

## Accessorizing Clarissa: How Virginia Woolf changes the clothes and the character of her lady of fashion

Mark Gaipa

When we peer into the origins of *Mrs. Dalloway* and reflect upon the first words Virginia Woolf wrote about Clarissa Dalloway's day, we encounter a small but vexing problem that has the potential to alter how we think about the published novel. The problem concerns a specific word Woolf uses in the opening line of her short story "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," which she wrote in the summer of 1922 before she realized Clarissa's story would become a book.<sup>1</sup> As readers of Woolf know quite well, that first sentence, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself," provides the very line Woolf would use to start the novel – with the exception of the word "gloves," which Woolf would replace with "flowers." And anyone who has read these two texts side by side has undoubtedly felt how consequential this substitution is: as we move from story to novel, the new purpose for Mrs. Dalloway's trip to Bond Street seems part of a broader change that Clarissa's character has also undergone, from snobbery to sympathy.

I will have much to say in this essay about Woolf's removing Clarissa's gloves in her novel, but the word in the story's first line that troubles me is not "gloves" so much as the one that follows it – "herself." Quite simply, what meaning can this word have – along with the sentence in which it appears, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the gloves *herself*" – when pages later in the story we find Clarissa at the counter of a glove shop trying on different pairs of gloves? We may debate what Clarissa's initial utterance in Woolf's novel – that "she would buy the flowers herself" – says about her, but everyone can agree that the statement makes good sense, since buying flowers is something that someone else can easily perform on her behalf. The same cannot be said, however, for the gloves she buys. Because Clarissa has some difficulty finding a pair that suits her, we may infer that she alone can purchase them, and thus has no choice but to visit the store herself. At face value, then, the first sentence in Woolf's story, which presumes someone can undertake this task for her, makes no sense at all.

It is possible that Clarissa misspoke that morning when she stepped out of her Westminster home, or that Woolf herself stumbled when she took these early steps in writing about Clarissa.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is good reason to take Woolf at her word. The only way the first sentence of her story does make sense is if a body double for Clarissa exists, someone possessing Clarissa's exact proportions (and taste) who can stand in for her at the glove shop. And as Woolf expands Clarissa's story into a novel, a double for Clarissa in fact materializes in the form of Septimus Warren Smith, who very much shares Woolf's book (its title notwithstanding) with Mrs. Dalloway.<sup>3</sup>

If we refrain from discounting the story's opening line as an error, we thus can see how uncannily predictive it is of the direction Woolf's drafting will take – as though it contains in embryonic form, unthought and undeveloped, the future of the novel. We can also see something else: If Clarissa's purchasing her gloves is indeed something that she alone can do, we may conclude that from the start, before Septimus existed as Clarissa's *spiritual* twin, a "double" theme was already at work within Woolf's evolving text, though in the form of Clarissa's *bodily* counterpart. And this suggests, in turn, that the doubling that appears in Woolf's novel is closely related, at its origin, to clothing – the idea of your standing, quite literally, in someone else's shoes.<sup>4</sup>

As one might guess by now, I will be arguing that clothing has special significance for Woolf's novel. The idea should not be surprising, since *Mrs. Dalloway* offers us a portrait of a lady of fashion.<sup>5</sup> But the idea *is* surprising – and has been neglected by previous critics – because so little fashion actually shows up in Woolf's portrait of Clarissa, and because Woolf was herself formulating at this time, in essays like "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," a modernist aesthetic in which she argued for cutting the material, external trappings of life out of her fiction. When Woolf moved from story to novel, she seemed to do just that; but I will maintain that the idea of clothing cannot be so easily unstitched from her evolving text. We will see that Clarissa's character changes when Woolf, with her dematerialized aesthetic, frees her in the novel from the numbing high-class fashion sensibility she exhibits in the story. But we will also see that Woolf, instead of

simply turning her back on fashion, is actually following – in both her novel and her modernist essays – the direction that women's fashions were taking in Britain in the 1920s, when the heavier, more restrictive clothing of the Edwardian matron was exchanged for looser, simpler, more youthful dress. And the theme of doubling in the novel – which intimately relates Clarissa to a character from a lower class beyond her social orbit – likewise remains caught up with clothing and changes in the garment industry, particularly the increasing democratization of fashion that resulted, after the war, from the introduction of ready-to-wear clothing.

Clarissa Dalloway remains, in Woolf's novel, a well-dressed upper-class woman whose survival, in stark contrast to her lower-class counterpart's death, underscores how intractably a class line runs through British post-war society. But the meaning quietly lodged in the word "herself" – Clarissa's impulse to reach across class lines, to cooperate with her social subordinates, even to stand in their place – prevents *Mrs. Dalloway* from becoming a satirical portrait of a lady's limited upper-class consciousness. When we uncover the material unconscious of the novel, we will see that Clarissa not only promotes Woolf's own aesthetic but also voices a rudimentary protest against the social imbalance of class competition and monopoly capitalism. And we will discover that Clarissa's gloves, which she seems to leave behind in the story, prove essential to the new woman that Clarissa becomes in the novel – after a fashion.

### I. Seeking an Immaculate Fit

Because the prospect of Clarissa's body double hinges on my claim that no one else could buy the gloves for her, I will begin this essay by shoring up that idea. Certainly there is nothing extraordinary about one person purchasing gloves for another; history is littered with accounts of gloves being given as symbolic gifts of trust and friendship, and sometimes even as payment.<sup>6</sup> Closer to Clarissa's time, department stores in the Edwardian period – like the Army and Navy Stores in 1907 – had begun selling women's gloves by mail order catalogue, indicating that customers did not have to try them on first.<sup>7</sup> But the gloves that Clarissa and her fellow shoppers want to buy appear to be too form-fitting to be given as a gift or bought through the mail. Their choice of apparel is also consistent with the prevailing fashion before the war; according to C. Cody Collins, "From the late 1880's to about 1910, the great importance of a [woman's formal] glove was its tight fit . . . Gloves were fitted so tightly, no matter how thin the hand might be, [that] there was always a little pillow of pink flesh in the heart-shaped opening of the palm."<sup>8</sup> S. William Beck also notes (in the early 1880s) that the importance of "an immaculate fit" is "so far recognized as the first essential of a glove that some superfine exquisites have had their gloves made on prepared models of their hands."<sup>9</sup> Clarissa and her fellow shoppers in Woolf's story may not be as exacting as that, but the difficulty each has finding a suitable pair suggests the continuing importance they all give to a snug fit. One of Clarissa's fellow customers despairs at finding a pair form-fitting enough to her liking: "The other lady rose very sadly and took her bag, and looked at the gloves on the counter. But they were all too large – always too large at the wrist."<sup>10</sup> A second customer, whom Clarissa later identifies as Miss Anstruther, demonstrates the tightness of the pair she tries on by splitting the glove's seams.<sup>11</sup> And Clarissa, who wants gloves that reach above the elbow, also seems beholden to an ideal fit. When she tells the shop-girl that the grey gloves she wears to the store "really don't fit" (25), the girl asks if Clarissa wears bracelets, implying that her jewelry may have stretched the leather.<sup>12</sup> We also know that the gloves Clarissa tries on are skin-tight from the way the shop-girl draws them "firmly, smoothly, down over [Clarissa's] rings" (26), and by the way Clarissa's arm is covered with powder after trying on a pair – "the glove was drawn off leaving her arm flecked with powder" (27); "There were little brown spots on her arm" (28) – since powder and water were used to help get on very tight gloves.<sup>13</sup> All this evidence, combined with the difficulty each character has finding a pair that matches her distinctive shape, confirms that Clarissa and her fellow shoppers are intent on wearing form-fitting gloves.

So what choice does Clarissa have but to buy the gloves herself? Perhaps someone could buy such a pair for her if he or she knew Clarissa's size and taste, but industry sizing was not standardized early in the century, and thus was not a reliable measure of fit. Nor could someone simply take a pair of Clarissa's gloves to the store and use them as a more accurate measure than a manufacturer's size, since the very pair Clarissa wears to the store does not fit well, and thus will not guarantee, in her absence, another form-fitting pair. Finally, there is the problem posed by Clarissa's specific dimensions. When the shop girl helps Clarissa try on a pair, she pays her a compliment, saying "Madame's hands are so slender" (26);<sup>14</sup> but we later discover that

Clarissa's hands are in fact quite thin – and hard to fit – when Clarissa notes the size of the pair she is buying: “Half an inch above the elbow; pearl buttons; *five and a quarter*” (28, emphasis added). Despite the lack of industry-wide standardization, Natalie Kneeland notes (in 1924) that ladies' leather gloves usually ran, at quarter-inch sizes, from 5.5 to 8 inches.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that most formal gloves are probably too wide for Clarissa's slender hands; it may also explain why the first pair Clarissa tries on is too short: “the glove hardly came to the elbow” (26). When measured against other women, Clarissa seems to be uniquely-proportioned, with her arms (as it were) too long for her hands, and her hands too slender for her arms. The jewelry that Clarissa wears on her distinctively-proportioned hands and arms poses only a further variable requiring her to visit the shop herself. When the shop-girl draws the glove “firmly, smoothly, down over her rings,” Woolf leaves little room for a stand-in.

We may conclude, then, that Clarissa walks to Bond Street to buy a pair of gloves that will exactly fit her hands and lower arms – but this means that the only person who could undertake this errand on her behalf would have to be her double, someone who (concerning these body parts, at least) shares Clarissa's exact dimensions. Who that person is, along with the person that Clarissa addresses in that first line of the story, remains a mystery, since each is missing from her text: “Mrs. Dalloway said [to whom?] that she would buy the gloves herself [in whose place?].” To determine how Woolf might have filled those blanks, we may look ahead to her novel, since both roles are performed there by the same person: Clarissa's house maid, Lucy. After Clarissa says that “she would buy the flowers herself,” we learn what she was thinking: “For Lucy had her work cut out for her.”<sup>16</sup> Woolf further clarifies Clarissa's thinking here when, later in the day, Clarissa undertakes to mend the dress she will be wearing that night, and echoes the first two sentences in the novel, thinking, “She would mend it [herself]. [For] Her maids had too much to do” (37).<sup>17</sup> By setting out to buy the flowers herself, Clarissa makes herself useful on the day of her party; and by offering Lucy a helping hand, she undertakes a task, like mending her dress, that she might normally ask her maid to do for her. Lucy, therefore, is not only “other” to Clarissa's initial utterance in the novel, but also the “Other” – Clarissa's substitute or proxy – who would otherwise buy the flowers in Clarissa's stead.

