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Negative Dialectics in *Mrs Dalloway*

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ABSTRACT

Critics have interpreted Clarissa Dalloway as an ontologically complete character who can be divided into private and public sides: the former is thought and kept to herself while the latter presents an exterior view of her to the members of the British elite with whom she associates. I take issue with this private/public split, however, and argue that, even in her thoughts, Clarissa never finds a permanent reprieve from the Victorian gender norms that are impressed upon her because her interiority is defined by the dialectical movement between her Victorian and anti-Victorian persuasions. I further contend that Woolf never provides a resolution to this dialectic, making it negative rather than affirmative, and thus reveals how she more generally felt about interwar women: as indefinitely *between* gaining full ownership of the newly won "rooms of their own" and forfeiting them in favour of a return to traditional Victorian mores.

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Mrs Dalloway opens on a June morning in 1923. Our protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, is on her way to buy the flowers for a party that she will later host in the evening. Almost immediately her subjective experience is pitted against the objective markers of reality:

> For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? over twenty, – one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable.[1]

The momentary realisation of her bodily vulnerability is erased by the striking clock whose mechanical function is to announce the passage of an hour. But more than just a keeper of time, Big Ben, perched atop Westminster Palace, "counselled submission" and "upheld authority" (*MD*, 154), reminding Clarissa of her place in society as the wife of a Conservative Member of Parliament: "Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (*MD*, 14). Showing the relationship between Clarissa's private thoughts and her public situation in the present (in both a chronological and social sense) was not a completely original move by Virginia Woolf. The same novelistic method had already been executed by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, particularly in the "Wandering Rocks" episode where a combination of omniscient narration and interior monologue – rotating through many of

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[1]Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 4–5 (hereafter cited parenthetically as *MD*).

the characters in the novel – was on full display. The experimental narrative form of *Ulysses*, in turn, suggests inspiration from Bergsonian *durée*: "each of Joyce's characters is conscious of an eternal process of qualitative change and flow, of states of consciousness waxing and waning, interpenetrating each other, ever forming new combinations and seldom repeating themselves mechanically".[2] *Mrs Dalloway*, then, might be seen as another continuation of this modernist fascination with the subjective experience and its incongruity to "materialist" coherence.[3]

But what separates Woolf's novel from other modernist literature is its commitment to "represent the world from the point of view of incertitude".[4] To this, Maria DiBattista adds:

> No writer of English fiction, with the possible exception of D.H. Lawrence, was more versatile in experimenting with the lyric potentials of narration, by which the subjective voice speaks without any distinct hope, often without even real desire, that its language will be heard, much less understood, by an audience.[5]

In other words, no matter how ambiguous, Woolf never intended to clarify the subjective voice, and this is precisely what makes *Mrs Dalloway* (despite its reception as Woolf's "most Joycean novel"[6]) unlike *Ulysses*. While Joyce does dedicate the first eighteen sections in "Wandering Rocks" to showcase the interior monologue of the episode's characters, the narrator of the final section "brings the characters together using a solely public voice and an external view of their various greetings of the car", which is a level of omniscience that is never granted to Woolf's reader.[7]

A few scholars have viewed this lack of omniscience in *Mrs Dalloway* as an invitation to restore it. Alex Zwerdling, for instance, concludes that Clarissa "has both a conformist and a rebellious side, a public and a private self".[8] By splitting Clarissa in two, Zwerdling reduces her into something more manageable. What she shows to the public (how she dresses, with whom she is seen to associate, how she decorates her house for evening parties, etc.) is interpreted as nothing more than a collection of acts that she must perform as a member of the traditional elite class into which she has married (a class still very much grounded on Victorian gender ideology) while her private side is defined as all that pertains to the non-visible. Her inner thoughts and feelings are where she can find an escape from her public obligations. Zwerdling's interpretation has persisted since its introduction in the critical literature, as when Vereen Bell affirms that "In her thoughts, Clarissa repudiates" the psychiatric authority of Sir William Bradshaw and "all that he stands for, but in her actions she collaborates in his social authority".[9]

I wish to argue against this private/public split, however. Even in her thoughts, Clarissa never finds a permanent reprieve from the Victorian gender norms that have been

