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The Pieces That Make the Self: Finding Balance Between Social and Individual Identity in Frances Burney's Evelina and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway

Jenna King

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Dr. Aaron Housholder

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Prologue: Humanity's Search for Self

In his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias writes that the maxim "know thyself" was inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi by its sages (Pausanias 10.24.1). This command resonates through the works of great thinkers, scientific and artistic alike, their creations and discoveries steps toward obeying it. In many ways, the desire to comprehend ourselves is at the heart of human existence, humanity's attempts at self-discovery easily tracked through the history of art, literature, and even technology. The search for the answer to the question "Who am I?" is further complicated by the fact that the customs of the social circles an individual participates in inevitably influence who they become. In order to follow the command "know thyself," a person must first know the world which has shaped them to be who they are—only once that is understood can they look beyond these pieces and find their "self," who they are as an individual. As this knowledge of self grows, individuals are able to better understand how that world influenced them, leading to a continuous cycle of gaining ever-deepening understanding.

Due to the complexity of this process, the relationship between the world and the individual is often central in literature about identity. In Frances Burney's novel *Evelina*, for example, the titular character is shown in the context of her place in the world of 18th-century England, which offers "a fund inexhaustible for Conversation, observations, and probably Incidents" (qtd. in Jones xiii) for her to experience. Furthermore, Evelina's social obligations influence both the actions she takes and the way she depicts them in her letters. As a result, an understanding of her identity requires readers to determine which parts of the person she appears to be are inherent pieces of her nature and which parts result from social expectations placed on her.

As in *Evelina*, the world depicted in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* has considerable impact on its main character. Throughout the novel, Clarissa Dalloway attempts to detangle her individual identity from her social position, her own inability to entirely separate the two further complicating readers' understandings of her identity. Clarissa's role as hostess of her party offers a middle ground between social role and individual identity: though hosting is a responsibility caused by her class, it is also something Clarissa genuinely enjoys. However, her struggle to balance the two, not letting one side outweigh the other, is also at the heart of her internal conflict.

Evelina's and Clarissa's journeys are further united by the fact that both women live in cultural moments when a person's worth and sense of self are defined by their position in relation to those around them—their individual identities are meant to align with their social roles. At the outset of the novels, however, neither woman experiences such alignment. David Oakleaf describes Evelina's individual and social identities as "rival selves whose divergence generates great cultural and personal anxiety" (344)—a description which could be applied just as easily to Clarissa. Though this progressive act of first uncovering and then bringing forward individual identities which are not in line with social expectations drives the majority of the internal—and some of the external—conflict of the two novels, it is also the discovery of balance between these seemingly disparate social and individual identities that ultimately allows each of the women to take control of the direction of their lives.

Through the stories they told in *Evelina* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Frances Burney and Virginia Woolf depicted the balance between social responsibilities and personal identity which women in their own societies sought to obtain. Neither book entirely answers the question of how to

discover identity, nor does it seek to. Rather, each of the two books shows one piece of the journey of one woman to find who she is.

Story One: The Outside World, and the Development of Social Identity

The first step Burney and Woolf take toward the discovery of identity is giving Evelina and Clarissa an understanding of their place in the worlds which surround them, examining both the positive and negative aspects of their social roles. The women's "social identities" have a degree of control over their actions: what is and is not deemed socially correct dictates their actions. Having an understanding of Evelina's and Clarissa's social identities is, therefore, crucial to an examination of the process of identity formation the two women undergo in their respective novels.

Throughout *Evelina*, Burney makes use of the epistolary form to depict Evelina's relationship with her own identity. By nature, the form reveals the internal: letters place the thoughts and emotions of their authors in full view of their recipients, and readers are therefore often presented with the private thoughts of characters upfront rather than having to attempt to parse together the main character's feelings using details scattered throughout the writing. Because of this, the epistolary form can largely be relied upon to accurately communicate emotions. Joanne Cutting-Gray writes that, while "[Evelina's] letters are not a form for imperatives, statements of facts, or assertions," the mode "opens channels for her feelings" (52). Supposing that the recipients of the letters are trusted by their author, the epistolary form can reveal deep truths about the characters authoring the letters. Throughout most of *Evelina*, Reverend Villars provides a trustworthy outlet into which Evelina may pour her observations of and concerns about the new world; when he cannot serve in this capacity due to Evelina's desire to withhold Lord Orville's supposed wrongdoing, the letters are instead addressed to Miss

Mirvan. This perspective becomes important as Evelina begins to experience London and the practices of its inhabitants. Her letters to Villars reveal what she does not tell her companions: how overwhelming it is and how the grandeur makes her feel, who she finds to be of good character and who she wishes to avoid. Evelina, naturally quite shy and eager to avoid the spotlight, does not readily reveal her thoughts in conversation; these insights are therefore crucial to a reader's ability to form a complete picture of her identity.

Among the most revealing aspects of Evelina's letters are her signatures, through which her relationship with her own identity may be traced, offering insight into the continuous struggle she has to feel that she truly belongs anywhere. Each signature, Samuel Choi points out, "represents a conscious self-positioning individually considered and specifically framed within local issues, contingencies, and conventions" (259). They are, in other words, a means by which she may clearly communicate her own feelings about the division between herself and the world around her, a division resulting both from the many social rules of London in the midst of the season and from her estranged relationship with her father.

The internal conflict caused by Evelina's uncertainty about her identity is apparent from the signature of her first letter, which reads: "Your / EVELINA— —— / I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*, and what other name may I claim?" (Burney 26). The answer to this question, found in a letter from Reverend Villars to Lady Howard, is both frank and heartbreaking: that her father is someone "whose name she is forbidden to claim; entitled as she is to lawfully inherit his fortune and estate" (20). Evelina *has* no name to claim, apart from that which was given to her, Anville, a name which she feels does not truly reflect who she is, and which says nothing a name is meant to say. Upon arriving in London and being exposed to the height of the social season, however, it

is this name which defines Evelina's social identity, the Mirvans introducing her as "Miss Anville."