Of course, we cannot conclude just yet that Clarissa's maid fleshes out for us her unseen double from the story, since Lucy does not have to be Clarissa's body double to purchase her flowers. But when Clarissa and Lucy have a friendly conversation later in the novel, we should note how their apparent exchange nearly verges on such doubling:

“And how,” she said, turning the crystal dolphin to stand straight, “how did you enjoy the play last night?” “Oh, they had to go before the end!” she said. “They had to be back at ten!” she said. “So they don't know what happened,” she said. “That does seem hard luck,” she said (for her servants stayed later, if they asked her). (38)

Our first job, in reading this peculiar passage, is to figure out who says what, but Woolf makes that hard to do: the vague pronoun “she” could refer to either Clarissa or Lucy, and Woolf does not give us the clear alternation of speakers we expect from dialogue. Until we can straighten this out (and it is not clear that we can), we have to treat each woman as exchangeable with the other. Such verbal tricks do not collapse the vast class difference between lady and servant that is signaled, in the first two sentences of the novel, by the difference in title between “Mrs. Dalloway” and “Lucy.” But because both women can wear the designation “she,” they have momentarily become verbal doubles for us, as though lady and servant – in their casual social exchange – have managed to span the class divide and become (within the space of indeterminacy) interchangeable, if not equals.

Much as the ambiguous pronoun “she” in the dialogue above leads us to think about what distinguishes Clarissa from her maid, so does the pronoun “herself” trigger such thoughts at the start of the novel – while proving to be equally ambiguous. The last word in the sentence “Clarissa said she would buy the flowers herself” appears to stress Clarissa's individuality by setting her apart from everyone else, but “herself” at the same time relates Clarissa intimately to Lucy, who must first vacate the space into which Clarissa steps. Because Lucy is Clarissa's servant, our first glimpse of Clarissa in the novel thus shows her in an act of condescension – Clarissa's offering to set aside class privilege and stand in the place of a social subordinate. With this first line, Woolf also introduces readers to the interpretative spectrum of the novel – for how we think about Clarissa (is she, after all, sympathetic or just a snob?) largely comes down to what we think her offer to Lucy says about her. Clarissa undoubtedly would like us to read her offer as an expression of her

generous character as a lady, much as she complacently reflects that "her servants stayed later, if they asked her." But it is left to us to decide whether Woolf thinks Clarissa's offer is genuine – and whether a genuine offer has any actual value.

The fact that Clarissa makes a similar-sounding offer at the start of Woolf's short story suggests, nonetheless, that Clarissa's Other there is probably a social inferior as well – and that the mysterious doubling in the story is tied up not only with clothing but also with social class. Certainly we may infer as much from the narrator's suggestion (in the second paragraph of the story) that Clarissa sees her walk to the glove shop as an "errand of happiness" (19). But we find further confirmation that Clarissa's double comes from the lower classes when we notice how her seeming offer across class lines at the start of the story points ahead to what later happens in the glove shop: when Clarissa sits at the shop counter to try on form-fitting gloves, she nearly puts herself in the shoes of the saleswoman who stands across from her. Upon entering the store, Clarissa greets the shop-girl – who, like Lucy, is a working woman and thus a "girl" by class standing, regardless of her age – with "her charming voice" and an "exquisite friendliness" (25) that seem to distinguish her from the other customers in the store. And when Clarissa sits across from the saleswoman at the glove counter, her thoughts disclose her concern for her; Clarissa worries, for instance, that her request to see another pair of gloves will be an inconvenience. With these thoughtful intentions, Clarissa apparently wants to have with the shop-girl the sort of friendly relationship she has with Lucy in the novel. Indeed, Clarissa even anticipates the confusing exchange she will later have with Lucy when she identifies with the shop-girl as a female (or "she"), wondering whether "it's an agony [for her] to stand" due to her period (26).

By reaching out emotionally to the girl across the shop counter that stands between them, Clarissa seems intent on transcending class barriers – and turning the saleswoman into her social counterpart. But when it comes to actually trading places with her – Clarissa nearly suggests that the shop-girl take her vacation where she and Richard go; "Nothing would be easier than to send her to Mrs. Lumley's right in the country (and it was on the tip of her tongue)" – something holds her back:

she remembered how on their honeymoon Dick had shown her the folly of giving impulsively. It was much more important, he said, to get trade with China. Of course he was right. And she could feel the girl wouldn't like to be given things. There she was in her place. So was Dick. Selling gloves was her job. (27)

This passage marks a quiet turning point late in the story, for Woolf shows that Clarissa's sympathy for her class counterpart has clear limits. Apparently reversing her offer at the opening of the story to exchange places with a social subordinate, Clarissa now reasons that she cannot hope to bridge the social gulf dividing her from the shop-girl: each woman is fixed by her class identity – the girl "was in her place," and (as Dick's wife) so was she – so neither can stand in the place of the other. But this turn of events in the glove shop, instead of simply contradicting the spirit of offering from the start of the story, may actually reveal why Clarissa's "Other" there is missing, and why her class double ultimately fails to materialize in the story. Clarissa's hesitancy before the shop-girl suggests that she is unable to conceive, in reality, a lower-class woman with whom she could exchange place – let alone clothing. Her initial offer in the story, which likewise never reaches its audience, thus dies stillborn in the air as an infelicitous speech-act. In both cases, Clarissa's sympathy for a social subordinate proves to be mostly *fictitious*.

## II. Constraints on Cooperation

I am again taking Woolf at her word when I describe Clarissa's sympathy across class lines in the story as being "fictitious"; this use of the term comes from an essay Woolf wrote in 1930, subsequently titled "Memories of a Working Women's Guild," which adds the complication of Woolf's own experiences to Clarissa's strained relationship with working women. Woolf composed "Memories" as an introduction to *Life as We Have Known It*, a collection of autobiographical writings by lower-class women that Margaret Llewelyn Davies, General Secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild from 1889 to 1921, had amassed over the years and that Virginia and Leonard published in 1931 with their Hogarth Press.<sup>18</sup> Woolf had long known Davies through their respective families,<sup>19</sup> but she and Leonard developed a new relationship with her through Leonard's work for the Women's Guild, which sought, as part of the wider Co-operative Movement,

to develop an alternative to capitalist industry in England by creating stores and factories where customers received a percentage of the profits. From 1913 to the time when Woolf began writing about Clarissa, Leonard Woolf was active in promoting Co-operation, and he wrote extensively about it in a variety of pamphlets and books.<sup>20</sup> Virginia also came into the orbit of Co-operation and the Women's Guild, which pressed for social reforms – like maternity benefits, access to divorce, and equal pay for equal work – that specifically affected the lives of working women.<sup>21</sup> In March 1913, a year after their marriage, Virginia accompanied Leonard on a two-week research tour of Co-operative stores and factories in northern England, and in June of that year they attended together the Women's Co-operative Guild Congress in Newcastle.<sup>22</sup> From 1917 to 1921, Woolf also organized Guild meetings at her home, where local working women were regularly invited to hear talks given by people Woolf had arranged to speak.<sup>23</sup>

Woolf's involvement with Co-operation and the Women's Guild also gives us a new social context in which to make sense of Clarissa's reaching out to her working class counterpart. Clarissa's personal offers to set aside class difference are certainly gestures at cooperating with members of the working class, and the idea she entertains of exchanging places with her working-class counterpart resonates with the democratic economic goals of Co-operation – to make the laboring classes double as owners and put working people (as it were) on both sides of the shop counter.<sup>24</sup> Behind Clarissa's vague offers to working women, then, we can discern some of the ideas Woolf was familiar with for putting class relations on a better footing. In her "Memories," which recounts her experience attending the Women's Guild Congress in 1913, Woolf envisions how a "great liberation would follow, and perhaps friendship and sympathy would supervene" if members of the middle class like herself could meet the working class "not as masters or mistresses or customers with a counter between us, but over the wash-tub or in the parlour casually and congenially as fellow-beings with the same wishes and ends in view."<sup>25</sup> While this picture of freer exchange among the classes recalls the casual conversation Clarissa has with Lucy in her parlor, "Memories" also echoes the doubling in that scene when Woolf recounts how she sought to heighten her identification with the working women on stage by trying to imagine herself standing in their shoes:

"Let's pretend," one said to oneself, looking at the speaker, "that I am Mrs. Giles of Durham City. . . . I am the wife of a miner. He comes back thick with coal grime. First he must have his bath. Then he must have his dinner. But there is only a wash-tub. My range is filled with saucepans. . . . Why in the Lord's name have I not hot water laid on and electric light when middle-class women . . ." "So up I jump and demand passionately "labour-saving appliances and housing reform." Up I jump in the person of Mrs. Giles of Durham; in the person of Mrs. Phillips of Bacup; in the person of Mrs. Edwards of Wolverton."<sup>26</sup>

Like Clarissa on her errand of happiness, Woolf here, in the audience among working women, imagines herself crossing the shop counter, calling upon the power of fiction to dress up as the laboring poor and become, momentarily, a lower-class counterpart of herself.

But this effort at identifying across class lines ultimately fails for Woolf, just as it failed for Clarissa at the glove counter. Though Woolf at the Congress outwardly participates in cheering the reforms demanded by working women, she tells us how fraudulent she felt in that audience, recalling how all the women's demands – including the demand "for eight hours instead of nine behind a counter" – "leave me, in my own blood and bones, untouched."<sup>27</sup> Like Clarissa sitting before the shop-girl, Woolf remains protected, by the privileges of class and wealth on her side of that counter, from the wants and needs on the other side: "One could not be Mrs. Giles because one's body had never stood at the wash-tub; one's hands had never wrung and scrubbed and chopped."<sup>28</sup> And just as Clarissa's offers are exposed as the "folly of giving" by Dick's emphasis on trade policy, the reforms envisioned by Co-operation now strike Woolf as fantastically naive. Concluding that "the barrier [between the classes] is impassable" (141), Woolf has apparently arrived at Clarissa's notion that members of each class, insulated by their class experiences, are fixed in their respective place:

Our sympathy is fictitious, not real. Because we pay our bills with cheques and our clothes are washed for us . . . we are condemned to remain forever shut up in the confines of the middle classes wearing tail coats and silk stockings and called Sir or Madam as the case may be, when we are all, in truth, simply Johns and Susans.

When Woolf finds here that she cannot sidestep the material conditions of her life that set her apart from working women, she judges her sympathy to be “defective . . . because it is not based upon sharing the same important emotions unconsciously”: it was “the sympathy of the eye and of the imagination, not of the heart and of the nerves” (142, 140).

