Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between women and the city in Virginia Woolf’s novel from 1925, *Mrs. Dalloway*. The relationship between people and the urban environment has increasingly become the focus of critics, and the flâneur is often considered to be a key figure in understanding the modern, urban living brought about by industrialisation in Europe. The flâneur took his first steps in the mid-nineteenth-century Paris of Charles Baudelaire, where he strolled the streets in a leisurely manner, observing the city-life. From the 1980s and onwards, the question has been increasingly asked: could there have been a female equivalent of the flâneur — a flâneuse — in the nineteenth-century city and if so, what form did she take? Because of the period’s strict gender roles and women’s association with the private, domestic sphere of life, women’s access to the streets was certainly limited. This dissertation brings forward some of the main arguments concerning the possibilities and problems of female flânerie, and argues that in *Mrs. Dalloway* we can identify a shifting point in women’s presence within the city. The dissertation focuses on the characters of Clarissa Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth, as the generation difference between those women symbolises the changes that were taking place in British women’s social reality during the interwar years. In order to cast a light upon the period’s changes regarding women’s access to the urban environment, the dissertation explores the gendered division of private and public spheres, the rise of the New Woman and the First World War’s effect on women’s access to the job-market. An encounter in *Mrs. Dalloway* with an unknown female passer-by in the streets is analysed, as the scene relates back to Baudelaire’s writings on the flâneur and further exerts the change in women’s position within the city.
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Introduction

The nineteenth century saw an unprecedented increase in the population of Europe, with cities such as London, Paris and Berlin doubling or tripling in size over just fifty years. Cities were of course not a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century, but with industrialisation in Europe cities grew with an ever increasing speed, presenting a new, urban lifestyle. While some perceived urban living in terms of decay and degeneration, and longed for the simplicity of rural living, for others, the city was a source of inspiration and beauty. Numerous writers have employed the urban environment in their writings in such a way that the city is more than just a setting, but rather a character in its own right. Charles Dickens’ nineteenth-century London, James Joyce’s Dublin, Charles Baudelaire’s Paris, and, as is increasingly acknowledged, Virginia Woolf’s early twentieth-century London; what these authors have in common is that their writings have shaped the way people think about those cities.

The figure of the flâneur, this walker and observer of cities, has become a central figure in exploring the relationship between people, modernity and the urban environment. Taking his first steps in the nineteenth-century Paris of Charles Baudelaire, the flâneur walked the streets in a leisurely manner, observing and taking in the beauty of the city. The flâneur was then, about sixty years later, analysed by Walter Benjamin, who believed the flâneur to be a central figure of modernity, as he believed Baudelaire to be an early prophet for modernity. From Benjamin’s writings onwards, the figure of the flâneur has been widely used in literature, sociology and the arts, and the activity of flânerie is commonly used by social and cultural commentators to understand the nature of modernity (Tester 1994:1).

This dissertation will explore women’s relationship with the urban environment in Virginia Woolf’s novel from 1925, Mrs. Dalloway. In my analysis I will use the figure of the flâneur, or rather, his female equivalent the flâneuse, to explore the characters’ relationship with the city. The nature of the flâneur has increasingly led feminist critics to ask the question whether or not a flâneuse could have existed in the nineteenth century, because of strict gender roles and women’s limited access to the urban environment. Here, I will argue that in Mrs. Dalloway we can identify a turning point in the development of the flâneuse. Set in 1923, the novel takes place in a period where the women’s suffrage movement was at its height in Britain. I will focus on the characters of Clarissa Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth, as I believe that the generation gap between these two women, and the difference in how they experience
the city, symbolises the changes that took place during this period regarding women’s access to public spaces. I will also explore the significance of an encounter with an unknown female passer-by in the streets, and how she relates back to Baudelaire’s writings on flânerie.

*Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf’s ultimate ‘London novel’. She was a great lover of London, the city in which she was born and where she lived for the greatest part of her life. She frequently took walks in the city, both for pleasure and for inspiration. In 1928 she wrote in her diary: ‘London itself perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives me a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble, save that of moving my legs through the streets [...] To walk alone in London is the greatest rest’ (2003:126). As a female writer in the early twentieth century, Woolf would have been highly aware of the obstacles women faced in the urban environment, as well as of the changes that were happening in women’s relationship with the city.