Evelina continues not to use "Anville" in her letters to Reverend Villars, however. Rather than showcasing her new social identity, Evelina continues her signatures to identify herself by the lack of connection with the wider world, though less explicitly than in her first signature. Shortly after attending her first parties, Evelina acknowledges her stumbling attempts to participate in the practices of the world by signing herself to Reverend Villars "Your dutiful and affectionate, though unpolished, Evelina" (29). This signature emphasizes the social blunders about which the body of the letter goes into detail, leaving the reader with Evelina's embarrassed recognition of the social shortcomings which result from her ignorance. Furthermore, it demonstrates the sense of loss she feels as an individual in the midst of a group with so many rules and expected politenesses which remain unknown to her. These difficulties are not merely obstacles Burney invented to act as plot-driving roadblocks, but rather, as Beatriz Palomo states, "the unavoidable result of the strict prescriptive behaviour set up for women in Burney's own lifetime" (445). The many rules of 18th-century London, which lead Evelina to declare that "there ought to be a book, or all the laws and customs *à-la mode*, presented to all young people, upon their introduction into company" (Burney 84), make her lack of social position still more apparent: it is obvious that she has not been taught how to get by in polite society.

The uncertainties expressed in these signatures continue to plague Evelina through all of the first and parts of the second of the novel's volumes. Beyond Evelina's simple lack of identification with the name Anville, that name carries no social weight, leaving Evelina to rely entirely on her companions' goodwill and sponsorship to participate in social activities. She acknowledges that "Miss Anville" is no one of note, and "should be alike unknown in the most

conspicuous or most private part of the house" (Burney 27). She is, in the words of Mr. Lovel, "a person who is nobody" (37)—or, in the greater detail given by Sir Clement Willoughby near the novel's end, "a girl of obscure birth, whose only dowry is her beauty, and who is evidently in a state of dependency" (347). In spite of this inconspicuousness, Evelina remains concerned with how her ignorance of social customs will make her appear, confiding in Reverend Villars a fear of being "so much *above* [her]self as these seeming airs ma[k]e [her] appear" (33). Evelina understands that, with no name to fall back on, the impressions she makes on those around her are of the utmost importance to how they perceive who she is.

This places Evelina in a situation which is not only uncomfortable, but also dangerous: Helen Thompson notes that her beauty, without the protection of a family name, "solicit[s] a brand of male notice foreign to the order of political economy" (161)—the usual "order of political economy" being the fact that a family name would "direct male attention to its proper (male) object" (161). Lacking a father or brother to serve this role, Evelina receives male notice directly, most offensively through Sir Clement Willoughby's continual attempts to press himself upon her—during a carriage ride, in the dark walks, and even while she is in the supposed safety of the Mirvans' house. Lord Merton's licentiousness, though less artful than Sir Clement's actions, is equally unwelcome and impossible for Evelina to avoid: with no defenders apart from friends who cannot always be present, both men are free to act without fear of retribution. The lack of protection Evelina's social identity offers her thus requires her to pay greater attention to both the public words and private intentions of those she interacts with in order to preserve what little social capital she does have.

The disparity between this social identity which is placed on Evelina and her inherent individual identity further complicates her search for self. The manners which Evelina has been

taught and the gentility of her nature make her comfortable in the world she occupies as a guest of the Mirvans. According to the rulings of that society, however, she belongs instead to the comparatively coarse world of the commoner's London which her cousins and grandmother occupy. Thompson describes Evelina's dichotomous existence by noting that she "is both the negative of Madame Duval and, [being] her granddaughter, made of the same stuff as she" (152). So long as Evelina is not owned by her father, her social and individual identities are constantly in conflict; the self she is coming to know vastly differs from what is expected of the Miss Anville who is cousin to the Branghtons and granddaughter of Madame Duval.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the lack of ease which characterizes Evelina's social interactions throughout much of the novel results in part from the teachings of Villars himself: his early letters, as Susan Greenfield points out, reveal a desire for "Evelina to develop into an ideal domestic woman," as well as a belief that "she must stay home with him and be humble and private for this to happen" (307), a desire evidenced by his deep discomfort with the idea of sending Evelina away beyond his immediate influence—and outside the range of his control. Greenfield goes on to point out that, "as much as the narrative depends upon Evelina's being separated from her natural father, it equally depends on her dissociation from the domestic containment that her surrogate father and his home at Berry Hill represent" (308). While under Villars' protection, Evelina is free from situations which challenge her view of her identity—though uncomfortable, it is the state of confusion and displacement resulting from Evelina's time away from Villars which opens the door for her to grow into something more than "Miss Anville."

Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness writing in *Mrs. Dalloway* serves a purpose similar to Burney's use of the epistolary: while the reliability of the facts communicated by the

narration is uncertain, readers may depend on the fact that the novel's narrators truly believe and feel everything they express, because everything that is said comes from their unfiltered streams of thought. As a result, characters' perceptions of themselves and of one another can help shape the image of their identities which their actions begin to form. An image of Clarissa Dalloway begins to form from the novel's opening declaration that "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway 3*): she appears to be a driven woman, ready to take control of situations. Though some of Clarissa's other actions—her choice to repair her own dress rather than handing it off to someone else, for example—support this understanding, Clarissa's view of herself soon contradicts the idea that it is the whole picture. In spite of her role in the world and in the lives of those around her, Clarissa struggles to find her sense of self, feeling instead that she is "invisible; unseen; unknown" (10). Clarissa's sense of self has been lost beneath the weight of the social roles she plays: she can see herself only as "Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (10). Unable to see past this role, Clarissa grounds her identity in what she calls "the things she like[s]; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short" (43). Though Clarissa means for this statement to encapsulate "her self," it only further emphasizes the prominence of her social identity. Shannon Forbes describes the effects of this attempt at self-definition as "emptiness, a lack of fulfillment, and ironically, virtually no self at all" (39), Clarissa's thoughts attempting to claim meaning for herself from every outlet apart from her internal being. In attempting to define her individual identity, Clarissa only reinforces the restrictions resulting from her role as "Mrs. Dalloway."