Woolf’s language in the passage above suggests, however, that something besides the lack of deep feeling may be interfering with Clarissa’s identifying with her class counterpart in the story. Until she can achieve a “real” sympathy – “of the heart and of the nerves” and not just of the “eye and . . . imagination” – Clarissa will remain, like Woolf’s middle classes, “forever shut up in the confines of [her class] wearing tail coats and silk stockings,” or whatever clothing most distinguishes her as a member of her own class. And in Woolf’s story, no clothing is more distinctive of Clarissa’s social pedigree than her gloves. Clarissa recalls how her old Uncle William used to say that “a lady is known by her gloves and her shoes” (26), and Woolf’s story builds on the idea by having Clarissa’s gloves function as a synecdoche of all the material trappings that separate her from working women. The gloves are, first of all, expensive – the pair that Clarissa buys costs 35 shillings, which roughly amounts to \$100 in today’s prices. When worn, Clarissa’s gloves also limit her ability to feel the physical world immediately about her, rendering her, like Woolf, “untouched.” But they also symbolically insulate Clarissa within her class universe, marking her distance (despite her errand of happiness) from the world or labor. In the terms set out in Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Clarissa’s gloves function as a social sign of conspicuous leisure, “mak[ing] plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labour.”<sup>29</sup> The gloves Clarissa buys – snug and white – render her hands useless; like women’s tightly-laced corsets in the late nineteenth century, which Veblen sharply criticized for physically harming the women whose bodies they held back, Clarissa’s gloves “testify to [her] exemption from or incapacity for all vulgarly productive employment.”<sup>30</sup> In this light, Clarissa’s gloves are an “insignia of leisure” that advertise the fact that their wearer “consumes without producing,” and thus stands very much on one side only of the shop counter.<sup>31</sup>

We might marvel now at how a single piece of clothing in Woolf’s story carries such contradictory meanings. Even as Clarissa’s form-fitting gloves provide the hypothetical vehicle for a radical exchange between women from different classes, they also function as a symbolic barrier that keeps the classes separate and prevents that exchange from ever occurring. Paradoxically, the very clothing that would link Clarissa to her servant as doubles at the start of the story ultimately distinguishes Clarissa from the saleswoman in the store and holds the two apart by the end. Or we might express the paradox this way: when Clarissa offers to “buy the gloves herself,” she nominally recasts herself as a working woman – undertaking an errand on behalf of (and in place of) a servant – even as the goal of her errand is to secure gloves that signify publicly Clarissa’s freedom from labor, which ensures that her initial offer cannot be realized. In this way, we may trace the reversal structured into the plot of the story back to the gloves’ conflicting meanings.

It may be that the idea of Clarissa’s swapping clothes and identities with her maid simply proved too fantastic for Woolf. Yet even if Woolf resigns herself to the inevitable material barrier posed by class differences, she nonetheless regrets that divide and continues in “Memories” to look for ways to minimize the difference. By contrast, Clarissa in the story goes on to affirm the value of class differences, which she justifies with the help of her new gloves. Reflecting on the social importance of maintaining her public appearance, Clarissa thinks that she would observe the rites of religion even though she does not believe in god, and she compares herself to another lady of fashion she admires, Lady Bexborough, who “opened the bazaar” even though she had just learned that her favorite son had died in the war. So too Clarissa “would go on. But why, if one doesn’t believe? *For the sake of others*, she thought *taking the glove in her hand*. The girl would be much more unhappy if she didn’t believe” (27, emphasis added). Clarissa – fingering the glove – muses that she can best serve society, as well as the shop-girl standing across the counter from her, by fulfilling her social role as a lady; and that means not only wearing in public a belief in god, but also fashioning herself after women like Lady Bexborough who stand above her on the social scale. Clarissa’s attitude suggests that she subscribes to a traditional fashion sensibility – the idea that fashion is dictated by the governing classes and usefully regulates class distinctions.<sup>32</sup> Even as Clarissa defers – in her judgment, dress, comportment – to the example set by aristocratic women of higher class rank, she sees herself in turn as a source of admiration, if not inspiration, for women from the classes below her. In Clarissa’s mind, her observing the rites of fashion – like wearing formal gloves – has even the importance of a religious offering to the masses; for unlike Clarissa and her kind, working people like the shop-girl (she reasons) need something

greater than themselves to believe in, just as she reflects that the King and Queen continue to matter for soldiers and the poor (21).

When Clarissa reveals the faith she places in the authority of fashion, it changes the meaning of her offering to lower-class women in the story. Though she initially offered to help such women by momentarily trading places with them, Clarissa now offers them her help by asserting her social superiority as a lady. So how should we evaluate Clarissa's new defense of fashion hierarchy as an important prop for civilized society? With the conclusion of the story, Woolf gives us the means to test Clarissa's idea: "There was a violent explosion in the street outside. The shop-women cowered behind the counters. But Clarissa, sitting very upright, smiled at the other lady. 'Miss Anstruther!' she exclaimed" (28). This scene may seem at first to vindicate Clarissa's outlook, since she remains unfazed by the explosion; in the face of tragedy, Clarissa will retain her composure, sit "very upright," and defiantly "go on" – like Lady Bexborough at the bazaar – observing the rules of good breeding. Clarissa's erect posture here, which elsewhere is described as stiff, is an expression of the high-class bearing that Clarissa admires in others and exhibits herself when she wears tight gloves.<sup>33</sup> However, the shop-girls in this scene do not seem to find any comfort in Clarissa's controlled response. And Clarissa, who never clearly acknowledges the explosion outside, appears not so much courageous as oblivious to the commotion about her.

We may infer that Clarissa's breeding – as well as the gloves she buys – wind up mostly insulating her from the outside world, which includes the world of the shop-girls within the store. Indeed, Clarissa in the end appears to be in a world of her own, and the explosion outside – which coincides with the epiphany she has upon finally remembering Miss Anstruther's name: "'Miss Anstruther!' she exclaimed" – serves to reinforce Clarissa's narrow world of high-society connections. Leading up to this moment of recognition, Woolf has linked the two ladies through their peremptory exclamations: "'There!'", "But it's an awful swindle to ask two pound ten!"; "At last!"; "Now you'll take twenty-five minutes to bring me my change!" The explosion at the end of the story, which sums up all these exclamations, punctuates for us how haughty these women are. Instead of causing Clarissa to look beyond herself, where she might forge a meaningful bond with the women now cowering behind the counter, the explosion signals Clarissa's turn inward to identify with one of her kind – Miss Anstruther, whose voice sounds as though she is accustomed to "making other people . . . obey" (28).

### III. Crossing the Counter

Woolf never tells us how we should think about Clarissa in the story, but it is hard to imagine a more disturbing picture of her high-class fashion sensibility. Very quietly, by the story's end, an ironic, critical perspective on Clarissa has emerged, springing not from her failure to reach across the class divide – for we have seen that Woolf actually shares Clarissa's doubts about how that can be done – but rather from how complacently she rationalizes, in the name of fashion, a hierarchically stratified class system as being both inevitable and valuable. Accordingly, Clarissa's gloves assume one final meaning in the story when Woolf uses them, in a series of ironic juxtapositions, to criticize Clarissa's emotional callousness.<sup>34</sup> Clarissa's high-minded idea that she is behaving "for the sake of others" is instantly compromised in the text when she "tak[es] the glove in her hand" (27), for she seems merely to be rationalizing her purchase here – a criticism that is quickly reinforced when the shop-girl tells her the high price of the gloves and Clarissa (thinking still about religious belief) reflects that "one doesn't live for oneself" (28). This irony comes to a head, however, when Clarissa's thoughts about how she would "go on" lead her to think of the recent dead: "Thousands of young men had died that things might go on. At last! Half an inch above the elbow; pearl buttons; five and a quarter." Clarissa here, musing at the counter as the shop-girl returns with her purchase, is indicted by the contingency of her own thinking which glides all too readily from the sobriety of her first idea – where she humbly reflects that her current life is paid for by the lives of innumerable unnamed soldiers – to the narrowly detailed description of her new gloves. Being able to buy French gloves again, it seems, is what Clarissa really means when she talks about how "things might go on." Against the background of others' ultimate sacrifice, Clarissa's behaving "for the sake of others" here feels tawdry and self-serving – just as her offering, at the start of the story, proves by the end to be an empty gesture. In light of her allusion to soldiers, the explosion that quickly ensues in the text brings the force of war directly into Clarissa's world – yet even this has no power to "pick a hole" in her air-tight universe.

When Clarissa reflects upon the recent sacrifice of British soldiers, we get a glimpse of how her story will soon expand into a novel. Just as soldiers died in the story so Clarissa may return to buying expensive French gloves, Septimus will play a similar sacrificial role in the novel, dying in the end so Clarissa may live.<sup>35</sup> Septimus also inherits the role that the shop-girl plays in the story as Clarissa's class counterpart; standing (as it were) across the counter from Clarissa throughout the day, Septimus – a clerk who, before the war, had good prospects for social advancement – provides a lower-class point of comparison with Clarissa while also marking the limits of her class horizon.

Because of these likenesses, it is tempting to read Clarissa in the novel with the same ironic criticism that she ultimately earns in the story, especially since her character can be, at times, as insensitive, self-centered, and out of touch with the world about her. In the story and novel alike, Clarissa holds herself erect and would like to model herself upon the aristocratic Lady Bexborough. And where Clarissa in the story cares for her gloves more than for the nameless soldiers sacrificed in war, she admits in the novel to caring more for the roses she gets from Richard than for all the nameless Armenians (whom she cannot keep separate in her head from Albanians) killed in the genocide. And where Clarissa in the story rationalizes her fashionable purchase as a social offering, in the novel she similarly defends her parties – along with her role as hostess – as an offering, something she says she does for others rather than for herself (or for Richard's professional advancement). And when Clarissa reflects upon Septimus' death at the end of the novel, she may appear as callously self-interested and class-insulated as at the end of the story, telling us that "he made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun" (186). The fun?

Yet despite all this, there is clear evidence in the novel that suggests Clarissa has indeed managed to cross the class divide – so she can stand alongside Septimus rather than across from him. The most salient proof of the change lies in their common distrust of Sir William Bradshaw, who represents for both the authoritarian threat of social subjugation. Given Clarissa's profound dislike of Bradshaw in the novel, it is hard to imagine that she could ever respect a woman like Miss Anstruther who uses her authority, as Bradshaw does, to make people *obey* her will. But there are numerous smaller changes that occur to Clarissa's character in the interim that indicate as well that she has become quite other to herself. Consider, for instance, the way Clarissa behaves in the flower shop. A violent explosion occurs outside the store, just as in the story, but Clarissa's response is strikingly different; she is startled, exclaiming, "oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!" (13), and she momentarily loses her composure: "The violent explosion . . . made Mrs. Dalloway jump" (14). Whereas Clarissa in the story presumes, with her game face on, to maintain order for the shop-girls, here the roles are reversed: it is Miss Pym, the shop-girl, who takes control of the situation, assuring a more vulnerable Clarissa that the explosion was only a car. And Clarissa, with flowers in hand now instead of gloves, shows a curiosity about what is happening outside that she lacks in the story: "Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry" (15).

Because Clarissa in this scene has not only reversed her behavior from the story but also exchanged roles with the shop-girl, the counter that stands between them no longer seems to be the insurmountable barrier it was in the story. Previously closed off, Clarissa now seems more open to the world about her. The clearest account of this change can be found in how Clarissa now regards her relations with others; for if her thinking in the story is wedded to an elite fashion sensibility, where clothing denotes fixed social standing, Clarissa espouses in the novel a sort of transcendental theory that Peter Walsh remembers from her youth:

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. (152-53)

According to this idea, Clarissa cannot afford to turn in on herself, or her class, if she is to realize "herself," but must at least try to cross the shop counter that defines the outer limit of her class universe. She needs to escape from her place ("here, here, here") and make contact with (among others) someone "behind a counter" – which succinctly sums up the challenge she faces in both the story and the novel.