*Mrs. Dalloway* takes place on a single day in June in 1923. Its background is London in the interwar years: there is relief in the air, the First World War is over and the surviving men have returned. The protagonist, fifty-two-year-old Clarissa Dalloway, is preparing for a party she is about to throw that evening. The novel starts with her walk to the flower shop, and throughout the novel the story effortlessly moves from one character’s perspective to another’s. We watch various characters moving around in the urban environment, each experiencing the city in their own way. Clarissa is unsettled by a visit from her old friend and proposer, Peter Walsh, who has just returned to London after five-year absence. Peter’s return evokes thoughts of the past and she looks back over her life as the upper-class wife of a politician; a life characterised by social events, house-calls and sending letters. She nostalgically thinks back to her youth in the countryside of Bourton, to her homoerotic relationship with her friend Sally Seaton, and her choice of husband; she chose to marry the reliable, but somewhat slow, Richard Dalloway, instead of the enigmatic Peter. Her thoughts also wander to her daughter Elizabeth, who is eighteen, and, unlike her mother, has no interest in parties or the social life of the upper-class. Later in the novel, Woolf gives us insight into the mind of young Elizabeth, and we learn of her ambitions for a professional career.

The first chapter of this dissertation will start by exploring the concept of flânerie, as depicted in the writings of Baudelaire and Benjamin. It will then examine some of the problems women in the nineteenth century faced in the urban environment, focusing on Janet Wolff’s essay from 1985, ‘The invisible flâneuse’. Wolff declares
female flânerie impossible in the nineteenth century on the grounds that women did not have access to the urban environment in the same way as men did. Although Wolff’s essay is in some ways central to any exploration of female flânerie, as indeed it is to this dissertation, it has been criticised for ruling out any female presence whatsoever in the city of the nineteenth century. I, however, agree with the more positive stance of Deborah Parsons, who has focused on the possible manifestations of female flânerie, rather than denying its existence. I will analyse a poem by Baudelaire, ‘To a passer-by’, as the poem shows an independent, female presence in the nineteenth-century city, and gives ground to the possibilities of female flânerie.

The second chapter will explore the character of Clarissa Dalloway and the ways in which she exposes some of the problems of female flânerie. Clarissa is a product of nineteenth-century ideas about femininity and her relationship with the city is formed by the gendered division of spaces. Therefore, she is more bound to the social, domestic sphere of life, opposed to the public, professional life of her politician husband Richard Dalloway.

In the third chapter, I will take a look at some of the historical and social changes that helped change women’s access to the urban space. I will look at how the First World War opened up the professional sphere for women, and how this is reflected in Elizabeth Dalloway’s ambition for a career. Then I will examine the figure of the New Woman, a social and literary figure whose roots date back to the turn of the century. I will argue that the New Woman is presented in the character of Elizabeth, but also in an unknown woman Peter Walsh encounters in the streets. The meeting is reminiscent of a typical Baudelairian scene, and mirrors the encounter the poet had in his poem ‘To a passer-by’. The female passer-by forms a link between the nineteenth-century Paris of Baudelaire and the interwar London of Woolf, with Woolf’s version of the scene symbolising the changes that have taken place in women’s relationship with the urban environment.

By exploring *Mrs. Dalloway* in relation to female flânerie, I intend to demonstrate the changes that the turn of the century brought to women’s access to the urban space, and the difference between women like Clarissa Dalloway, and New Woman characters such as Elizabeth Dalloway and the female passer-by. I believe that in *Mrs. Dalloway* we come across a turning point in the development of female flânerie.
1. Flânerie

1.1. Baudelaire and Benjamin’s Flâneur: a Painter of Modern Life

‘The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd’ (Baudelaire 1970:9)