Throughout the novel, it becomes apparent that the two—Clarissa and Mrs. Dalloway—are separate entities, or at least, they have become that. Peter Walsh, who she had once loved, reflects on how her marriage has affected her, thinking it a pity that "with twice [Richard's] wits,

she had to see things through his eyes" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 76). In gaining the title "Mrs. Dalloway," Clarissa has lost part of her individuality. This observation echoes one made by Clarissa earlier in the novel—studying her face in the mirror, she thinks that "she could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces" (31). Her condition is reflected in the bareness of the room around her—especially her bed, the clean, white sheets stretched tight over the narrow surface (30) creating a whole which, while functional, lacks *character*. Clarissa, too, has begun to be reduced to her function: her performance as Mrs. Dalloway. In spite of this perceived loss of self, Clarissa does not resent the role she has to play. As Johanna Garvey notes, Clarissa is "drawn to both sides" of her identity, and thus "vacillates between her public identity as Mrs. Dalloway and the private self" (69-70). Clarissa's problem is not the fact that her social role is to be Mrs. Dalloway, but that, at the moment, she is unable to be something *more* than that, something which unites her social and individual identities into one united self.

It is this desire for unity which leads Clarissa to place so much importance on the success of her party, though there is nothing particularly unusual about it from an outside perspective. To Clarissa, the act of hosting a party offers a chance to live up to the expectations of her social identity while also proving that she is more than simply Mrs. Dalloway—parties are her means of giving back to the world, taking people who never would have met and bringing them together "to combine, to create….an offering for the sake of offering" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 120-121). Clarissa's sense of self, tangled up in being Richard's wife and Elizabeth's mother, the love of Peter Walsh's life and the bane of Ms. Kilman's—everything, in summary, apart from *herself*—hinges on this moment, this party which is something she can put into the world and identify as uniquely her own. Unlike Evelina, whose approach to the problem of the conflicting sides of her

identity at first consists mostly of acknowledging discomfort, Clarissa acts in hopes of solving that discomfort. Clarissa's hope is to use her party not as an escape from the requirements of her social identity but a transformation of then, taking genuine joy in the act of being a hostess rather than simply seeing it as part of a routine.

Story Two: Time, and the Development of Individual Identity

An increased understanding of their social identities is only the beginning of the process Evelina and Clarissa undertake in search of "self." Once the roles of the women in the context of their social circles have been established, Burney and Woolf proceed to explore Evelina's and Clarissa's individual identities—the parts of the women's personalities which define them as unique characters. Time is significant in the examination of individual identity in both *Evelina* and *Mrs. Dalloway*: Evelina grows into this individuality as the novel progresses, while Clarissa's connection to her past allows her to grasp her own.

The distinct social circles which *Evelina* depicts drive the growth in Evelina's comprehension of her self. Where her first entrance into society familiarizes her with her social identity of Miss Anville and the expectations with which that identity comes, Evelina's immersion in the society of the Branghtons without a respectable chaperone to guide her requires her to consult her individual identity as she make decisions about what parts of that society she is and is not willing to participate in. The passage of time is Burney's ally as she narrates Evelina's progressive growth: the weeks spent in each circle allow the young heroine to familiarize herself with both the social and individual aspects of her identity, which in turn leads her to develop increased agency and new control over her life. Evelina's growing understanding of herself grants her individual self a more even footing with her social role—and, as Oakleaf notes, while "Evelina lacks a public character…her private character is distinctively meritorious" (344). By

giving less weight to the Miss Anville who is a social nobody, the aspects of Evelina's identity which have appeared in letters but remained hidden behind her mask of meekness in public begin to bleed more and more into her interactions with the world around her.

This shift begins in the novel's second volume, following Sir John Belmont's rejection of Evelina as his daughter. While her letter to Reverend Villars reveals her considerable sadness and distress at his failure to recognize her as his daughter, its ending shows personal growth: rather than dwelling on her negative feelings or the fact that these wholly severed ties mean the end of any hope of recognition, Evelina focuses on the relationships she *does* have. At the end of her letter to Reverend Villars following her father's rejection, Evelina remarks to him that she "may now sign myself / Wholly your / Evelina" (Burney 162), celebrating the connection she has. Moreover, this signature marks a progression from an earlier letter in which Evelina asks Villars "can you…suffer me to sign myself / Your dutiful, / and most affectionate / EVELINA?" (116). This earlier signature, Choi notes, both "expresses her wish to align herself with Villars and, in a way, asks him to claim her" (265). In this signature, she claims *him*, deciding for herself who she will be aligned with rather than letting it be decided for her. This decision is a step toward declaring her individual identity, a declaration that she is something more than the family she does or does not have.