Naturally, one feels that the man behind the counter in the novel that Clarissa most needs to seek out for completion is Septimus – even though, attired in a "shabby overcoat" (14), he is, like Miss Kilman, an affront to her fashion taste. Clarissa in the story – and perhaps Woolf, in real life – never managed to pass Woolf's test for crossing the class counter, but Clarissa in the novel seems to have done just that by sharing with

Septimus “the same important emotions unconsciously,” a sympathy not only of “the eye and of the imagination” but also “of the heart and of the nerves.” We witness the depth of Clarissa’s sympathy for Septimus when, without any direct knowledge of how he died, she experiences his fall with her own body: “Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes” (184). And at the start of the novel, when Clarissa recalls how she had once “burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air” (3), it seems she already feels Septimus, her double, deep in her bones, anticipating the plunge he will take into open air from a Bloomsbury window later that day. These passages show that some profound change has opened Clarissa to her class counterpart. The important question now is how that change has come about.

#### **IV. Materialists and Modernists**

The simplest answer, of course, is that Woolf has contrived these parallels between Clarissa and Septimus – so Clarissa’s sympathy across class lines remains (though in a different way) fictitious. A more satisfying answer, however, can be found in the idea of feeling itself, for Woolf paradoxically relates Clarissa and Septimus in the novel around the difficulty each has feeling; in doing so, she turns on its head the paradox that characterized the gloves in her story. There, the exclusive gloves that link Clarissa to her double ironically hold them apart by preventing her from feeling for her class counterpart; but suppose Clarissa’s lower-class double is unable to feel as well? The emotional numbness that Septimus suffers, from post-war trauma, draws him close to Clarissa’s own insulated condition. During the war, he watched shells “explode with indifference” (86), which recalls Clarissa’s stoical stance, at the end of the story; and when he discovers he is unable to feel (87), he experiences Clarissa’s fear that she lacks “something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together” (31); and much as Septimus “married his wife without loving her” (91), Peter suspects the same is true of Clarissa’s decision to marry Richard. One might object that Septimus cannot feel because he was too exposed (and thus unnaturally hardened) to the violence of warfare, which stands in sharp contrast to Clarissa’s privileged class insulation. But his lack of feeling also stems from his mad belief that the world revolves around him, which resembles Clarissa’s difficulty, in the story, feeling beyond her own kind.<sup>36</sup>

Bound to Septimus by the very insulation that holds them apart, Clarissa nonetheless can feel deeply for her double only if Woolf finds a way to loosen the stays of her character. It just so happens that at this time Woolf was developing a theory of fiction that would help Clarissa do that. In essays like “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923, 1924) and “Modern Fiction” (which is a 1925 revision of Woolf’s 1919 essay “Modern Novels”), Woolf critiques the leading “Edwardian” novelists of her day – Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy – for stifling the life of their characters with a heavy material coat. Naming these novelists “materialists,” Woolf claims that they misspend their energies depicting the material trappings of their characters’ lives and slavishly adhering to conventions of probability – conventions that tell us beforehand, and from the outside, what a character must be. By contrast, Woolf presents her own writing, and that of a new generation of “Georgian” or modernist novelists like Joyce and Lawrence, as attempting to free the novel from these suffocating restrictions. By stripping off her characters’ material insulation, Woolf reasons that she can better reveal their unseen inner life.

Though these essays are widely known, little is ever said about the thread of clothing that runs through them. Yet when Woolf takes aim at the Edwardians’ materialism, her targets include the things that confine Clarissa in the story – clothing and fashion. Woolf complains that the Edwardians’ writing is “the form of fiction most in vogue” in her day;<sup>37</sup> that the materialist novelist “takes too much delight in the solidity of his fabric;”<sup>38</sup> that “the essential thing [in modern novels] has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide.”<sup>39</sup> In this last complaint, Woolf calls upon clothing metaphorically to describe how a novelist “dresses up” a character; but she also complains, less figuratively, about how the “air of probability” of the Edwardian novelist is so deadly in its precision that “if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.”<sup>40</sup> And she faults the Edwardian novelist for minutely observing how a character like Mrs. Brown “wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth’s bazaar; and had mended both gloves – indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced.”<sup>41</sup> She also despairs that the reading public,

trained to expect these material details in novels, will demand to know how much Mrs. Brown had "paid for her gloves" (113).

In these many objections, fashion and clothing function as metonyms for materialism, and the author who pays too much attention to outward dress is thereby "constrained . . . by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall."<sup>42</sup> The idea is reprised in the most famous passage from "Modern Fiction." Bringing to a head the difference between Edwardian and Georgian writing, Woolf suggests that if we "look within" we will see that "life . . . is very far from being" the way it appears in Edwardian novels:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind 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; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; . . . so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. (160)

Woolf's effort here, in rejecting the model set by the Edwardian novelists, is to open her writing to the wide variety of lived experience that either cannot pass through the thick barrier of surface reality or that is stymied by the materialists' deference to the "accepted style" of conventional fictional realism. And Woolf promotes her anti-insulating aesthetic by stitching tailoring into her text – she battles the materialists by leading a figurative revolt against the tyrannical authority of high fashion, personified by the Bond Street tailor whose impeccable taste is commanding, and whom the Edwardian novelists slavishly obey when they weigh down their characters with factual details about their lives.

When we read Woolf's criticism of materialism alongside her own fiction of the period, we can see how her account of Clarissa, in moving from story to novel, itself shifts from an Edwardian to a Georgian outlook. Both texts give us privileged access to Clarissa's mind (much as Arnold Bennett sought to do with Hilda Lessways), examining an "ordinary mind on an ordinary day." But the story, with its close attention to material detail, does more to locate Clarissa against the backdrop of the external world (even to the extent of letting us know how much Clarissa paid for her gloves), while Clarissa's thoughts are largely tethered to the world around her, and her memories mostly concern what happened at the Embassy the night before. By contrast, Clarissa in the novel has hardly stepped out her front door when she falls into the distant past, remembering (and re-enacting) a similar scene from when she was a "girl of eighteen" (3). In fact, Woolf's apportioning of space on the novel's first page plays out for us her preference of a modernist outlook over a materialist one: in the stubby first sentence, Woolf alights us upon the narrow ledge of Clarissa's external reality, but she then tips us, in the longer paragraph that follows, into Clarissa's thoughts about the present, and finally plunges us – in the much longer third paragraph – into the depths of Clarissa's memory of her remote past.

But it is not simply *how* Clarissa is presented to us that has changed from story to novel; Clarissa *herself* has changed, too, along the very same lines. Like the Edwardian authors as Woolf describes them, Clarissa in the story expresses the belief that we can sum up individuals by the place they occupy in society, and her concern with outward, material things (like her perfect gloves) ultimately stifles her imaginative capacity to sympathize with others. The faith that Clarissa places in the importance of fashion, along with her conservative defense of social convention and her attachment to the way things were done in the past,<sup>43</sup> make her, as a lady of fashion, Woolf's unofficial mouthpiece for the Edwardian materialist sensibility. In the novel, however, Clarissa has become much more of a showcase – if not spokesperson – for Woolf's brand of modernism. In fact, when Clarissa enunciates her transcendental theory, she translates into fiction the theory of aesthetic dematerialization that Woolf has laid out in her essays. Clarissa may feel "herself everywhere" in the novel because Woolf has since opened her to "myriad impressions" and the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" of the world, so Clarissa's life – like the "luminous halo" Woolf describes in her essay – can now be "laid out like a mist . . . [that] spread ever so far, her life, herself" (9).

## V. Young and Loose

We might think that Woolf's impulse to "look within" a character like Clarissa would distance her from the world, but Clarissa's example shows us otherwise. Though she stands in the story closer to the material world about her, Clarissa nonetheless seems alienated from it, whereas in the novel she appears to be genuinely open to the present moment, even though her mind is repeatedly steeped in the past.<sup>44</sup> Clarissa's surprising reorientation toward the present may arise from the discovery that Woolf, in the August 30, 1923 entry to her diary, says she made when drafting the novel: by "dig[ging] out beautiful caves behind [her] characters," she can not only give them "humanity, humour, depth" but also connect them to each other – for "the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment."<sup>45</sup> When Woolf dematerializes Clarissa and tunnels into her, she also tunnels beneath the material barriers that, on the surface, hold her apart from others – including Septimus. What Woolf does not mention in her diary is that her use of interior monologue to dematerialize Clarissa's character helps put Clarissa in touch with her youthful past, her own otherness, which in turn helps burst the seams of her insulated character from the story. All of this can be observed in the plunge that Clarissa takes on the opening page of the novel. Instead of appearing before us as merely the aging fashion maven from the story, Clarissa now comes to us double, her mature self supplemented by a youthfulness she has not entirely left behind.

As Woolf goes on to rewrite Clarissa's story in the novel, Clarissa literally comes to stand beside her former self when she bumps into Hugh Whitbread on her morning walk. In the story, Clarissa's short conversation with Hugh is represented to us outwardly, dramatically, but in the novel their conversation is presented instead from the perspective of Clarissa's mind. By giving us her experiences from the inside out – so their dialogue is now internalized as so many impressions continuous with Clarissa's other thoughts – Woolf has effectively erased Clarissa's body from the scene, while causing readers to stand in Clarissa's place and see Hugh as she sees him. But once again, Clarissa's character has also changed in this scene, along with Woolf's depiction of her, demonstrating how beholden her character is to Woolf's evolving technique. In the story, our first clear glimpse inside Clarissa's head shows her sympathizing with the misfortunes of the materialistic Mrs. Foxcroft,<sup>46</sup> but when Clarissa stands across from Hugh in the novel, she implicitly dissociates herself from his materialism and fashion sensibility: Clarissa thinks to herself that Hugh has a "very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court)" (6). Hugh meets here, with his "perfectly upholstered body," the class-defining expectation of a tailored fit,<sup>47</sup> but Clarissa nonetheless registers Hugh's meticulous clothing as an expression of his limited aspirations. Though she aspires to such a perfect fit in the story, in the novel it is Hugh – who appears across from us in this scene, materially objectified like an overstuffed chair – who embodies, in Clarissa's stead, the importance of fashion. A poster-boy for tailor-sewn buttons and made-to-measure clothing, Hugh is preoccupied by "the trivial and the transitory" material things that Woolf scorns in the Edwardians.<sup>48</sup> In turn, Clarissa in this scene is made to feel defensive, exposed, and vulnerable (for Hugh made her feel skimpy), much as she will later feel vulnerable by the explosion outside the flower shop. Unlike Hugh, who perfectly fits his clothes, Clarissa feels uncomfortable in hers: "Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it?" Later we learn that Clarissa so dislikes her body that she thinks of it as something she wears (like an ill-fitting vestment?) quite apart from herself.

