

Mackenzie McAnear

8 December 2021

Annotation and Analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*

"Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" is the famous first sentence of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which, up till now, was just a famous opener to a famous book (Woolf 3). Annalee Edmondson's article "Narrativizing Characters in Mrs. Dalloway" was published in 2012 in the *Journal of Modern Literature*. Edmondson's article starts with this famous sentence, then follows it up with the question, "[d]oes Mrs. Dalloway speak these words, whether silently or aloud, to herself or to another present on the scene, most likely Lucy? Or is this instance of free indirect discourse an 'unspeakable sentence,' one that does not imply that an original speaker uttered these words, whether silently or aloud" (17)? This article expands on a very minute subject buried deep in *Mrs. Dalloway's* scholarship. Edmondson answers her opening questions in her final paragraph on page 32, stating, "In the final analysis, Clarissa's interiority has not been completely revealed to us. On the contrary, she continues to elude us even as her very presence provokes our affective narrativizations."

Edmondson lays out her argument concerning the narrativization of Virginia Woolf's character in sections and incorporates different scholarly articles and primary texts from Woolf herself. Edmondson starts by introducing the inward and outward portrayal of Clarissa Dalloway in the introduction before narrowing the discussion with her first section titled, "Woolf's 'Tunneling Process'; or, Narrativizing Clarissa," where she breaks apart how Woolf goes about having Clarissa narrate the things and events around her by using both "internal *and* external perspectives" (21). This section introduces the reader to Virginia Woolf's diary entries starting

with January 26, 1920, in which she writes that "she has 'arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel'" (Edmondson 22). The next section is titled "From 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street' to Mrs. Dalloway," in which Edmondson discusses how Virginia Woolf transformed her short story of *Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street* into a full-on novel, noting the changes that Woolf made along the way (23). In the third section, "Social Minds in Action in *Mrs. Dalloway*," Edmondson narrows in on the physiological narrative of the novel and its characters (25). Edmondson introduces the terms "character-reading" and "the study of 'character in itself,'" both of which are terms that Woolf uses to describe the "physiological response" in *Mrs. Dalloway* (25). However, Edmondson disagrees with Woolf and introduces her own term for Woolf's process, which she calls "narrativization" (25). In this section, she introduces the title of her article and her reasoning behind it. The last section, "Mrs. Dalloway's Affective Narrativizations," focuses on Clarissa Dalloway and her physical and psychological responses to specific situations, such as Septimus's death (Edmondson 30).

Edmondson dedicates a substantial section of her article to exploring her primary material, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the novel's source material, "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street." This use seems heavy-handed as a critique, but Edmondson uses it so that it would be helpful if the reader needed to look at the article more critically. She uses this section to explain Woolf's transition from her short story to her novel and how the narrativization changed in that process. She employs various strategies to examine these texts, such as traditional plot exposition, substantially sized block quotes from the text themselves, and a smattering of regularly sized quotes. Her use of block quotes concerns the main characters, Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh, and Septimus Warren Smith's actions and how Clarissa and Peter react to them.

Edmondson mentions a few secondary characters, such as Richard Dalloway and Sally Seton.

She uses a quote Peter says of Clarissa on page 132 of *Mrs. Dalloway* (Edmondson 29).

Edmondson uses this quote to dissect how the different characters think and explains how some think very similarly, to the point that one character might be trying to observe themselves through someone else's point of view.

After *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," Edmondson relies pretty heavily on *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1925-1928*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie specifically to show how Woolf's narrative choices in the two texts were made and to further clarify them. Edmondson quotes from Woolf, "Kitty fell, very mysteriously, over some bannisters," which led to the creation of Septimus's suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway* where "Woolf decided to create a 'double' for Clarissa, whose act of suicide, in place of [Woolf's friends], would deeply affect [Clarissa] and also provoke [Woolf's] affective narrativizations" (24). This is the second most used source after *Mrs. Dalloway* and lends itself very well to the conversation, filling in gaps and answering questions that Edmondson brings up.

After her primary sources and Woolf's diary, Edmondson relies on Alan Palmer's "The Construction of Fictional Minds" and *Social Minds in the Novel*. Edmondson uses both of Palmer's works for their narrative references and uses this for her narrative argument of the novel. Palmer is referenced six times, twice via "The Construction" and four times by *Social Minds*. His article is what Edmondson uses to introduce the idea of Clarissa having a public and private self, saying that "most narrative theorists have 'tend[ed]' to give the impression that characters' minds really only consist of a private, passive flow or thought'" (Edmondson 19).