This specific understanding of her identity proves critical in the novel's second volume, as Evelina faces time spent with her blood family whose understandings of the world greatly clash with her own. Rather than going along with them out of a sense of duty, Evelina begins to push back against their choices and thoughts as far as she is able, not allowing her family to define her, but choosing to be defined as an individual apart from them. This shift in mindset is demonstrated in the signature of a letter Evelina writes to Miss Mirvan shortly after taking up

residence with Madame Duval, which is made up of the full name “EVELINA ANVILLE” (Burney 174) rather than the simpler and more familiar “EVELINA” (256) she uses in a later letter to the same recipient. Evelina’s choice to claim the name Anville, in spite of her usual aversion to it, is a form of self-ownership—Choi writes that, by choosing to sign her letter in this way, “she asserts with no uncertainty her independence from Mme. Duval, and that her current circumstance of lodging indicates no acceptance of any other kind of relationship” (266). Though the name “Anville” has no real meaning, it *is* something Evelina can claim ownership of. Her decision to use the name to make a statement transforms it from something essentially worthless to a means of gaining a measure of control over her situation and over her self.

The shift in Evelina’s actions during her stay with the Branghtons is an act of discovery rather than reinvention—her core self is unchanged, but her new ownership of and control over that self lead to different behavior. Throughout *Evelina*, there is a distinction between Evelina’s authorial voice and the version of herself she writes about—as Cutting-Gray notes, “The Evelina who writes reveals a more evaluative knowledge of her world than the Evelina she writes about” (48). This seemingly “new” version of herself into which Evelina transforms is really an Evelina whose actions more closely align with the quick wit and keen observation skills which have always been displayed by Evelina the author. It is Evelina’s choice to let this individual identity shine through in social settings which enables her to continue to gain agency, responding to the world around her in new ways. Throughout the novel, Evelina’s letters have continually shown the quality of her judgment, a marker of what Cutting-Gray calls her “reflexive ability to read more than one possible meaning in otherwise socially correct behavior,” giving the examples of “hypocrisy (Mr. Lovel), bad taste (the Branghtons), male impertinence (Willoughby), and female constraints (codes of propriety)” (46). As Evelina begins to speak her mind more often and it is

no longer only Reverend Villars hearing her observations and opinions, this ability to judge situations becomes more and more important.

Upon first meeting the Branghtons, Evelina remarks to Reverend Villars that "this family is so low-bred and vulgar, that I should be equally ashamed of such a connexion in the country, or any where" (Burney 95). Evelina's period of residence with Madame Duval, which leads her to see them more frequently, only intensifies this distaste. Rather than simply maintaining her early passive disdain for their lack of good breeding, however, she begins to speak out against it. The action Evelina takes is not always fruitful—she is, for example, obliged at one point to follow the Miss Branghtons "Quite by compulsion…down a long alley, in which there was hardly any light" (197) despite her resistance. Regardless of the effectiveness of her actions, however, she continues to make herself heard, even directly chastising young Mr. Branghton for using her name without her leave, cutting off his explanation with the exclamation "you have done me an irreparable injury!" (249)—an act which Cutting-Gray notes is "perhaps the first time in the novel [that] Evelina claims her own right to the disclosing as well as concealing power of name and discourse" (49). In addition to admonishing young Mr. Branghton, Evelina makes it her duty to make reparations for his actions, penning a letter to Lord Orville "to clear [her]self from the imputation of…impertinence" (250). This choice, while it ultimately backfires on her, demonstrates Evelina's newfound willingness to defend her own honor. Though her position in the world has not changed, still affording her no real protection or rights, Evelina has begun not only to recognize her own individual worth but also to demand that others treat her with the respect she is owed as a human, regardless of her status.

Evelina demonstrates this agency not only in response to the actions of her family, but also in her interactions with others. Perhaps most notable is her deepened resistance to Sir

Clement Willoughby, who forces his attentions on her throughout the novel. After being first compelled to enter the dark walks with the Miss Branghtons and then separated from them, Evelina finds herself alone and vulnerable, surrounded by men who assume her to be a prostitute (197) and are unwilling to listen to her protests. Upon recognizing Sir Clement among the men, Evelina calls out for his help, only to be met by an attempt to take advantage of her vulnerability. In some ways, this showcases the dangers of her innocence—and the wisdom of Mrs. Mirvan's warning that "it is sometimes dangerous to make requests to men, who are too desirous of receiving them"(154). Evelina's response, however, demonstrates her personal growth. Far from her panicked response to Sir Clement's first attempts to take advantage of her during carriage rides, Evelina responds by calling his honor and social responsibilities into question, demanding to know "how he dared treat [her] with such insolence" (199), a query both direct and bold. She goes on to specify that this claim came from the fact that "from [him], who know[s] [her], [she] had a claim for protection,—not to such treatment as this" (199). It is Evelina's use of *insolence* which makes her claim so weighty, the word suggesting not only that he has been rude, but that he has not given her what she was owed—that she was in some manner above him. This is a radical claim in light of the social statuses of the two characters, and Evelina's unapologetic demand showcases both an increased willingness to speak up for herself and a growing understanding of her worth, not as a member of high society, but as an individual.

The immediacy inherent to stream-of-consciousness, combined with the fact that the entirety of *Mrs. Dalloway* only covers one day, barred Virginia Woolf from the gradual development Burney gave Evelina. Woolf nevertheless made use of time when showing the development of her characters: unlike Burney, she focuses not only on the present situations of the characters but also on how those situations are informed by the hopes, dreams, and relationships of their

youths: as J. Hillis Miller writes, “The present, for them, is the perpetual repetition of the past” (184). Clarissa slips into memories of the past early in the novel. Enthralled by the complexities of the world around her and constantly seeking to understand it and the people who make it up, she enters into the bustle of the London streets with an air of excitement surrounding her, internally declaring: “What a lark! What a plunge!” (3) as she steps out her door. With this action, Clarissa recalls the times as a girl when “she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air” (3). For a moment, past and present blur together, the “little squeak of the hinges” (3) on those Bourton windows coming to her as her door in London swings open, the act less of a memory than a moment re-lived. With this scene appearing so early in the novel, it is quickly apparent that the days spent at Bourton, of which so many of the characters have memories, still have an active role in shaping those characters’ perceptions of the world. The narrative form Woolf uses in *Mrs. Dalloway* is uniquely suited for this union of different times of life. Garvey describes it as offering not a “strictly mimetic representation of London and its inhabitants but a flowing procession of impressions, sensations, and visions, interrelated” (64), a style which perfectly allows memories of the past to be woven into the present. Miller similarly writes of Woolf’s narrative form that, for the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway*, “in one sense the moment is all that is real....In another sense, the weight of all the past moments presses just beneath the surface of the present, ready in an instant to flow into consciousness, overwhelming it with the immediate presence of the past” (184). The novel is made up of one day, but that one day is made up of years of personal history.