Much hinges on Clarissa's standing aside from Hugh's perfect fit, since this is the same perfection that informs the "perfect" gentleman in the novel, as well as the "perfect hostess" that Peter Walsh accuses Clarissa of becoming (7, 62). She gains some distance from that kind of class perfection during her walk when she hesitates before the window of a glove shop – perhaps the same glove shop she enters in the story – and thinks how "before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves" there, how "her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves," how he lost the will to live during the war, and how "she had a passion for gloves" while her daughter Elizabeth "cared not a straw for either of them" (11). Still admiring "almost perfect gloves," Clarissa disavows neither her fashion sensibility nor her Edwardian uncle's idea that you can read character off from clothing; indeed, later in the novel Clarissa reaffirms the value of fashion when she shows contempt for "frumps" and dislikes Miss Kilman in part because she neglects her personal appearance. Yet Clarissa also registers in this scene how outmoded the traditional standard of fashion evaluation has become: the ideal of "almost perfect gloves" appears to have passed away during the war, along with her uncle and his way of thinking, while Elizabeth, a representative of the new generation, shows no similar concern for her clothes. This passage thus reconfirms our double view of Clarissa, straddling

age and youth; but it also records for us the shift that Woolf describes, in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," from Edwardians to Georgians, from materialists to modernists, with Clarissa self-consciously spanning the divide. Not so ambivalent, however, is Woolf herself, who stands squarely among the modernists in this scene when she declines to tell us whether Clarissa, when measured by her uncle's test, is a lady or not – for she never describes Clarissa's shoes or gloves in the novel, or even lets us know if Clarissa is wearing gloves while she reflects upon them in the shop window. We may conclude that Clarissa shares Woolf's discomfort about perfect gloves to the extent that she, too, settles for window-shopping. When she resumes her walk to buy flowers without entering the glove shop, Clarissa literally steps beyond her destiny in the story.

This double process of dematerialization, whereby Clarissa is divested of restrictive clothing (from the outside) and a snooty fashion sensibility (from the inside), is dramatized in the novel when Clarissa, returning home from the flower shop, thinks that "Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe" (31), and begins to remove her outerwear. So what has Clarissa been wearing thus far in the novel? After handing her parasol to Lucy (30), Clarissa goes to her room and takes off her "feathered yellow hat" along with the hat pin that had fastened it to her head (31), puts away her coat (32), removes her hair pins (34), and takes off her brooch (36). And as Clarissa dismantles her public figure, something seems to happen to her: her thoughts begin to warm up. After she reflects upon her innate coldness, the lack of warmth she brings to her marriage and relations with other people, Clarissa recalls that she has had fleeting moments where her coldness is ruptured, revelatory moments of warmth when, for example, she "yield[s] to the charm of a woman":

one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (32)

The latent significance of this moment of illumination, which sounds blissfully orgasmic with its swelling and explosion, only becomes clear when we notice how Woolf has again rewritten a rather pedestrian moment from her story, the moment when Miss Anstruther (as yet unidentified by Clarissa) splits one of the gloves she tries on:

. . . the other customer took a glove, tugged it, and it split.  
"There!" she exclaimed.  
"A fault of the skin," said the grey-headed woman hurriedly. "Sometimes a drop of acid in tanning. Try this pair, Madame."  
"But it's an awful swindle to ask two pound ten!"  
Clarissa looked at the lady; the lady looked at Clarissa. (28)

The subtle resonance between these two passages suggests, first, that Clarissa, in this scene from the story, is in the process of being charmed by another lady. Miss Anstruther's voice may seem more commanding than seductive, but there is a clear moment of communion between the women ("Clarissa looked at the lady; the lady looked at Clarissa"), which soon climaxes with an explosion of recognition at the end: "Miss Anstruther!' she exclaimed." And this revelatory moment (which reveals Miss Anstruther to Clarissa, and Clarissa to us) is triggered by Miss Anstruther rupturing the skin of the glove she tries on, much as Clarissa later recounts experiencing a moment of revelation when "some pressure of rapture . . . split its thin skin."

However, if this warmth between the two women in the story underscores Clarissa's exclusive class identity, it does just the opposite in the novel by rupturing the staid surface of Clarissa's conventional high-society life, allowing her to recover a part of her more youthful self. When she begins to undress, Clarissa thinks about Sally Seton, who has epitomized unconventionality for her; and her hard exterior begins to soften as her undressing proceeds: "the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins" (34). Moments later she recalls the "most exquisite moment of her whole life" – when Sally, years ago, "kissed her on the lips" (35). In rewriting this incident from the story, Woolf has drawn an undercurrent of transgressive sexual desire for another woman out from under the very thing that reinforces Clarissa's class elitism in the story – her confederation with another respectable lady. A rather ordinary material event (and unremarkable

dialogue) in the story – the splitting of a glove – thus takes on symbolic, spiritual value for Clarissa in the novel, whereby she exchanges, in a moment of “inner meaning,” her affection for Miss Anstruther – one of her own kind, in the present – for her affection for Sally, who used to race down the hall naked, and who represents an alternative to Clarissa’s current life.

By exchanging material constraints for youthful liberation, Clarissa continues to follow the shift from Edwardian to Georgian that Woolf describes in her essays; Clarissa felt that Sally “could say anything, do anything” (33), which is what Woolf herself most desires as a novelist. But there is another subtext playing behind Clarissa’s recovery of her youth in the book: women’s fashions in Britain after the war emphasized a similar youthful looseness. According to Quentin Bell (who was not only Woolf’s nephew and biographer, but also a historian of fashion), women’s fashions in the “first thirty years of this century” favored “simpler and more youthful styles of dress,” dispensing with the corset that was so instrumental in constraining women’s bodies in the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Alison Lurie likewise notes that “by the end of World War I women’s clothes had become relatively unconfining”: “youth and novelty were in fashion, and fashion transformed itself to emphasize and proclaim youth. Thousands of women entered the second decade of the century shaped like hourglasses and came out of it shaped like rolls of carpet.”<sup>50</sup> This new fashion has often been described as mannish, as it de-emphasized women’s sexual difference from men, but Lurie claims that women who dressed this way – in “loose smocklike or sacklike dresses that ended just below the knee and were either waistsless or belted at hip level” – really resembled children, “the little girls they had been ten to twenty years earlier, and (to a lesser extent) the little boys they had played with”: “After nearly a century of skintight or rather corsettight gowns these loose, short frocks made women look like little girls dressed in their mothers’ old blouses” (74-75).

Because Clarissa’s liberation in the novel coincides with the direction that women’s fashions were taking in Woolf’s day, we might regard Woolf’s call to dematerialize the novel as less a critique of fashion per se than a critique of what had been so confining about women’s fashions in the recent past. From this perspective, we may note that a fashion precedent exists for Woolf’s reformist aesthetic, since the trend toward looser women’s clothing in the 1920s was anticipated in the 19th century by the dress reform movement.<sup>51</sup> Where Woolf complained that the life of a character in Edwardian novels is stifled by too much materialism, the dress reform movement railed against the excessive, restrictive material that weighed down women and made them prisoners of their own clothing. Dress reformers worried about the health risks that arose from the amount of clothing middle-class women had come to wear, its tightness (in lacings and form-shaping corsets), and the restrictions these burdens imposed upon women’s movement. Liberation required shedding this cumbersome attire and replacing it with looser, simpler, and more youthful garments, including – over the course of time – such innovations as bloomers, Jaeger clothing, and aesthetic dress. The liberalization of women’s clothing that drove the reform movement got its second wind in the twentieth century, long after bloomers went out of style. And when women gained new political and economic freedom after the war, they were further emancipated from the restrictive, heavy outfits of the past. Upon his return to London, Peter senses such a loosening up after the war – a “shift in the whole pyramidal accumulation which in his youth had seemed immovable. On top of them it had pressed; weighed them down, the women especially” (162). Less clothing, and looser designs, afforded women greater freedom of movement, much as the looser-fitting sportswear at the end the century allowed women to ride bicycles, and thus helped them secure a new freedom of movement beyond the home.<sup>52</sup>

Clarissa is neither a new woman nor a flapper, but what is new about her in the novel resonates with post-war youth culture and the liberation afforded by looser, lighter women’s fashions. It is also this new liberation – Clarissa’s experiencing the spirit (if not the actual fashion sense) of a new woman – that helps her escape her class confinement. After Clarissa has removed her outer dress in her room, she replays her initial gesture in the novel by setting out to help Lucy by mending her dress herself; no longer merely a consumer or wearer of gloves, Clarissa now tries her hand at being a seamstress. We also know that Clarissa could not sew her dress in this scene if she were still wearing formal gloves; and though we do not see her remove her gloves when she takes off her other clothes, we know she is not wearing them when she reaches into her cupboard to remove her dress, since we learn that “Clarissa plung[ed] her hand into the softness” of her evening dresses (37). This is the first time that Clarissa actually *feels* something with her hands in the novel; and that suggests how Woolf’s removing her gloves – if not previously from Clarissa’s walk, then from her earlier appearance in the story, where her gloves are so insulating – has enabled Clarissa to feel the world immediately around her, including people from other social worlds.

Clarissa's crossing the counter to sew, in this scene, also draws her a step closer to Septimus' world. Clarissa tries her hand at the labor that is most saliently represented in the novel by Rezia, Septimus' wife, who makes hats and is often seen sewing. And by helping Lucy, Clarissa also resembles Septimus when, just before his death, he has a moment of genuine communion with Rezia and uncharacteristically lends a hand in creating a hat for Mrs. Filmer's daughter (143). When Clarissa has her glove-bursting moment of illumination in the novel, the experience not only causes her to feel "the world come closer" but also allows her to "feel what men felt" for a woman (32), suggesting further how she might better identify with Septimus once the impediment of her gloves has been removed.

So when news of Septimus' suicide bursts into her party – "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death" (183) – it creates an opening in her adult life, reminiscent of the rent in Miss Anstruther's glove, that allows Clarissa to renew her feeling: "She *felt* somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She *felt* glad that he had done it; thrown it away . . . He *made her feel* the beauty; *made her feel* the fun" (186, emphasis added). We can still hear in these lines – in the way Clarissa trades in Septimus' death for her own fun – the distant echo of Clarissa's callousness from the story, where she proved too eager to exchange the soldiers' sacrifice for her new gloves. But Woolf's emphasis on Clarissa's newfound depth of *feeling* signals her genuine sympathy for him. And if Clarissa's "fun" brings her within arm's reach of a flapper's quest for "fun and thrills,"<sup>53</sup> it also represents the youthfulness and daring that have opened Clarissa, in the novel, to the other possibilities of living.