[2]Kumar, 108. For more on the connection between Joyce and Bergson, see Gillies, 133–5.
[3]I mean "materialist" in the way that Woolf used the term to describe novelists like H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett who were singularly focused on describing just the exterior details of their characters. See Woolf, *Common Reader*, 150–5.
[4]DiBattista, 84.
[5]Ibid., 85.
[6]Brown, 60.
[7]Snaith, "Virginia Woolf's Narrative Strategies", 139–40.
[8]Zwerdling, 79.
[9]Bell, 96. For more appearances of the private/public split in other readings of *Mrs Dalloway*, see Allen, 588; Latham, 204; Mackin, 113–5; Tratner, 90; Graham and Lewis, 88–91; Griesinger, 438; and Wolfe, 38–41.

impressed upon her, and she continuously reminds herself of the need to be a "perfect hostess" (*MD*, 9). I thus intend to show that her subjective experience is not just the reverse of her public identity as Richard's wife. Instead, her private self is where she oscillates between individuality and conformity. Hence, Clarissa's inner consciousness is defined by the dialectical movement between her private and public persuasions.

I must mention, though, that I am not the first to relate the private and the public in terms of a dialectic. That achievement belongs to Anna Snaith, who explains how in *Mrs Dalloway*: "Woolf portrays London not as a monolithic, fixed realm, but as the meeting of empirical fact and private interpretation and response. There is a continuous dialectic between inner and outer".[10] In a later monograph, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, Snaith further describes this dialectic as a "narrative negotiation" in which "there is no right answer. [*Mrs Dalloway*] is anti-authoritarian because all narratives are valid. There is no hierarchy of meaning".[11] Woolf, while moving in and out of the consciousness of her characters, does not commit herself to either a public voice ("Joyce's omniscient narrator" in the last section of "Wandering Rocks") or a private form of discourse ("direct interior monologue"),[12] and instead gives each an equal opportunity to emerge, therefore preventing the domination of one over another. Neither is prioritised, so there is "no competition for the right answer, because it is non-existent".[13] A public narrator communicates Clarissa's "marginalization" from the "various systems of authority" (such as patriarchy, imperialism, and religion) that oppress her, but this is simultaneously balanced out by her inner thoughts which display an indifference toward these selfsame systems.[14]

But Snaith's application of the word "dialectic" will be distinctly separate from mine. She uses "dialectic" to emphasise Woolf's lack of commitment to either Clarissa's private voice or the anonymous narrator's, which conveys her external appearance and situation to the reader. To Snaith, Woolf moves back and forth between the two so that one is not privileged over the other, thus leading to a narrative multiplicity where a single voice is never given full authority.[15] Put another way, Snaith suggests that Clarissa, who says of herself that she is either "this" or "that" (*MD*, 11), should also be seen as this *and* that. Clarissa should be allowed to be "two things at once" instead of having to choose one side of herself over the other.[16] But I would like to use "dialectic" to show that the movement between private and public is not an indication that the two exist on equal ground. Rather, there is a continuous competition between them within Clarissa. Her inner life is charged with a conflict between her impulse to perform her public duties as a member of the political elite and her desire to escape them. The relationship between the two sides is pugnacious and always in an imbalance; it is not, as Snaith claims, evenly weighted on both ends.

I also extend this line of analysis to illustrate that Woolf leaves the reader without a resolution to this competitive dialectic between private and public. The oscillation between the two will be shown to be indefinite, so there is no forward progress toward

[10]Snaith, "Virginia Woolf's Narrative Strategies", 138.
[11]Snaith, *Virginia Woolf*, 76.
[12]Ibid., 75.
[13]Ibid.
[14]See ibid., 72–6.
[15]Ibid., 76.
[16]Ibid., 6.