Woolf’s integration of the past into the present expands the scope of *Mrs. Dalloway* without detracting from the urgency created by the stream-of-consciousness form. Beyond simply being a way to give characters more time to develop, these glimpses of the past give

insight into the motivations and personalities of the characters. Bond describes this phenomenon by saying that "Past and present spaces (and the corresponding selves those spaces produce) are not isolated, but are in constant conversation and, therefore, reciprocal modification" (68). This dialogue with the past is possible because, as the characters grow, they look back on their lives with fresh eyes, understanding the memories in new ways, which in turn help them define and re-define who they are and what they do in their present. This is certainly true of Clarissa, whose identity is constantly fluctuating between her individual identity—the Clarissa who existed at Bourton—and her social identity—Mrs. Dalloway, a member of London's upper-class. Clarissa's movement toward her party on this day is thus not a straight line, but one which loops back to the past—Woolf, Bond notes, "deconstruct[s] and revise[s] conventional notions of time, space, and identity as linearly evolving entities" (68), allowing the past to influence Clarissa's search for balance as much as her present self does. Clarissa's journey can simultaneously occur in a day and over years; she can learn from her experiences at Bourton without ever leaving London. These lessons are different from normal memories; they are re-livings, experiences happening for the first time. Miller refers to this as "the power of narrative not just to repeat the past but to resurrect it in another form" (191): that, though these things occurred long ago, the Clarissa who exists in the present, being a different person than she was in the past, experiences them for the first time through the act of remembering them.

This flexibility also, as Bond notes, pertains to the question of identity, freeing Clarissa from the rigidity of social expectations that she must choose between being Clarissa or Mrs. Dalloway. Like Evelina, Clarissa thus moves toward finding the point where the question of individual identity vs. social identity can be answered with "both and" rather than "either or." Clarissa's imbalance is echoed in the novel's other characters: Septimus, whose memories of war

bleed into his daily life; Rezia, whose love for Italy sharply contrasts with a cheerless life in London; Peter, whose past love for Clarissa continues to haunt him even in the midst of his new relationship. In this way, even when the narrative focus is not directly on Clarissa, readers are able to more deeply understand her experience and her internal journey. Clarissa herself finds her "self" by looking not only inward, but also at those around her. Even the unnamed old lady across the street, who Clarissa watches move about her house, makes Clarissa reflect on her own state. In the old lady Clarissa sees what she refers to as "the privacy of the soul" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 125), feeling both connected to and separate from the other woman in what she calls "the supreme mystery," that "here was one room; there another" (126). This thought reflects Clarissa's greater conflict: she sees herself as separate and distinct from those around her, but also inherently connected to them as fellow humans. She is Clarissa and she is Mrs. Dalloway, yet cannot understand how to be both at the same time.

The connection between the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* is strengthened by the narrative's habit of flowing between different perspectives without indicating the shift, creating the picture of a group of people who are inherently interconnected. As the people of London go about their days, their unique lives are drawn together by shared experiences. Ban Wang writes of the "common identity and communion" (180) Woolf establishes between the people of London by including their thoughts in her narrative alongside those of her own characters. Wang discusses this effect on a city-wide scale, speaking to a scene early in the novel in which a crowd on the street watches first a car and then a plane pass by, Woolf describing the scene not through the eyes of the novel's main characters, but those in the crowd around them (16-22). This idea, however, is also applicable on a smaller scale, the shared memories and experiences of individual characters creating a communion of memories. Not only do characters' parallel

journeys inform how readers understand what they are going through, but their views on one another allow readers to create more accurate pictures of who the characters are.

Peter and Sally's impressions of Clarissa are particularly important to the development of readers' understanding of Clarissa as an individual. Clarissa tends to remember the past fondly, but look at herself critically, seeing herself as silly and somewhat vain, wishing she were "one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves…[not] to make people think this or that" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 10). Peter however, though critiquing Clarissa when she is shallow, acknowledges that she is "very shrewd—a far better judge of character than Sally" (75), while Sally, though considering Clarissa a bit snobbish, states that she is "generous to her friends" and "pure-hearted" (188). Because Clarissa, unlike Evelina, is reconnecting with her individual identity rather than uncovering it for the first time, the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* has no outright depiction of Clarissa's discovery of who she is. The thoughts from Sally and Peter, therefore, are crucial to readers' ability to develop understandings of Clarissa's individual identity: it is through their comments about her, which stem from years of shared history and memories, that readers are able to form a more complete image of who Clarissa is.

Story Three: The Balance of Identity

Burney and Woolf not only look at Evelina's and Clarissa's social and individual identities separately, but also examine the point where the two identities intersect. Rather than requiring one to be sacrificed in favor of the other, the effort to "know thyself" culminates in the mingling of individual and social identity. It is in the act of balancing the two halves of their identities that Evelina and Clarissa are able to most clearly find their "selves."