Charles Baudelaire has been credited with being an early prophet for modernity (Wolff 1985:2). It was in his writings on mid-nineteenth-century Paris that the literary figure of the flâneur took its first steps. Baudelaire’s accounts of the flâneur, together with Walter Benjamin’s analysis of Baudelaire, have been influential in understanding the new, modern and urban lifestyle that was brought about by industrialisation in Europe. Baudelaire’s account of the flâneur is a necessary starting-point for any research concerning the act of flânerie. Not only did he give an account of who the flâneur is and what he does, in his essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (1995), but he was also himself an archetypal flâneur, spending his days strolling the streets of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. His poems and prose are full of attempts to capture the experiences of modern urban life. Metropolitan Paris is the setting for most of his poems and prose, in which the narrator walks the streets and reads aesthetic meaning into the environment. For the flâneur, the urban environment is a source of inspiration and joy which he cannot acquire in the privacy of the home. He is a passionate lover of crowds: ‘The man who loves to lose himself in a crowd enjoys feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box, and the slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of’ (Baudelaire 1970:20).

While many thinkers at the time saw urban living in terms of decay, Baudelaire’s essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ stresses the beauty of modern city life. Baudelaire argued that, rather than imitating the classical arts, the modern artists’ task was to capture the fleeting beauty of modernity. Modernity Baudelaire defined as the ‘ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable’ (12). The flâneur is for Baudelaire an artist, ‘the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains’ (5). Baudelaire’s prototype for this artist-flâneur, as described in ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, was a relatively little known artist called Constantin Guys, whose drawings and paintings are like quickly-drawn sketches from urban scenes. Baudelaire thought Guys possessed all the necessary qualities of a flâneur; he had a childlike curiosity towards life, he was passionate and a man of the world — an idle walker of the city. ‘He marvels at the
eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities [...] He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city — landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist of buffeted by the sun’ (10). The artist-flâneur is curious towards everything, ‘he wants to know, understand and appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe’ (7).

Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the flâneur, in the 1930s, placed this figure in a much wider social context than before. In Charles Baudelaire: A Lyrical Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1983), Benjamin presents the flâneur as a key figure in understanding modern, urban living and it was with Baudelaire that the capital of the nineteenth century, Paris, ‘became the subject of lyrical poetry’ (171). Benjamin’s Marxist analysis displays the flâneur as a nostalgic figure, losing his natural habitat with the rise of commercialism and capitalism in Europe. Benjamin’s flâneur is at home in the arcades of Paris, those half inside/half outside streets, where the ‘walls are his desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done’ (37). As the Parisian arcades were torn down in the mid-nineteenth century, to be replaced by Haussmann’s boulevards, the flâneur lost his place in the modern city. For Benjamin, the flâneur symbolises bygone times and risks becoming extinct by consumerism and the speed of an industrialised city. According to Benjamin, the ‘department store was the flâneur’s final coup’ (171).

1.2 Problems and Possibilities of Female Flânerie
As Deborah Parsons has noted, one must, in answering whether and how female flânerie can take form, question ‘the status and meaning of the flâneur as both historical figure and critical metaphor in literary and cultural criticism’ (2000:2). As a historical figure from the nineteenth century, the flâneur is a very limited figure; only a considerably wealthy male could have had the opportunity to spend their time wandering the streets in the way in which Baudelaire’s artist-flâneur does. The fact that women had little access to the public, urban sphere of society in the mid-nineteenth century has been the ground for some feminist critics to claim that female flânerie was all together impossible in the nineteenth century.

Janet Wolff was one of the first critics to point out the difficulties of female flânerie. In her essay ‘The Invisible Flâneuse’ (1985) she argues that the literature of modernity, characterised by the ‘fleeting, anonymous, ephemeral encounters of life in the metropolis’ (37), accounts almost exclusively for the experiences of men. While
women were more restricted to the private sphere of life, that is to the domestic life, men dominated the life outside of the home, the public sphere. And as Wolff points out, the literature of modernity is mostly concerned with the public world, that is, ‘the world of work, politics and city life’ (37).