## VI. From Tailor-Made to Ready-to-Wear

Besides the youthful relaxing of women's attire, there is another development in the world of fashion that may have affected the change in Clarissa's character, and that additionally speaks to the nature of her relationship with Septimus: the early twenties witnessed the advent of ready-made clothing for women in England. Ready-made clothing had first entered the commercial marketplace in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was largely men's clothing (which was more readily mass-produced) and the American fashion industry (which was more open to industrialization and technological innovation) that took the lead. Only with the First World War, which demanded the rapid mass-production of men's uniforms, did the machine manufacturing of clothing take hold in the England.<sup>54</sup> Margaret Wray notes that "between the wars, factory production of ready-made garments gradually replaced bespoke production as the main source of women's outerwear supplies," and S. P. Dobbs writes (in 1928) that "women's garments are now for the first time being made in bulk by factory methods. Very soon it seems as if only the most exclusive of men's and women's clothes will be made by hand, so that dressmaking and handicraft tailoring will become purely luxury trades."<sup>55</sup> The surge of working women after the war, with new purchasing power, created a market for such fashion, by demanding clothing – and dictating fashion – that they could buy quickly, without the trouble of multiple fittings required by tailored clothing.<sup>56</sup> This demand for ready-made clothing likely contributed as well to the loosening of women's fashions in this period, since the factory system for the British garment industry – still in its infancy in the 1920s – had not yet developed the technology and coordination needed for industry-wide standards and uniform sizes. For ready-made clothing to be affordable and popular, customers had to adjust to a looser fit.<sup>57</sup>

We may speculate that this change in clothing manufacturing also inaugurated a change in fashion epistemology. As more ready-made women's clothing became available in this period, and as industry increasingly standardized its production, a corresponding conceptual change likely began to take hold among English women in the way they related to their clothing and, in turn, thought about their own bodies. Up to this point in history, if a woman (like Clarissa) was wealthy enough to have her clothing made for her, her own body provided the unique standard for her clothing; at numerous fittings, a tailor or dressmaker would repeatedly measure her body and painstakingly cut her clothes to match, and also enhance, the peculiarities of her own shape. But as quality ready-made clothing became increasingly available, the standard of measurement for many women must have gradually shifted to outside their body, where it was provided for them by an industry whose job was to dress an anonymous base of customers. Now, rather than adapt clothing to her unique shape, a woman would fit her body into clothing that has already been measured against an emerging industrial standard – the average of many women's bodies together.<sup>58</sup> The mass-production of the same outfit, measured upon a small number of standard sizes, essentially introduces the idea that a fashion

double of yourself exists somewhere in the community. Not only is someone likely wearing the exact outfit you are wearing, but who you are, as a customer of ready-to-wear clothing, is now measured by a standard size that exists apart from (and even precedes) you.

I believe that the emergence of ready-made women's clothing after the war has something to do with the emergence of Clarissa's double about the same time – first, rather vaguely in 1922, in the opening of Woolf's story and the theme of Clarissa's lower-class counterpart, and then more clearly in 1924, in the form of Septimus, the double who in the novel walks about London just beyond the fringes of Clarissa's awareness. Of course, Clarissa has little to fear that Septimus will be wearing her clothing – not merely because of his gender but because Clarissa's clothing is certainly still made-to-measure, tailored to her body. Yet in this period of dramatic upheaval in the world of fashion, Clarissa is undoubtedly confronted by these changes – alluded to, perhaps, by her dressmaker retiring (39), or by Peter's observation, upon his return to London from India, that “a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place” since 1918 and that “people looked different”: “even the poorest [women] dressed better than five years ago surely” (71). In fact, the transition in women's fashions – from bespoke tailoring to ready-to-wear clothing – may already be registered in “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” in the frustration the ladies experience in the glove shop: for even as they want to observe the bespoke standard of a perfect fit, they are reduced to fitting themselves into clothing that is ready-made. As I noted earlier, very high-end gloves were occasionally custom-made, but form-fitting gloves, like other accessories, were mostly produced ready-made before the start of factory mass-production. While ready-to-wear merchandise offers customers in the glove shop the convenience (and savings) of one-stop shopping, it also introduces the problem of finding a garment that matches one's body shape – a frustration that looks ahead to the difficulty that all shoppers will increasingly experience if they do not adapt their personal standards to the looser-fitting norm of ready-made clothing.<sup>59</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this same frustration reappears when Miss Kilman is reduced to buying anything at all, since “no clothes suited her” (129) – a problem she would not have if she could afford to have her clothing custom-made. In the absence of reliable ready-made sizing, the solution offered by clothing manufacturers to customers in Woolf's day is to alter their fashion sensibility and wear more relaxed clothing. That is a solution – I would argue – that Woolf herself embraced when recasting Clarissa's character. Clarissa in the novel has yet to give up bespoke clothing; but when she moves from story to novel, the changes that Woolf brings to her character, in loosening up her, nonetheless coincide with the emerging trend of ready-made fashion.

But can Septimus, as Clarissa's double and fashion alternative, really figure in the novel as the standard-bearer of the new ready-to-wear era? In at least two ways he does – by being Clarissa's “equal” from a lower class, and by providing readers with an external “standard” for measuring her. As Elizabeth Ewing notes, the introduction of ready-to-wear clothing enabled the democratization of fashion; quality clothing could now be had for less, which made it available to ordinary people.<sup>60</sup> This in turn made real the possibility that your fashion double could come from another (and lower) class, even as it became increasingly difficult to read class standing from someone's clothing.<sup>61</sup> Such a development spells the end of Clarissa's uncle's advice, since at some point in the twentieth century you simply cannot tell a lady by her gloves, shoes, or other clothing. We may still debate whether Clarissa manages to cross the class divide that separates her from Septimus, but we know that the fashion industry was itself crossing that divide when Woolf was composing her novel. And though fashion is still an exclusive preserve for Clarissa in the story, in the novel it disappears as something she can offer to others.

At the same time, we sense that Clarissa in the novel is now to be measured against Septimus, in much the way that women in Woolf's day were beginning to measure themselves, through their clothing, against a critical mass of people whom they resemble but have never met. But Clarissa does not merely encounter, in Septimus, her double (or equal) from a lower class; she also encounters a character who, at some level, is intended in the novel to function as a social type. “Septimus Warren Smith” is the name that Woolf has given, in effect, to the unknown soldier buried in Westminster – a local embodiment of the thousands of anonymous uniformed soldiers whom Clarissa momentarily reflects upon in the story, but also an expression of the public average. As his last name suggests, Smith was typical before he ever put on his uniform: “London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them” (84).<sup>62</sup> As though proving that the pull of typicality is too strong, the Smiths' attempt at individuating their son backfires, simply underscoring his generic origins. Septimus feels himself to be unique, “the lord of men . . . called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth” (67), but his deluded sense of self-importance is a symptom of the nervous ailment

he shares with “thousands of young men” who survived the war. Readers of *Mrs. Dalloway* may object when Sir Bradshaw callously refers to Septimus, after his suicide, as an unfortunate “case” (183); but notwithstanding her personal identification with Septimus’ madness, that is how Woolf saw him as well.

In her draft of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf seems to struggle when describing both Septimus and Rezia Smith:

They were both on the verge of the gentle classes. . . . For example, [his trousers,] or his shoes – the working classes do not wear brown shoes; & his hands, & his high cheek bones, & his expression. with that . . . shade of absent mindedness which generally means [education,] reading, leisure; And yet it was a rough face – the mother might have been a mill hand, & the father in orders. . . .<sup>63</sup>

While Woolf has some trouble here establishing the Smiths’ class standing, she also seems stymied in her effort to individuate characters whom she sees as types. Contrary to her imperatives about character building in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf reads the Smiths, their social position, and even their parental history from the outside, off of their external features and clothing. We may be tempted to construe this as a further expression of Woolf’s discomfort in writing about characters from the lower orders – in other words, as her own inability to cross the class counter in her fiction. But by using such broad strokes to describe Septimus, Woolf is also self-consciously fitting him with “ready made clothing” – and we know this because Woolf says as much: ‘Then of course he meets a girl somewhere – they think, like all their sort. [first] that they won’t marry; [& then <but>] they do. [But this ready made clothing fits. Yet they’re not ordinary, either of them]’. Though slight evidence, this passage indicates that Woolf, when drafting her novel, conceived of Septimus, Clarissa’s double, in the context of ready-made clothes. It also shows that she self-consciously likened her own act of capturing characters to her clothing them. Woolf seems defensive about this, protesting that the Smiths are not ordinary in the end. But her wording – “of course,” “like all their sort” – indicates that she does conceive of them as types, and her “ready made clothing fits” their character because ready-made clothing is designed to fit people who coincide with the norm. As such, Septimus is well-suited to the new era of mass-produced clothes, embodying an emerging standard and the uniformity that the mass-production of clothing cannot do without. It is against this new standard that Woolf’s readers need to measure Clarissa herself.

## VII. Clarissa Herself

Readers of *Mrs. Dalloway* may be bothered by this idea, and think that the point of Woolf’s novel is just the opposite, if they associate the standardization ushered in by modern mass-production with Bradshaw’s compulsory proportionality. From such a perspective, Septimus’ problem is that he is coerced into a standardized suit – first he is pressured by nationalism to wear a uniform, and then bullied by his doctors to follow their ill-fitting prescriptions. Rather than expose Clarissa to the same fate, we ought to measure Septimus against Clarissa – and regret that Septimus, who sacrifices his life to save his soul, lacks Clarissa’s means to defend his individuality. This reading, suspicious of the uniformity of mass-production, becomes all the more commanding if we regard Woolf’s modernist technique as similarly providing an alternative to “ready-made” or one-size-fits-all characterization. Accordingly, when Woolf forsakes the ready-made tools handed her by her Edwardian forebears, she embraces an inside-out mode of characterization that is akin to hand-tailoring each of her characters, enabling her to draw out their individual uniqueness.

The power of this interpretation ultimately comes from its confirming the popular view of modernism as an art that resists technological modernization. When mass-reproduction begins to challenge the unique aura of art, modern art (we know) responds by recovering the ideals of craftsmanship mostly lost to the past. But I believe that is the wrong way to regard contemporary manufacturing and the advent of standardization in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and I would argue that Clarissa’s character, as well as Woolf’s brand of modernism in the novel, are more modern, and less backward-looking, than we may think. Woolf’s objection to the Edwardian novelists lies less in their reliance upon ready-made conventions (for even Woolf concedes there is no communication without them) than in their use of outmoded conventions that are no longer able to capture “the accent [that] falls differently from of old,” and in their suffocating their characters with indulgent portrayals of the material surface of life. Using such tools in his fiction, Arnold Bennett comes to resemble

Bradshaw (in Woolf's view) because he squelches the voice and inner life of the characters he represents, dictatorially promoting his own outlook at their expense.

Woolf's argument with the Edwardians hardly centers on industrial progress, but technological developments in *Mrs. Dalloway* – like the airplane flying overhead, which solicits myriad irreconcilable responses from the public – nonetheless provide her with an image of freedom and imaginative possibility that contrasts sharply with the cramped vision of life she associates with Bennett. Ready-made clothing, I believe, is a comparable positive industrial development for Woolf – not because she smiles upon the idea of mass-produced uniformity, but because she senses that the wide-availability, the lower cost, and even the relative looseness of the new clothing would help dismantle the rigid hierarchical fashion system that has stifled Clarissa's soul, bringing her into contact with other people (some from across the counter) who could be her fashion doubles in modern London.