Evelina's uncovering of her individual self can perhaps best be summed up in what Lord Orville says of her to Sir Clement: "she is not . . . to be known in half an hour; her modest worth,

and fearful excellence, require both time and encouragement to shew themselves" (347)—a statement equally true of her self-discovery and Lord Orville's understanding of her. Having gradually gained this self-knowledge during her time with the Branghtons in Volume Two, Evelina enters a third social circle, more private than the others: the home of Mrs. Beaumont, a woman "born of a noble and ancient family" (284) who, though kind and generous, places much stock in the social positions of those around her, not giving much thought to anyone "whose name[s are] no where to be found in the Court Calendar" (284). Evelina's stay at Mrs. Beaumont's house requires her to combine what she has learned from the previous two circles—her individual and social identities—and balance them, acting as Miss Anville, a member of society, while still considering the desires of Evelina when making decisions. Significantly, at this point in the novel, Evelina's companion shifts once more: Mrs. Selwyn, who is quickly shown to be far different from both gentle, ladylike Mrs. Mirvan and coarse, worldly Madame Duval. Mrs. Selwyn, who, though bold and sharp-tongued, is still a lady, offers Evelina an example of a woman who speaks and acts as she desires without sacrificing her respectability is important in Evelina's journey. Though Mrs. Selwyn occasionally takes matters too far, her unshrinking manner offers Evelina a model of female agency which balances social and individual identity.

Evelina's growing agency is put to the test when Sir Clement attempts to take advantage of her isolation during a walk, continuing to push his presence onto Evelina even after she has made it clear that she does not desire his presence. Evelina first attempts to resist his advances on her own, demanding that he release her and informing him that she will not see or be near him unless he "adopt[s] a very different style and conduct in the future" (344). Both the manner of her delivery—a statement rather than a request—and the firmness of her stance suggest a

measure of equality between herself and Sir Clement: her actions assume that she has the right to place boundaries between them. Though appearing to be a natural response to her situation, Evelina's chastisement of Sir Clement thus involves her passing beyond the rights of her status in defense of herself: she has neither a title nor connections to give her any social authority, while Sir Clement has both. Taking action regardless of lacking the "right" to do so requires Evelina to see her individual self as something worth defending.

Evelina's protestations, however, have little effect, and Sir Clement takes matters a step further, "flinging himself at [her] feet" and "grasp[ing] her hand" (344). After her attempts to break free from him fail, Evelina still refuses to surrender control of the situation to Sir Clement, instead desperately calling out to the passing Lord Orville for assistance. This appeal assumes Evelina's right to make use of Lord Orville's name in an incredibly personal way. This is no matter of a borrowed chariot or dance at a ball; it is a statement that she has a claim to his protection. Sir Clement and Lord Orville both acknowledge that the latter "ha[s] not the right of enquiry which any of those three titles [father, brother, or lover] bestow" (345), and is therefore not entitled to ask about Sir Clement's intentions. Likewise, as neither daughter, sister, or lover, Evelina has no right to assume his protection, yet still she calls out to him—the bold act of someone who recognizes her own worth. Her judgment of Lord Orville's character is proven to be accurate when he immediately comes to her aid, regardless of the fact that he is not required to by social expectations. Oakleaf posits that Orville's role is largely to demonstrate an appreciation for the private character which makes up Evelina's individual identity, citing particularly his proposal, which occurs "before paternal acknowledgment makes her an heiress…[and] in the language of esteem and admiration" (349). Early on in the novel, grieving the thought of Lord Orville potentially having a low opinion of her, Evelina asks "of whose

esteem ought we to be ambitious, if not of those who most merit our own?" (Burney 39). Orville's continual efforts to treat Evelina with respect not only shows that she judged his character correctly, but also gives insight into her *own* character: by Evelina's own logic, Lord Orville's repeated attempts to attain her esteem suggest that he views her as someone who has merited his own

Evelina's growing agency is further reflected in the increasing faith she shows in her own judgment. Before going to London, Evelina was entirely reliant on the judgment of Reverend Villars to guide her choices and actions, even against her own desires. When requesting his leave to visit London with the Mirvans, Evelina tamps down her obvious joy and longing to see the city with the declaration that she "shall be very well contented to remain where [she is], if [he] desire[s] that [she] should" (25). Her time in Bristol Hotwell, however, demonstrates the new trust in herself which she has had to develop in her time away from Reverend Villars. From the beginnings of her growth—the ability to speak up for herself—Evelina begins consciously to make decisions which are wholly her own, rather than choosing her path as a result of advice or instruction received from someone else. Apart from Villars, Evelina is able to gain control over herself. In this section of the novel, Evelina makes what Margaret Doody calls the "major moral decision…not to tell Macartney's story," a choice made both "in the face of [Orville's] disapprobation" (366) and without Reverend Villars' advice, acting on the lessons he has taught her rather than waiting for specific instruction. Instead, she acts in a manner directed by the morality which has defined her private self throughout the novel, reasoning both that she "ought not betray Mr. Macartney" and that she refuses to "forfeit a confidence which would never have been reposed in [her], but from a reliance upon [her] honour which [she] should blush to find

[her]self unworthy of" (Burney 302), choosing to remain true to her values rather than sacrificing them in an attempt to win another's approval.

Furthermore, in the case of Villars's advice regarding Lord Orville, though Evelina first heeds it even to the point of entirely ignoring Lord Orville, she eventually chooses to trust what she has seen and experienced firsthand—rejecting, as Cutting-Gray puts it, "the forgery…[and] Villars's abstractionist advice about character, and lets observation guide her judgment" (50). She solidifies this decision to rely on her own perceptions when writing to Reverend Villars upon accepting Lord Orville's proposal, stating her hope that "the time is not very distant when your Evelina's choice may receive the sanction of her best friend's judgment and approbation" (Burney 355). This phrasing demonstrates that, while Evelina still values Villars's insights and aid, she no longer feels the need to wait for his approval before taking action. As Evelina's understanding of her self has grown, so has her willingness to outwardly display that self: she retains the kindness and gentleness which have marked her throughout the novel, but is now also both willing to speak up for herself and confident in the fairness and accuracy of her evaluations of others.