a pre-determined endpoint like in a Hegelian dialectic. The more appropriate term for this essay, then, would be negative dialectic, which Theodor Adorno formulated precisely to counter the affirmative aim of Hegel.[17] Woolf herself insisted on recording "the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall […] however disconnected and incoherent in appearance" to avoid giving her characters "an air of probability".[18] Therefore, it would be odd to think that Woolf set out to move Clarissa toward a final synthesis that would provide the reader with a conclusive revelation about our female protagonist, which would further press the character into the service of a predictable storyline (a "powerful and unscrupulous tyrant").[19] To view Clarissa through a negative instead of a positive dialectics is therefore in keeping with Woolf's authorial intentions. Rather than being used to fulfil a pre-given, foreseeable aim, Clarissa's subjective consciousness, marked by the indefinite conflict between her private and public coercions, is allowed to exist as is, and Woolf, as critics like DiBattista have highlighted, thus represents her interiority in its full "aberration" and "complexity" as an "uncircumscribed spirit".[20]

Before I move on to specific areas of text in the novel, however, I want to make clear that, for the purposes of this paper, I will be contextualising the words "private" and "public" in terms of Woolf's feminist beliefs. I do this because it is important to acknowledge not only the literary forms but also the sociological currents of *Mrs Dalloway*, especially since it is one of those "landmark contributions" to the field of "modern feminist literary criticism".[21] Woolf herself even admitted about the book: "I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense".[22] Hence, it is the social contents of the novel, rather than its poetics, that is of primary interest in this article.

Woolf's metaphor of the room is particularly helpful in explaining what I mean by "private" and "public" in the forthcoming close readings. She first used it in *A Room of One's Own* and talked about it further in her "Professions for Women" address, in which she urged her female audience to see how "for the first time in history" women had finally "won rooms of [their] own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men".[23] The "Angel in the House" had been killed: the Victorian ideal of the "utterly unselfish" and "pure" woman, perfectly sympathetic to the needs of her husband and family, had begun to break down.[24] But Woolf warned that these rooms still needed to be "furnished […] decorated [and …] shared".[25] Just because women now had their own private spaces where they could more intensely reflect on their individual ambitions did not mean that they were completely free from the "masculine complex" that still surrounded and tried to infiltrate these rooms ("not so much that she shall be inferior as that

[17]In his own words, Adorno found issue with the achievement of "something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of a 'negation of negation'". Adorno, xix. Ross Wilson elaborates about negative dialectics: "Adorno objects to positive dialectics on the grounds that if dialectics is pressed into the service of some positive aim, then its focus on the material with which it deals is weakened. Dialectics with a positive aim of this kind becomes like any other portable method with which to achieve an end that has been fixed upon in advance". Wilson, 64.
[18]Woolf, *Common Reader*, 153–5.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Ibid., 154.
[21]Goldman, 66.
[22]Woolf, *Writer's Diary*, 57.
[23]Woolf, *Death of the Moth*, 242.
[24]Ibid., 237.
[25]Ibid., 242.

he shall be superior").[26] Woolf's views, moreover, were not isolated. They were shared by other influential feminists of the same time, such as Winifred Holtby, who, while able to express her interior thoughts as a journalist, would question whether her readers were taking her writing seriously or summarily dismissing its contents as "minor matters" because she was a female author.[27]

It is therefore my intention to show that Clarissa's subjective experience is best read through Woolf's room metaphor. While her inner consciousness is at times able to provide her an escape from the Victorian ideologies of gender, Clarissa's interiority is equally filled with concerns over whether she is adequately fulfilling her public obligations as Richard's wife. Clarissa's mental space – the room of her own – is thus the competitive terrain over which her Victorian and anti-Victorian ("public" and "private") sides clash.

The notion of a dialectic within Clarissa begins at the onset of the novel. It is when she reaches the Park Gates along Piccadilly that she "had a perpetual sense […] of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (*MD*, 11). Clarissa momentarily forgets that she is in the bustling streets of London, but it is at this instant, when she has lost touch with the physical senses that situate her in the external world, that she is actually most in touch with herself: she breaks away from the "oddest sense" of feeling "invisible; unseen; unknown" (*MD*, 14). No longer is she worried about the need to present herself as a "perfect hostess" (*MD*, 9). Her mind is free of the codes of the "public-spirited" governing class around which she must determine her every perceptible move, whether by "always quoting Richard" or by organising massive "parties […] all for him" (*MD*, 116). What she now sees in herself is not a prim and laminated Victorian actor but a weak, aging body. It is a relief, Clarissa muses, to think for herself, rather than doing things "to make people think this or that" about her (*MD*, 14). Here, Clarissa's private side has entirely consumed her interior space.

