard initially as an attractive young woman, instead of as his daughter, reduces her to an object of male desire. As Bowlby has helpfully pointed out, "This does not make her her father's equal or surrogate, but effectively returns her to the position of the idealised object."⁴⁷ It is also this Elizabeth, all dressed up as an idealized version of femininity, who makes Richard feel "proud of his daughter" (296). In other words, what makes Richard feel proud is Elizabeth's physical appearance, which promises her potential to marry well and to become a perfect hostess, like Clarissa.

Contrary to Elizabeth's desire to pursue a career in the country and to spend time alone with "her father and the dogs" (204), Richard has no intention of having her work at all. As he has previously thought, "If he'd had a boy he'd have said, Work, work. But he had his Elizabeth; he adored his Elizabeth" (172). The double standard for daughters and sons highlights the divided gender roles imposed by patriarchal norms. Although Elizabeth—born in the early twentieth century—appears to enjoy more freedom than Clarissa, who belongs to the previous

⁴⁷ Bowlby, "Thinking Forward," 75.

generation of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the progress in Woolf's liberation of her female characters remains ambiguous, testifying to Bowlby's observation, in relation to the situation of women in Woolf's works, that "the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is not so direct or progressive as it may at first have seemed."⁴⁸ Bowlby's statement finds support in the novel's final scene, where Woolf juxtaposes Elizabeth's reactions to Richard with an image of her fox-terrier: "He [Richard] had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, Who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter! That did make her happy. But her poor dog was howling" (296). Instead of rebelling against her father's superficial focus on her looks, Elizabeth feels happy, thus exhibiting her implicit willingness to conform to the strictures of traditional femininity. But in the meanwhile, the image of the howling dog, which is closely associated with her private dream of having a profession in the country, also implies Elizabeth's unextinguished interior struggle against the patriarchy.⁴⁹ In this regard, the character's final scene further points to Woolf's ambivalent attitude towards the the future of women, especially that of Elizabeth's generation.

Woolf's ambivalence is presaged in an earlier scene, where she situates Elizabeth in what I call an in-between space to depict the character's subjective experience. After Elizabeth has decided to return home and has "turned back down the Strand" (210), and before she has "mounted the Westminster omnibus" (211), she

⁴⁸ Bowlby, "Thinking Forward," 74.

⁴⁹ The representation of the dog howling is a suggestive moment, which has been variously interpreted by scholars. For example, Kathy Phillips considers the howling dog as a "code" for "how much Elizabeth must give up." Audra Dibert-Himes considers the image as an indication of Elizabeth's "personal agenda and that she would like to lead her life independently," but Dibert-Himes also suggests that Elizabeth's dream and her caring for the dog manifest her father Richard's influence. Wendy B. Faris suggests that Elizabeth's howling dog can be seen as "a private part of her self connected to the country, which is not involved in London's social whirl." Kathy Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 24; Audra Dibert-Himes, "Elizabeth Dalloway: Virginia Woolf's Forward Look at Feminism," in *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Vara Neverow and Mark Hussey (Pace University Press, 1994), 228; and Wendy B. Faris, "Bloomsbury's Beasts: The Presence of Animals in the Texts and Lives of Bloomsbury," *Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 120.

experiences a momentary connection with the natural world as she watches the clouds in the sky:

although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (210–11)

In her poetic rendering of the sky image, Woolf juxtaposes several antithetical conceptions:

“settled habitations”	“perpetual movement”
“assembled for the conference of gods”	“dismantle the solemn assemblage”
“Fixed”, “grave fixity”	“to change, to go, to dismantle”
“light”	“darkness”

Thus, the passage manifests a profound sense of uncertainty, which corresponds with Woolf’s attitude towards the possibility of a radical change in women’s social position. As Natania Rosenfeld insightfully observes about the political nature of this cloud imagery, “everything is poised on the balance, and could collapse back

into stasis or move forward into new articulations.”⁵⁰ Rosenfeld’s identification of the clouds’ political implications can be seen as resonating with Bowlby’s earlier statement on how feminist advance between the centuries is neither “direct” nor “progressive.”⁵¹

Woolf’s feminist outlook, as reflected in Elizabeth’s perception of the clouds, is also registered in the character’s physical location in the Strand, which—as previously discussed—marks an important urban space where the “gender order, the established mechanism of discrimination and exclusion, is suspended, but not, however, replaced by a new one, and there is diversity and the possibility of something new.”⁵² As Elizabeth’s musing upon the clouds in the sky takes place right after she turns back from the Strand, but before she embarks on the return omnibus, the character can be seen as occupying an in-between space in this scene, bordering the domesticity of the Dalloway house and the freedom of the external world. Here, the implied spatial border evokes Morisot’s frequent juxtaposition of different spatial systems in her paintings, as Pollock explains in illustrating how “spaces of femininity” are inscribed in the woman artist’s spatial devices. Noting that Morisot often includes balustrades, balconies, verandas, and embankments in her paintings, Pollock suggests that they serve as compositional devices for demarcating “not the boundary between public and private but between the spaces of masculinity and of femininity inscribed at the level of both what spaces are open to men and women and what relation a man or woman has to that space and its occupants.”⁵³ For Pollock, the boundary not only highlights the physical spatial divisions between genders, but also underscores women’s ideological relationship to space, alluding to their different lived experiences from those of men within a patriarchal society. Akin to Morisot’s use of spatial devices to juxtapose interior and exterior spaces, Woolf’s description of the Strand as an in-between space connotes her feminist concern with women’s restricted situation within a male-dominated social culture. By depicting Elizabeth’s pondering of the clouds’ movements in the sky, Woolf further alludes to the uncertainties regarding her

⁵⁰ Natania Rosenfeld, “The Subtext of Class Division in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 9, no. 2 (1998): 152.

⁵¹ Bowlby, “Thinking Forward,” 74.

⁵² Larsson, *Walking Virginia Woolf’s London*, 12.

⁵³ Pollock, *Visions of Difference*, 62.

destiny as a young woman. Yet Woolf also enables Elizabeth to find some resolution in the natural landscape, which leads the character to mount her omnibus back “Calmly and competently” (211). As in the scene with the howling dog, the character’s action here also indicates that Woolf has not relinquished her faith in a more radical change in women’s situation, especially for the future generation. Nevertheless, it seems as if Woolf is unable to promise anything more than an ephemeral resolution for her character, one that is left undefined.

Through my discussion of Clarissa’s and Elizabeth’s urban experiences via the critical lens of Pollock’s matrix of “spaces of femininity,” I have illustrated Woolf’s forth and back strategy for depicting her female characters in relation to space. While Woolf endows the characters with momentary trespassing experiences by depicting their psychic spaces, she eventually returns them to their traditional feminine roles and physical “spaces of femininity.” As I argued, this forth and back in the characters’ spatial practices demonstrates Woolf’s conciliatory approach to addressing the domestic situation of women, as shaped by her gendered and class identities. Much as Woolf was critical of the patriarchy, she was reluctant to confront the male-dominated ideology during the time she wrote this novel in the 1920s, but instead, insisted on women’s access to a private income and space within the established social order. By foregrounding Woolf’s social status as an upper-middle-class woman in exploring her representations of women and space in this novel, this essay enables us to better comprehend her feminism of this period and in relation to other periods. It also offers a new approach to space, deriving from Pollock’s theory, which can be applied more widely to the analysis of Woolf’s other works.