This path to finding this sense of self is rather cyclical: at the beginning of the novel, she is known as Miss Anville, yet sees herself as simply "Evelina," the lack of a last name signifying her lack of connections. As the novel's end approaches, however, her reconnection with Sir John Belmont allows her to finally claim his name. Though grateful to be recognized by her father as his daughter and rightful heir, and glad for the connection it gives her to a parent, the growing agency which Evelina has demonstrated throughout volumes two and three mean that her identity no longer hinges on his decision—she is content and confident in being "Evelina." This truth is emphasized by the short time Evelina holds this title—she herself acknowledges that

when she signs herself "Evelina Belmont" to Reverend Villars, it is both "the first—and probably the last time [she] shall ever own the name" (Burney 404). Though the buildup to this signature, as Choi notes, "calls a great deal of attention to her act of claiming a name" (262), Evelina's new ownership of the name Belmont holds less weight than it would have at the start of the novel. The focus, rather than being on the name itself, is on Evelina's act of claiming it.

The central cause of this temporary ownership is, of course, Evelina's impending marriage. It could be argued that this new nonchalance about her identity is not personal growth, but mere acknowledgement of the fact that she will soon be trading the name of one man for that of another—and, if the novel concluded with a letter from "Evelina Orville," the argument that Evelina was still being saved by a man would ring true. It is true that Burney's novel does not attempt to disrupt the social order of 18th-century England: as Choi notes, "the conclusion of the novel…does not seem to convey an overt sense of rebellion against or liberation from her social order" (260). However, while the novel's final letter is a brief message from an Evelina whose happy marriage adheres to that social order, the novel's final signature is not that of "Evelina Orville," but simply "Evelina" (Burney 406). Though now fully secure in belonging to not only her father but also her husband, the novel ends with an acknowledgement of Evelina belonging to herself: she has taken control of who she is, no longer defining herself by the family or social status she does or does not have, but by her qualities and character. Furthermore, Lord Orville's decision to propose before Evelina has secured a name or inheritance suggests that he finds inherent value in Evelina herself, not only her connections: he values her for her self, which she found before either of these men came to make her life easier. Evelina's ending pushes back against the idea that agency and traditional femininity cannot coexist: at the novel's end, she is both happily married and confident in who she is.

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa's and Peter's memories of the past and of one another agree on the unique connection they share—he is able to perceive her clearly, and she is able to feel his silent critique when those perceptions are not positive. Among these critiques is Peter's disdain for the persona Clarissa takes on when throwing parties—she is, he says, "the perfect hostess" (61), and it is there when she is "at her worst—effusive, insincere" (165). It is an imperfect evaluation, not taking into account her motivations or what she hopes to do by means of the parties; however, it captures well the mask she puts on when being merely "Mrs. Dalloway." When she allows herself to be Clarissa as well, none of these things are true: instead, her presence gives him a sensation "Like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest" something which is, he realizes "like Clarissa herself….It is Clarissa herself" (49). This Clarissa—Clarissa at her best—bursts with the promise of vitality; she is beautifully imperfect and by nature sincere, offering something beyond surface-level politenesses: true connection.

This version of Clarissa which Peter praises is one who has achieved the balance she seeks throughout the novel, her movement toward which reaches a climax in the middle of Clarissa's party at the end of the novel. Clarissa, already feeling that "it was going to be a failure; a complete failure" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 165), hears from Dr. Bradshaw of the suicide of one of his patients—Septimus Warren Smith, whose story the novel follows alongside Clarissa's. She is taken aback by the knowledge, the timing of the information upsetting her as much as the content: "in the middle of my party, here's death" (180). Many scholars refer to these moments of Clarissa pondering Septimus' death as an indication of her coldness or lack of understanding of those with lives different from her own—a follow-up to their interpretations of the novel's earlier scene in which Clarissa admits that "she cared much more for her roses than for the

Armenians" (119). This interpretation, however, implies that Woolf was attempting to create a perfect person in the character of Clarissa, or that Clarissa herself is claiming to be one. On the contrary, Clarissa's statement is not a dismissal of the horrors experienced by the Armenians, but a confession that she feels more strongly that which is in front of her and directly affecting her, selfish though that may be.

Clarissa's first, negative response is not the end of her train of thoughts, however: Garvey points out that, "despite her initial distress, her rejection of his act, Clarissa does sympathize with the unknown man" (65). As she contemplates his death, it becomes something more personal—not in terms of loss, but in action taken. Death is loss, but also, Clarissa thinks, "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate….There was an embrace in death" (181). She begins to feel that Septimus' death was "Somehow…her disaster—her disgrace" (182), the shocking news causing her to examine herself: her failings and desires and the years spent at Bourton in the past which shaped the course of her life. This event, though seemingly unconnected to Clarissa, gives her a moment of clarity, forcing her to contemplate the thoughts of mortality which have danced around the narrative from the beginning of the novel, wrapped up in considerations of passing time and thoughts of illness and aging. Facing this, Garvey notes, Clarissa "chooses life but remains constantly aware of the approach of annihilation" (68), Septimus's death reminding her to value the life she has. As she considers this, Clarissa steps to the window for a moment of reflection and, gazing out, sees the old lady who lives across the street—who before seemed to Clarissa to encapsulate the great question of existence—"quite quietly…going to bed alone" (183), an image in stark contrast to the bustle of the party in the room behind Clarissa.