In the next sentence, however, she violently swings to the other side of her dialectic, succumbing to the governing-class standards that she had just rejected: "Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently! She would have been in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes" (*MD*, 14). The idealised aristocratic beauty of Lady Bexborough overwhelms Clarissa and fills her with a sharp and immediate self-loathing for her own aesthetic inadequacies, namely her "narrow pea-stick figure" and "ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's" (*MD*, 14). In an attempt to revive her self-esteem, Clarissa reminds herself of Miss Kilman ("this brutal monster!") and "how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted" (*MD*, 16–17). The opening scene is finally rounded out with Clarissa's visit to Miss Pym's flower shop, where she indulges in "this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her […] a wave which she let flow over her" (*MD*, 19). Recalling the likeness of Lady Bexborough is all

[26]Woolf continues: "Even Lady Bessborough, I remembered, with all her passion for politics, must humbly bow herself and write to Lord Granville: '[…] notwithstanding all my violence in politicks and talking so much on that subject, I perfectly agree with you that no woman has any business to meddle with that or any other serious business, farther than giving her opinion (if she is ask'd)'". Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 83–4.
[27]Spender, 100.

that it takes for Clarissa to become preoccupied with the prescriptions of the traditional British elite, whether those concerning beauty, wealth, or the decoration for a party, all three of which converge to project a proper bourgeois picture of her. The fears over her old age and increased infirmity have been expelled out of her interior consciousness by the governing class, which instead pushes Clarissa to believe that questions about her death can wait. With chronic procrastination and the continuously mandated worship of the twin goddesses "proportion" and "conversion" (*MD*, 151), these qualms can soon be forgotten altogether.

It is because of this sudden contrast from one moment (at the Park Gates) to the next (when the perfect image of Lady Bexborough enters into her mind) that early reviews of *Mrs Dalloway* are often conflictive. Blanche Gelfant, for instance, observes how Clarissa's "principal and coherent action […] is to expose and condemn the various forms of conversion. Her basic opposition to the coercive will is an absolute quality of her personality".[28] But we also have critics on the other hand, such as Mary Kelsey, who contend that "Mrs. Dalloway is the very type of femininity".[29] She has a compulsive habit of collecting herself into something public ("pointed; dartlike; definite") for all the world to see, and her "faults, jealousies, vanities, [and] suspicions" ("all the other sides of her") are kept hidden (*MD*, 55). She is an entire "book […] of which others see only the title".[30]

These kinds of inconsistent readings were what inspired Zwerdling to submit the idea of a private/public split – that Clarissa is "made up of distinct layers that do not interpenetrate […] that the governing-class spirit has increasingly come to dominate her life, [but that] the stream of her thoughts and feelings shows us that the various strata of her personality are all intact" – so as to allow the private and the public to exist at once within her.[31] But I am not so sure that Woolf makes this clear at the beginning of the novel, when we are first introduced to the two sides of our titular character. Rather than existing simultaneously, the private and the public take turns, materialising one at a time within Clarissa, because each competes for full control over her internal consciousness.

The private/public split tries to find a "wholeness" in Clarissa and thus views her as an ontologically complete character who can be equally divided into two parts. But Woolf herself worked to avoid this wholeness and instead desired to articulate her characters through their "ruins and splinters" and "gleams and flashes" (what she called these "things in particular").[32] Rather than starting with coherent and platitudinous generalisations that her characters must adhere to (where "the funny man was always funny, the good woman always good"[33]), bits and pieces of their subjective lives sputter and litter the pages of her work at random. It is when picking up these fragments and putting them together that we get not one consistent but two very different pictures of Clarissa that clash with one another.