There is a moment in the novel when Clarissa seems to be challenged by a new, looser standard for measuring herself. Having disrobed after her return from the flower store, she examines herself in the mirror, thinking:

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 who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to . . . [she] had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her – faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions. (37)

In fashioning this small portrait of Clarissa, Woolf – heeding her own advice from “Modern Fiction” – looks within Clarissa's ordinary mind on an ordinary day, and finds beneath the hard surface of her life a multitude of conflicting selves. The outward view of Mrs. Dalloway – the one Clarissa carefully presents to the world – looks back to Woolf's description of Edwardian character (definite, stable, contrived), while the second view of her – from the inside-out, and hidden from the public – points us toward the looser Georgian character that Woolf, having pried Clarissa open, has sought to present in the novel. But Clarissa's public view here (defensively closed-off, as a single point or essence) also aspires still to tailor-made perfection, which ultimately denies the full complexity of her character, regardless of how Clarissa heroically construes her effort to seamlessly draw her parts together. Only a looser standard for clothing Clarissa's character – like that offered by ready-made garments, or employed by Woolf to describe her in this very scene – can express how fundamentally Clarissa is other than herself.

The privileged view of Clarissa in this scene may lead us to believe that her otherness simply wells up from inside, but the way Woolf describes Clarissa's parties indicates that the new standard she uses to measure Clarissa in fact comes from outside her self. Late in the novel, after Clarissa has left the party to reflect upon Septimus' death, she decides that “she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter” (186). By this she certainly means to resume her role as the party's hostess and bring people together: “Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. . . and she felt if only they could be brought together” (122). But Woolf's manuscript clarifies what else she means by “assemble”: “she must go back to [them] . . . must collect from here & there all her scattered parts, & assemble together the different parts of her, no one knew how strange, how widely scattered, which for a moment now standing alone came together, & must be composed, combined, made whole in order to breast & confront the world there.”<sup>64</sup> This passage, which clearly echoes the earlier portrait of Clarissa from her dressing room, reveals that Woolf has drawn upon the same pattern to construct both Clarissa's character and the community about her: just as Clarissa assembles her many selves to create the public persona that offers a meeting-place and refuge for others, her party is similarly an assemblage of many selves that Clarissa has brought together to “confront the world there.” Clarissa's internal differences thus resonate with the outward differences among her guests, which turns her party into an additional portrait of its hostess. When Clarissa strides back in and brings people together, it seems that she also, by that very act, recollects her many selves – while bridging the divide between herself and others.

We may still doubt, however, if Clarissa, as the hostess in Woolf's novel, is truly more open than she is in the story to people beyond her social orbit. We have seen how Clarissa defends her parties as an “offering,” a way to bring different people in London together; and not unlike her initial offer across class lines at the start

of the novel, Clarissa captures life in her parties because “odd unexpected people turned up” (77), because her guests – ranging from politicians to artists – themselves come from different walks of life, even as she has only sought to ensure that “everyone merely . . . be themselves” (126). But it remains hard to imagine that Septimus, her double from across the counter, could ever attend such a party other than by crashing it – which is arguably what he does, when news of his death so unsettles Clarissa. Indeed, early in the novel Clarissa proudly sees her party as an expression of upper-crust London life: “being part of it, since her people were courtiers once . . . she, too, was going . . . to kindle and illuminate; to give her party” (5). Might her parties then not simply reinforce her insulation from the lower orders?

We are less likely to think so if we recognize that Woolf’s critical distance from Clarissa has mostly disappeared in the novel. A major irony in *Mrs. Dalloway* is that Clarissa has come to resemble her author precisely by being a society hostess. Both women have sought, with their labors, “to combine, to create” (122) and bring people together. Both offer up their creation as an end in itself: Clarissa, recalling Woolf’s claim that literature does nothing, describes her parties as an “offering for the sake of offering” (122). And both studiously avoid imposing themselves upon others; what Clarissa now offers others, in place of a fashion ideal, is a method for resisting conversion and avoiding coercion, which Woolf herself adopts when composing her narrative. In fact, Clarissa’s method of assembling herself, and others, coincides with the way Woolf has conveyed her character to us throughout the novel. In the October 15, 1923 entry to her diary, Woolf reflects that she can prevent Clarissa’s character from seeming too stiff if “I can bring innumerable other characters to her support,”<sup>65</sup> and she does just that when she offers an assortment of conflicting views of Mrs. Dalloway in the novel. Here, perhaps, we can sense the true significance of ready-made clothing for the book, for Woolf gives us a veritable wardrobe of ready-made clothes that we can try on Clarissa in order to make out her character. In the absence of a narrator who will tell us what to think of her, we arrive at Clarissa’s identity by measuring her against others, and calculating (as best we can) the average of the multiple, incompatible, possibly unreliable views of her (“all the other sides of her”). Some of these views we get from Clarissa herself, but others come from people she knows well – like Lucy, Hugh, Peter, Miss Kilman – as well as from people she hardly knows at all – like Scrope Purvis, who watches Clarissa without her realizing it (4), or the “old lady opposite climbing upstairs” whom Clarissa watches without her knowledge (126), or Septimus, who throughout the novel helps to define Clarissa, by their likenesses and differences, even though the two never meet. When we try upon Clarissa these different suits, we wind up applying her transcendental theory, since “to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them” (152-53), and Clarissa truly becomes “part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best . . . it spread ever so far, her life, herself” (9). This new kind of identity – where Clarissa is completed by others – is not incidental to her portrait in the novel, nor is it merely a device for critiquing her, for it has become the very condition for her being. In the end, it is what allows Clarissa to realize “herself.”

There is a further irony, however, attached to this new, looser portrait of Clarissa. Where Woolf’s original story about Clarissa revolves around her finding a pair of gloves that fits, the novel she subsequently writes revolves around our figuring out how well Clarissa fits the various ready-to-wear accounts of her that come from within and without. Understanding Clarissa, then, is still a matter of dressing her up in different suits. But since the “clothes” we use to do this are all incomplete (and often biased) judgments about her, none is a perfectly-tailored expression of Clarissa’s being (her essence, her *sui generis* identity); and thus we may speak of them all as *accessories*. A glove – like a handbag, a brooch, a hat – is an accessory because it complements – and completes – an outfit, rendering the wearer whole. The characters’ various judgments about Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* are likewise accessories because they similarly complete her – but with the difference that there is no original outfit for them to match. Woolf captures Clarissa’s soul by assembling and “accessorizing” her – surrounding her with various partial perspectives that together make her whole. To this extent, then, material gloves – though largely banished from the novel – remain the secret to Clarissa’s character. Woolf may deliver Clarissa’s character to us in the novel by stripping her of the gloves she wore in the story and dispensing with most of the material trappings in her life; but when she replaces these things with other characters’ opinions and judgments (including Clarissa’s own conflicting views of herself), she winds up bringing the supplemental logic of the accessory to the center of Clarissa’s being. Clarissa’s transcendental theory is founded, it would seem, upon the solid ground of fashion that Woolf has repressed into the unconscious of her novel.

In this way, as we assemble and accessorize Clarissa's character, the material context of modern-day clothing can be felt throughout Woolf's novel. But another material context from Woolf's day – the social and economic ideals of Co-operation, discussed early in this essay – proves just as important an influence upon Clarissa and her parties in the end. When we look at Clarissa's parties in this light, we notice something surprising – they share certain unlikely features with the Women's Guild meetings that Woolf attended and even hosted in her home. Like those meetings, Clarissa's parties bring together people from different walks of life, and both seek to offer guests a refuge from "the world there" of wilful competition, class conflict, and social subordination. "This was the tiny magnet that drew to itself all that restless wishing and dreaming. This was the central meeting-place where was formed and solidified what was else so scattered and incoherent."<sup>66</sup> That is how Woolf described a meeting of the Working Women's Guild, but her words could as easily describe Clarissa's parties – and Clarissa herself.

It is a long way from Clarissa's parties to the Guild meetings that Woolf hosted.<sup>67</sup> But the continuity between the two nonetheless colors the many offerings Clarissa makes in Woolf's novel, linking the upstairs world of Clarissa's parties to her downstairs relationship with servants like Lucy. Septimus may ultimately be excluded from Clarissa's society, but the alternative social and economic practice of Co-operation has nonetheless been quietly smuggled, as a value, into Clarissa's social functions – and into her character, too, as the "perfect hostess." More open to her own otherness and that of the world about her, Clarissa in the novel seems to embody not only the youthful looseness of modern fashion in Woolf's day, but also the looser model of ownership promoted by Co-operative societies, where customers double as owners, and capital and power are spread, more equitably, across the counter. In the end, Woolf manages to save her lady of fashion from herself, because she gives up the tailor-made ideal of literary uniqueness and outfits Clarissa with a modern self instead.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to her diary, Woolf was still writing this story on August 22, 1922, but on October 14 she recorded that "Mrs. Dalloway has branched into a book," *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), 190, 207.

<sup>2</sup> In Woolf's typescript of the story the first sentence reads, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the silk herself," with the word "silk" crossed out and the word "gloves" written in above it. The Berg Collection [microfilm] (Reading, England: Research Publications, 1994). Woolf seems to have been testing different words in that slot; it is anyone's guess how much thought she gave to this one revision.

<sup>3</sup> In 1928, Woolf confirmed that she thought of Septimus as Clarissa's double, writing that "in the first version [of the novel] Septimus, who later is intended to be [Clarissa's] double, had no existence," "Introduction' to the Modern Library Edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1928)," reprinted (as Appendix C) in *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Morris Beja (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 198.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase is mine, but the idea it conveys – of escaping your own perspective to see the world through someone else's eyes: e.g., walking in some one else's shoes – belongs to Woolf. It is the unspoken theme of *Mrs. Dalloway*. We might trace Woolf's interest in the idea of clothing functioning as a metonym for point of view back to the end of her previous novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), where Betty Flanders, collecting her son's possessions after Jacob has been killed in the war, asks Mr. Bonamy, "What am I to do with these?" while holding out "a pair of Jacob's old shoes" (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 176. The answer: Woolf gives Jacob's old shoes a new use in her next novel by transforming them into a pair of high-class gloves.

<sup>5</sup> In the margin of her manuscript of *The Hours*, Woolf scribbled – perhaps as a possible title, as Helen Wussow suggests – "A ladies portrait. A lady of Fashion," *Virginia Woolf's The Hours: The British Museum Manuscript of Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Helen M. Wussow (New York: Pace University Press, 1996), 221.

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<sup>6</sup> Kristina Stankovski, 'Gloves,' *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, Michigan: Scribner's, 2005), 146.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Adburgham, *The Very Best English Goods: A Facsimile of the Original Catalogue of Edwardian Fashions, Furnishing, and Notions Sold at The Army and Navy Co-operative Society Store in 1907* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 806-7.

<sup>8</sup> C. Cody Collins, *Love of a Glove: The Romance, Legends and Fashion History of Gloves and How They Are Made* (New York: Fairchild, 1945), 73.

<sup>9</sup> S. William Beck, *Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1883), 132. Stankovski confirms that "by the end of the century, it became fashionable to wear tightly fitting gloves that were molded to the specific contours of the hand" (147).

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,' *Mrs. Dalloway's Party* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Miss Anstruther complains to the shop girl that the next pair she tries on is a shade "too tight" (28), which suggests that gloves *can* be too tight, but also that a good match should be snug, form-fitting.