As the old lady puts out her light, Clarissa realizes that her moment of isolation is over; however, she feels changed, no longer pitying Septimus but instead "fe[eling] somehow very like him" (183). The "supreme mystery" Clarissa contemplated on first watching the old lady that day, "here was one room; there another" (126), seems nearly solved in this moment, as the old lady in her room and Septimus dying in his join Clarissa at her house, her party. Wang posits that *Mrs. Dalloway* ultimately moves toward the idea that "identity, character, and personality are dissolved," stating that the two options we have are to "become everybody or nobody" (188). I argue, however, that this moment of Clarissa standing at the window in contemplation is an argument for rather than against the possibility of the individual. Septimus and the old lady, though in very different situations with very different emotional significance, communicate the same idea to Clarissa: that what we have is simply life, and it is ours to direct as we will. To sleep and to wake, to live and to die. When Clarissa turns from the window to "go back…assemble…find Sally and Peter" (183), it is not an act of surrendering individuality but claiming it. It is the choice to be Clarissa Dalloway: wife, mother, *and* individual.

It is with this new resolve that Clarissa re-enters her party at the end of the novel. Peter, about to leave with Sally Seton, pauses for a moment, at first unsure why, asking himself "What is this terror? What is this ecstasy?....What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?" before realizing that "It is Clarissa….For there she was" (191). This sentiment, the novel's final line, captures the freedom Clarissa's new understanding of herself has given her. As Bond points out, it is the ultimate sign that Clarissa "does not have to identify as "this" or "that," but can instead simply be, as the novel's closing line implies" (79). Clarissa returns to the room fully intending to resume her duties as a hostess, no longer as a role by which her worth is defined, but instead as a means by which she might do something she enjoys: bringing people together,

giving back to the world for the beauty it gives her. Forbes concludes her essay on *Mrs. Dalloway* with the note that Woolf's later writings examine "how crucial it is for women to perceive of performance as a celebration of the necessity of enacting not one, confining role, as is the case with Clarissa, but rather, the multifarious roles that constitute their sense of self" (50). I would argue, however, that Clarissa also meets these criteria—as Bond writes, Woolf, through Clarissa, "proposes a female subjectivity based on inclusivity and multidimensionality, rather than one based on the adherence to debilitating patriarchal binaries" (75). As Clarissa finds internal balance, she proves that women *can* have multiple roles, neither sacrificing individuality to meet social expectations nor casting off their social roles in the name of individuality. *Mrs. Dalloway* is about Mrs. Dalloway, hostess and wife and mother, and it is also about Clarissa, confidant and artist and lover of beauty.

Epilogue: How the Search for Self Unites the Human Race

In their respective novels, Evelina and Clarissa come to know themselves in different manners and different circumstances from one another—in part due to the differences in the social situations which they participate in, and in part simply because they are different people. Evelina, encountering the broader world for the first time, faces different challenges and has different opportunities than Clarissa, who has lived a good portion of her life already. Moreover, while Evelina is limited by the future she must prepare for, Clarissa is bound to the decisions she made in the past which led to her current life.

As the two women seek to find individuality amid these social roles, however, neither of them entirely cast off the precepts they have been told to follow—not because they are unable to, but because it is not something they wish to do. Neither *Evelina* nor *Mrs. Dalloway* tell the story

of a culture revolutionized by a shocking modern woman, choosing instead to focus on people who are ordinary—people whose experiences and searches for self could belong to anybody.

Though their experiences differ, however, the two women's individual searches for their "selves" inform one another, the lessons learnt by each protagonist giving insight into the story of the other. While pieces of Clarissa's youth can be glimpsed through memories of her time at Bourton, *Evelina* offers further insight into what may have been a part of Clarissa's past—the emotions surrounding Evelina's transition from the innocent, sheltered life of her childhood to London and its bustling atmosphere give an idea of what the transition from Bourton to London may have been for Clarissa. Although the world itself was greatly altered from the time of one to the other, the excitement and nervousness Evelina expresses as she ventures into a new world are enduring, as is her journey of learning to have greater faith in herself throughout that transition. With so much of Clarissa's journey being informed by her past experiences, having this extra insight enriches readers' understandings of who she turns out to be.

On the other side of the coin, Clarissa's experience gives a glimpse at the experiences which may be in Evelina's future. The ending of *Evelina* leaves its main character entering a new stage of life. Evelina has become a wife—and, what's more, has become Lady Orville. Although she has learned more about who she is and how to balance her identity with her role in the social circles in which she participates, that role is vastly different by the conclusion. Clarissa's effort to find herself at age fifty-one indicates that the search for our individuality is not a one-time experience of youth; rather, it is a constant effort. The end of *Mrs. Dalloway* doesn't suggest that Clarissa knows who she is forever, but that she found balance in that moment in time and in regard to that situation. At the end of the party, Clarissa will still have to head to her attic bedroom and its bed with the pale, stretched sheet, and she will still think about her interactions

with Peter and Sally that night and all of what is now and once was and the things that might have been. That Clarissa's act of finding balance is not one-and-done, but a repeated action suggests that Evelina, too, is not done discovering herself—she has completed part of her journey, but following the command to know thyself is a lifelong effort.

Why, then, does it matter that we record these stories? That Virginia Woolf wrote about a middle aged woman rediscovering her individuality or Frances Burney about a young girl encountering the world for the first time? It matters, in short, because pieces of the stories of others can help us on our journeys, and the rest can help us better understand those around us. Though the question of identity is never fully answered, humanity will never stop asking it. By sharing the partial answers we find, humanity is more deeply connected across past, present, and future, individuals able to more fully understand not only themselves, but also one another. The search itself brings us together—it is a way "to combine, to create" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 121), to ignite something new.

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