Even Snaith – whose dialectic (or, "negotiation") between private and public was meant to take issue with the earlier critics who had misread *Mrs Dalloway* as a "search

[28]Gelfant, 232.
[29]Kelsey, 428.
[30]Ibid., 437.
[31]Zwerdling, 79.
[32]Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", 118–9.
[33]Ibid., 117.

for unity" – is unable to adequately capture the competitive relationship between the two because her commentary is focused mainly on the novel's literary techniques.[34] Take, as an example, the scene with the motor car. Snaith insists that the use of free indirect discourse "allows Woolf the flexibility to move smoothly and rapidly" between Clarissa's "private thoughts" (through which she determines that the unnamed dignitary seated within the vehicle might be the Queen or the Prince of Wales, one of those important guests she had seen "that night in Buckingham Palace" [*MD*, 25]) and the public narrator's that "describes and presents" an exterior view of her to us (how Clarissa "stiffened a little" to appear large and distinguished like a hostess standing "at the top of her stairs" as she comes within the sight of the car's passengers [*MD*, 25]).[35] But Snaith's definition of the terms "private" and "public" is entirely formal. She is most concerned with the poetics of the novel and how Woolf uses free indirect discourse to continuously move between internal (what is thought) and external (what is shown) points of view, thereby permitting each to emerge equally and disallowing one from overwhelming the other.

However, I pay closer attention to the hermeneutics, and so I recontextualize "private" and "public" in terms of the novel's social contents (what is said) rather than its literary forms (how it is said) in order to show that the relationship between her public (Victorian) and private (anti-Victorian) sides is marked not by coexistence but by the need to dominate each other.

Returning to the car scene with my definitions of these two terms in mind, it might be said that, though there are two different narrative voices (one that comes from *within* Clarissa and another that is based on what can be seen from her *outside*) as Snaith contends, the contents of their messages are actually quite similar because they are both expressions of Clarissa's public life as Richard's wife, as the "perfect hostess" defined by her resolute attachment to Victorian womanhood (*MD*, 9). In fact, the description of her conveyed by the narrator is an exact translation of her private thoughts from interiority to exteriority: from when she believes that the passenger in the vehicle must be a person of high rank to when she perches herself upright so that she appears dignified and proper in the view of the distinguished rider. In this particular scene, then, Clarissa's personal reflections and the narrator's account of how she looks from the outside are consistent with each other because they both communicate, albeit through different narrative voices, that moment when the impulse to assume her public identity has taken over her mental space.

But, like at the opening of the novel, Clarissa does not stay too long with one side before sharply turning to the other. No sooner had the scene with the motor car ended than she begins to feel "shrivelled, aged, breastless" in the next scene we see her (*MD*, 45). She had just been shocked to hear from her maid that Lady Bruton had not invited her to lunch that afternoon, and a profound sense of social exclusion begins to fill her: she describes herself as a "nun withdrawing" or a "child exploring a tower" (*MD*, 45). Alone in her room, her bed looks to be getting "narrower and narrower" into the proportions of a coffin, and her candle is "half burnt" (*MD*, 45–46), symbolising a life that is approaching its end. In what closely mirrors her subjective experience at the Park Gates, it is when Clarissa becomes temporarily detached from the traditional British

[34]Snaith, *Virginia Woolf*, 70.
[35]Ibid., 64, 75.

elite (in this case, through the absence of an invitation to a lunch party) that she is able to perceive the "emptiness" that lies behind her Victorian performances of gender (*MD*, 45). There can be no hiding that her "body and brain" are set to one day permanently "fail" (*MD*, 45), and she acknowledges this private truth instead of glibly covering it with the protective coating of a socially coerced public identity.

The dialectic between private and public comes to a climax when the news of Septimus Smith's suicide reaches Clarissa's party. The arrival of the message forces Clarissa away from where she had been entertaining her guests and into an empty little room, wherein she realises that Septimus had successfully preserved "a thing" that "mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life" (*MD*, 280). The death of the shell-shocked Great War veteran was "defiance" (*MD*, 280).[36] It was "an attempt to communicate" how there was this mattering "thing" that had been perverted by the "corruption, lies, [and] chatter" of her governing class (*MD*, 280). Clarissa feels that Septimus's suicide was somehow "her disaster" too, and she is moved to admit her disgrace as one who had "schemed" and "pilfered" to chase "success, Lady Bexborough and the rest of it" (*MD*, 282).

Yet, Clarissa is unable to resist the urge to return to her party any longer than she already has. Much like in the earlier scenes, Clarissa's move from one side of herself to the other is almost immediate. In this case, only a conjunction separates the two: "She felt glad that [Septimus] had done it; thrown it away […] He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. *But* she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room" (*MD*, 283–84, italics mine). She once again finds her place among the "people of importance" (the "politicians […] great merchants, great manufacturers") and resumes the dutiful execution of her responsibilities as the organiser of that night's *soirée* (*MD*, 284).