Most of the terms that are brought up in this article come from *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* or Palmer's works.

Edmondson has an active bibliography that involves dozens of other sources; however, most are only referred to once or twice. E. M Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Alex Zwerdling's *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* are used four times each. Zwerdling is used for his views on the novel's opening line and how that sets the groundwork for the rest of the novel. Forster is used as a counter to Woolf's new novel idea, which Forster is referred to as Woolf's "contemporary" (Edmondson 20). Michael North is used twice as the only critic that Edmondson expands upon with North's book *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* by adding her ideas to the conversation he started and giving quotes from *Mrs. Dalloway* to support not only her argument but the argument and information brought up by North. She also uses Nathalia Wright's article "Mrs. Dalloway: A Study in Composition" twice in the section "From 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street' to Mrs. Dalloway" for her statistical view of the novel, citing the number of appearances of both Peter and Clarissa in the novel then citing how many hours of the day they appear, Peter appearing in ten hours and Clarissa in eleven (Edmondson 25). Charles G. Hoffmann's article "From Short Story to Novel: The Manuscript Revisions of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" is used once in the introduction, and it is all about the transition of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" to *Mrs. Dalloway* the novel; yet, Edmondson only quotes him once on page 22.

Edmondson's reliance on *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* is heavy. The longest she goes between references to either source is, at most, three paragraphs. There are many sources that she only used one and tended to overlook as sources that could have given her

added information and been more useful toward her argument than she let them be. Many of her sources are not even used in her article; the majority are only referenced in the notes following the conclusion of her article. While this is not necessarily a problem, Edmondson could have used these sources in her article and notes. Most readers look past the footnotes and want to focus on the information in the article instead. That is how articles work: the essential information is in the body of the text, not the footnotes, right? However, they would be wrong; this is where Edmondson slips up.

On the one hand, using footnotes could be incredibly overwhelming or intimidating to undergraduates or otherwise unprepared readers who are not accustomed to reading articles with massive footnotes. Just like when readers come across a prominent block quote, their first thought is to skip it and move on to the vital information; footnotes can be intimidating, and a reader might need help figuring out what to do with them. For an undergraduate or unprepared reader, the footnotes that Edmondson has put together in this article can come across as overwhelming and even raise the question: if the footnotes were so important, then why were they not in the article proper, but instead relegated to a footnote. On the other hand, Edmondson's extensive footnotes are helpful for the following reasons: they give further background information on Woolf that is not necessarily important for her argument but could be helpful in other ways to her readers. Instead of clogging up her article with many definitions, she puts them at the end and notes other pieces of work pertinent to someone studying Woolf or *Mrs. Dalloway*. The inclusion of the footnotes is a mixed bag; on the one hand, it can be off-putting to readers who are not used to dealing with this level of footnotes, but for a scholar of *Mrs.*

*Dalloway* or Virginia Woolf, what Edmondson has done is provided a verity of useful information as well as bibliographical information that they should find especially useful.

For all the berating of *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, this source is a true gem that Edmondson takes full advantage of, and its inclusion sheds more light on Woolf's transition from short story to novel and how she chose to expand on the internal narrative of her characters. It is because of the diary that the reader gets introduced to Woolf's "tunneling process" (Edmondson 18). Edmondson's use of the novel is excellent. Whenever she quotes from *Mrs. Dalloway*, she does not rely on the quote to do the heavy lifting because she also adds her commentary and italicized words and phrases that she deems essential to her argument. The use of sections gives her argument a well-established transition from sub-topic to sub-topic.

In her analysis and argument of Woolf's narrativizing characters, Annalee Edmondson successfully explains Woolf's approach when turning her short story into a novel and how she changed and enhanced her use of narrative throughout the process. Edmondson's use of *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* identifies the remaining links between *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," as well as the links that Woolf uses from her own life. Housing over fifty sources, this article grabs onto many important points from Edmondson's sources to boost her argument and help explain themes and choices made in the novel, making *Mrs. Dalloway* better to understand and more beneficial to the narrative conversation. Edmondson's article includes more than just a surface argument of the text.

Works Cited

- Edmondson, Annalee. "Narrativizing Characters in Mrs. Dalloway." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 17–36. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2979/jmodelite.36.1.17.