<sup>12</sup> As to how leather gloves may stretch to ruin a perfect fit, Natalie Kneeland writes, "Nothing is more dressy than a handsome kid glove. It is soft and pliable and conforms easily to the hand. The finest and most expensive imported gloves are made from superior kidskins . . . However, kid stretches so easily that it is essential to have a perfect fit, and even then it may get out of shape," *Hosiery, Knit Underwear, and Gloves* (Chicago: A. W. Shaw Co., 1924), 71.

<sup>13</sup> See Collins, 73, and Kneeland, 82.

<sup>14</sup> This description "slender" itself alludes to size, since glove sizes measure the width of the hand, around the fingers.

<sup>15</sup> Kneeland, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 3. We should note that this idiom, of having your "work cut out for" you, is a dead metaphor that probably derives from the clothing trade.

<sup>17</sup> This reading is further confirmed when Lucy then asks, "Couldn't she help to mend that dress?" and Clarissa responds that "[Lucy] had enough on her hands already, quite enough of her own to do without that" (39). The novel's opening sentence, we may surmise, is Clarissa's response to a similar question posed by Lucy: *Couldn't she help to buy the flowers?* "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself," since Lucy *had enough on her hands already, quite enough of her own to do without that*.

<sup>18</sup> *Life as We Have Known It*, ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies (London: Virago, 1977). This piece was later republished, with some slight changes, as "Memories of a Working Women's Guild" in *The Captain's Death Bed* (1950) as well as in Woolf's *Collected Essays*, vol. 4 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967). Because of these differences between the two versions of the essay, I quote from both, referring to them as "Memories" in the body of the essay but then as either *Life as We Have Known It* or *Collected Essays 4* in my citation references.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 101.

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<sup>20</sup> From 1914 to 1916, Leonard wrote several pamphlets about the Co-operative Movement; and though his focus shifted, during the War, from domestic cooperation to the need for international cooperation (leading him, with his work for the Fabian Society, to help lay the intellectual foundations for the League of Nations), he nonetheless continued to write about the Co-operative Movement during this period. From 1914 through 1923 (when Woolf was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*), Leonard each year published one or more works (as author or editor) that addressed Co-operation in some way, including the books *Co-operation and the Future of Industry* (1918) and *Socialism and Co-operation* (1921).

<sup>21</sup> Jean Gaffin and David Thoms, *Caring & Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Holyoake Books, 1993), passim.

<sup>22</sup> Virginia also "helped [Leonard] with research for [his] pamphlets [on the Co-operative Movement] while she convalesced at Asheham House"; Mark Hussey, *Virginia Woolf: A – Z* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 371. In March 1914, she wrote (to Leonard) that "all the morning I typewrite – then read your Co.op: books, and make futile notes I expect," and (to Janet Case) that "by occupying myself with typewriting and Co-operative manuals, I keep cheerful." *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt Brace 1976), 44-45.

<sup>23</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977), 76.

<sup>24</sup> In 'Memories,' Woolf looks forward to the time when "society will pool its possessions instead of segregating them" (*Collected Essays 4*, 142).

<sup>25</sup> *Life as We Have Known It*, xxix.

<sup>26</sup> *Collected Essays 4*, 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>28</sup> *Collected Essays 4*, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, reprinted in *The Portable Veblen*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Viking Press, 1948), 199.

<sup>30</sup> Veblen, 206. Quentin Bell notes that the late nineteenth century was "a time of drastic tight lacing," such that "it must have been hard to walk, to eat or to breathe in the expensive carapace which fashionable women then wore," *On Human Finery*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 156.

<sup>31</sup> Veblen, 199, 200.

<sup>32</sup> As Bell describes it, "the situation in the past has been that a wealthy and powerful group of people set the fashion and that this elite was imitated, after a certain lapse of time, by less wealthy groups" (*On Human Finery*, 170).

<sup>33</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 19, 20, 22, 24, 27, 28.

<sup>34</sup> This is not the only time that Woolf has used gloves to point out how insensitive high-society ladies can be. In her essay "Am I a Snob?" Woolf wonders if Lady Colefax, who continues to attend parties while still mourning her recently-deceased husband, is "so tanned and leathered by society that the only thing she could not face was solitude" (*Moments of Being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985), 215-16, emphasis added). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Lady Bexborough's skin – described as "crumpled leather" – suits the "perfectly

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upright and stoical bearing” that she and other ladies summon to deal with the “tears and sorrow” of their age (9-10).

<sup>35</sup> When Woolf in 1928 recounted the thinking that went into *Mrs. Dalloway*, she not only claimed that Septimus was “intended to be [Clarissa’s] double” but also said that “Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party” (“Introduction” to the Modern Library Edition, 198). Taken together, the two ideas suggest that Septimus is introduced, as Clarissa’s double, so he may die in her stead. Just as Clarissa stands in the place of another at the start of the novel, Septimus will stand in her place at the end.

<sup>36</sup> Septimus believes, for instance, that he is the one “blocking the way” of the car stuck in traffic, that he is “being looked at and pointed at” by the crowd (15), that the airplane in the sky is “signalling to me” specifically (21), that he is “the greatest of mankind . . . the Lord who had come to renew society” (25).

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1994), 160.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 159; ‘Modern Novels,’ *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3 (London: Hogarth, 1988), 32.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Modern Fiction,’ 160; ‘Modern Novels,’ 32-33.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Modern Fiction,’ 160.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown’ (1924), *The Captain’s Death Bed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 106.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Modern Fiction,’ 160. Bell notes that fashion has a long history of being depicted as a tyrant (*On Human Finery*, 17-18).

<sup>43</sup> Clarissa thinks that “for all the great things one must go to the past” (23); she refuses to “be taken in” by French pointillism, which she describes “as if people had thrown confetti – pink and blue – for a joke” (24); and her taste in books is equally conservative, believing that “the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death” (23). This last judgment is particularly ironic as Woolf had just completed her first distinctively modernist novel, *Jacob’s Room*, which culminates with Jacob’s death.

<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, where Clarissa in the story nostalgically clings to the past at the expense of the present and readily passes judgment upon the fashion offenses she witnesses on her walk (“No! No! No!,” (23)), in the novel she prides herself (not quite accurately) in never judging others (8-9).

<sup>45</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, 263.

<sup>46</sup> The fourth paragraph of the story, which slides from an external to an internal view of Clarissa, is the first time Woolf allows Clarissa’s thinking clearly to overtake her narration: “Pride held her erect, inheriting, handing on, acquainted with discipline and with suffering. How people suffered, how they suffered, she thought, thinking of Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night decked with jewels, eating her heart out, because that nice boy was dead, and now the old Manor House . . . must go to a cousin” (20).

<sup>47</sup> “Human beings vary so much in size – height, girth and shape – that the only real method of ensuring a perfect fit is made-to-measure clothing,” writes Gavin Waddell in *How Fashion Works: Couture, Ready-to-Wear, & Mass Production* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 56.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Modern Fiction,’ 159.

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<sup>49</sup> *On Human Finery*, 96-97. See also Valerie Steele and Colleen Gau, 'Corsets,' *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, vol. 1 (Farmington Hills, MI: Scribner's, 2005), 292. Alison Lurie writes that "the clothes of the 1920s were thought at the time to represent an extreme of freedom for women, and certainly they were a relief to anyone old enough to have worn the styles of twenty years earlier"; *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1981, 2000), 223.

<sup>50</sup> Lurie, 223, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Woolf justified her call for authors to dematerialize their writing by claiming that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" ('Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,' 96). Well before she made this pronouncement in 1924 about how best to dress modern fictional characters, the fashion world was dematerializing women's fashions. As Beth Rigel Daugherty has observed, the examples Woolf gives to illustrate her claim that character had changed suggest she had the new woman in mind. See 'The Whole Contention between Mr Bennett and Mrs. Woolf, Revisited' (1983), in *Virginia Woolf: Critical Assessments*, vol. 2 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, c.1994), 73-74.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Ewing writes that after the war, designs became "much freer than anything that had previously been worn. Freedom was necessary for the great number of women now working in factories and offices, and undertaking all sorts of unaccustomed activities," *History of Twentieth Century Fashion* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1986), 81. In the early twenties, there was also a greater simplicity in design, and the use of light-weight synthetic fabrics eventually contributed as well to women's wearing less clothing.

<sup>53</sup> Lurie, 74.

<sup>54</sup> Ewing, 86-88.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Wray, cited in Ewing, 124; S. P. Dobbs, *The Clothing Workers of Great Britain* (London: Routledge, 1928), 4. In the introduction to Dobb's text, Sidney Webb describes how the clothing trades in Britain are "in process of rapid disintegration and reorganization"; "in every centre of the industry . . . what is most manifest is the continuous transformation that is taking place" (xi).

<sup>56</sup> Ewing, 119.

<sup>57</sup> Ewing 124-7.

<sup>58</sup> Reporting on the inroads made by ready-made tailoring exhibited at the 1867 World's Fair in Paris, Auguste Luchet wrote that the age of the sculptural tailors was over. See Alison Matthews David, 'Tailoring,' *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, vol. 3 (Farmington Hills, Michigan: Scribner's, 2005), 263.

<sup>59</sup> The glove shop, in providing only a limited stock of set styles and sizes, telescopes for us some of the limitations of ready-made clothing that women in Woolf's day would be experiencing in department stores and mail-order catalogues. The customer was at the mercy of whatever gloves were available, and finding a pair to suit could be frustrating since sizes were not uniformly standardized for quite some time. This industry-sizing problem was compounded by the fact that gloves were manufactured in different countries; the pair Clarissa eventually buys comes from France.

<sup>60</sup> Ewing, 1.

<sup>61</sup> A cartoon published in *Punch* on March 16, 1921 may offer support for this idea in the dialogue of two ladies who have just passed a third woman on the street: "That's Betty Grant's new maid." "She's much smarter than her mistress." "Well, they can't both afford to dress like that"; reprinted by Catherine Horwood in *Keeping Up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars* (Sutton: 2005), 7.

<sup>62</sup> In editing the novel, Woolf revises the phrase, "London has swallowed up . . . many *armies of young men* called Smith" (Wussow, 105, emphasis mine), to read, "millions of young men" (84). The change indicates that before Septimus entered the British army, he was already a member of another army, the masses of England – his typicality, or lack of individuality, precedes his status as a soldier.

<sup>63</sup> Wussow, 103. In this and the next quotation, I have placed within brackets those words that Woolf crossed out in her manuscript.

<sup>64</sup> Wussow, 484.

<sup>65</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, 272.

<sup>66</sup> 'Memories of a Working Women's Guild,' *Collected Essays 4*, 146. Woolf writes that the Guild meetings gave working women "a room where they could sit down and think remote from boiling saucepans and crying children; and then that room became a place where one could make, and share with others in making, the model of what a working woman's house should be."

<sup>67</sup> In her diary, Woolf often sounds a sadly bemused note about how inconsequential her Women's Guild meetings are, but she concedes (on April 18, 1918) that the Guild "does somehow stand for something real to these women. In spite of their solemn passivity they have a deeply hidden & inarticulate desire for something beyond the daily life," *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, 141.