Though we hear no more from Clarissa after this point, this does not necessarily mean that the dialectic between private and public has ended. It is actually at the conclusion of the novel with Peter Walsh, Clarissa's former lover, that the importance of describing the dialectic as negative is revealed: "What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? [Peter] thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (*MD*, 296). Clarissa suddenly comes into the sharp view of Peter, but the reader is left to wonder about what will happen next. Peter is filled, in part, with excitement, but does that mean he will approach her? Or will his feeling of terror prevail and give him cold feet?

Before going any further, it is worth pausing here to point out that Peter might be said to be in a dialectic of his own throughout the novel. When he gets a letter from Clarissa saying that it was "heavenly" seeing him earlier in the day, he is pleasantly surprised, exclaiming to himself: "Oh it was a letter from her! This blue envelope; that was her hand. And he would have to read it" (*MD*, 234). He immediately qualifies his enthusiasm, however, by telling himself that it would require "the devil of an effort" to go through her letter (*MD*, 234). But it is upon reading that very letter that he decides to attend Clarissa's party, only to then swiftly proclaim that it was just to "ask Richard what they were doing in India – the conservative duffers" rather than to see Clarissa (*MD*, 244).

[36]For more on Septimus's suicide and his emancipation from the "proportion" and "conversion" of the psychiatrists Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw (*MD*, 151), see, e.g., Hite, *Woolf's Ambiguities*, 26 and Samuelson, 76.

What is most consistent about Peter is his very inconsistency toward Clarissa. So the reader is still left to wonder: what will Peter do next when he sees Clarissa at the end of the novel? That this question resists resolution suggests that Clarissa's dialectic does, too. Will Peter walk toward her and once again fill her with "heavenly" delight, temporarily allowing Clarissa to forget about her marital obligations to Richard, one of those "perfect gentlemen" who "stifle her soul" (*MD*, 114)? Or will he distance himself and let Clarissa continue her duties as a hostess? Clarissa's dialectic, linked indirectly to Peter's in the final scene, is thus properly negative, for it refuses the reader any closure. Woolf ends the novel by leaving its loose ends untied, and she confesses of this scheme herself: "People […] say I can't create […] characters that survive. My answer is – but I leave that to the Nation".[37]

Now, the interpretation of the final scene as one that leaves the novel with a distinct tone of undecidability is not a new one. Christine Darrohn, for instance, explicitly stresses how "we do not know whether to admire or abhor Clarissa" as we finish the book.[38] And Molly Hite, more generally, writes that *Mrs Dalloway* is "remarkable for contradictory, absent, or muted tonal cues", which in turn leads to a work steeped with deliberately unresolved "open questions" about its characters.[39] Yet, like Snaith's, accounts such as these concentrate mostly on the novel's poetics, whether its tonal cues, many types of narrative discourse, or inconsistent system of nomenclature.[40] Much can be learned about Clarissa not just by *how* she is expressed through literary form, however, but by *what* exactly she expresses and thus tells us about her social condition.

Jean Guiguet, one of the first critics to foreground the "poetic vision" of Woolf, insists that "the social elements in Virginia Woolf's work […] are only on the surface, merely a veneer".[41] But by viewing the social contents of Clarissa's subjective experience through a negative dialectics, I hope to have suggested the opposite. Woolf was committed to expressing her progressive feminist beliefs not just in her essays and speeches but also in her fictional corpus. And the negative dialectics within Clarissa between her competing private (anti-Victorian) and public (Victorian) sides reflects how Woolf more generally felt about interwar women at that time: as in an indefinite (and hence not easily definable) state of oscillation between gaining full ownership of the newly won rooms of their own and forfeiting them in favour of a return to traditional Victorian mores.

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[37]Woolf, *Writer's Diary*, 57.
[38]E.g. Darrohn, 116, quoted in Wachman, 131.
[39]E.g. Hite, "Tonal Cues and Uncertain Values", 251–2.
[40]See Ibid., 249; Mezei, 67; Herman, 244–5; Schulz, 95.
[41]Guiguet, 46, 71–2.

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