Apart from being more restricted to the home, women, when they did walk in the streets, risked their clothes and appearance being scrutinised for an indication of class (41). The very nature of flânerie requires a certain level of anonymity; the flâneur is able to ‘become one flesh with the crowd’ (Baudelaire 1970:9). For women at the time, such invisibility was almost impossible. Women, to a greater extent than men, were subjects to scrutiny for their appearance, often to differentiate ‘respectable’ women from ‘loose’ women. A woman walking in the streets constantly risked being taken for a prostitute. Elizabeth Wilson (1992) has even argued that the prostitute, because of her stable presence on the streets, was ultimately the flâneuse of the nineteenth-century city. But Wilson goes on to admit that such a view risks romanticising the status of the prostitute. Certainly ‘Public Women’, or ‘Women of the Streets’, ‘never inhabited the streets on the same term as men’ (10).

Women’s problematic and restricted access to the urban experience has lead Janet Wolff to declare female flânerie in the nineteenth century impossible: ‘There is no question of inventing the flâneuse: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century’ (45). Griselda Pollock, who has explored middle-class women’s presence in the streets, focusing on female artists, has come to the same conclusion as Wolff about the impossibility of female flânerie (Pollock 2006).

The private/public dichotomy that Wolff uses in her argument is useful as a conceptual tool in investigating women’s presence in the urban environment. There is no doubt that women were highly restricted to the private, domestic sphere and largely excluded from the public sphere. The next chapter in this dissertation explores in more detail the gendered division of spaces and how this is portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, Wolff’s use of the private/public dichotomy has been criticised by other feminist critics for being too rigid and generalising. Elizabeth Wilson complains that it is not clear whether Wolff ‘perceives the flâneur as a gendered concept or as a descriptive account’ (9). The problem with Wolff’s article is that it fails to distinguish between the ideology, that of women being confined to the private sphere, and reality, in which there were exceptions from the private/public dichotomy. This kind of
approach completely rules out the notion of female flânerie and declares it impossible. Deborah Parsons also objects to Wolff’s article on the grounds that it considers the flâneur as merely a historical figure, but ignores the wider meaning flânerie has acquired. She accuses Wolff and Pollock of supporting ‘the masculine definition of the urban observer’ (2000:4). Rather than being a historical nineteenth-century figure, the flâneur has to be considered as ‘a conceptual term and as a socio-historical phenomenon’ (Parsons 2000:5).

A more fruitful approach to investigating female flânerie in the nineteenth century, many critics have found, is to explore those manifestations of female presence in the city that do exist. For example, Anne Friedberg has explored the rise of consumer culture and department stores in the mid-nineteenth century as a location for female flânerie. Friedberg (1993) argues that the shopping malls of the 1850s and 1860s created a new public arena for women and it is there that the flâneuse was born. However, she admits, the consumer flâneuse did not enjoy the same freedom as the detached flâneur, as ‘women were addressed as consumers in ways that played on deeply rooted cultural constructions of gender’ (36). Judith Walkowitz has explored the urban movement of women who undertook social and charity work in nineteenth-century London (Walkowitz 1992). Although it is up for debate whether the activities of shopping and charity work should be considered examples of flânerie, they do demonstrate a female presence in the nineteenth-century city, thereby challenging Wolff’s straightforward denial of female presence in the city.

In exploring the possibilities for female flânerie, it seems appropriate to return to the original accounts of flânerie; to the writings of Charles Baudelaire. While women are widely present in Baudelaire’s accounts of Paris, their presence is generally in the form of certain types. Wolff recognises a few types of female city-dwellers most prominent in Baudelaire’s writings: the prostitute, the widow, the lesbian, the old woman, the murder victim and the female passer-by (1985:41-42). What these women have in common, with the interesting exception of the female passer-by, is that they do not meet the poet-flâneur as equals; he is interested in them and often sympathises with them, but they are nevertheless objects to him and are subjected to his gaze. On Baudelaire’s attitude to women, as presented in his writings, Parsons notes that women are generally described as purchasable commodities; they are objectified and generally not given a viewpoint of their own (2000:25). In a chapter from ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, named ‘Woman’, Baudelaire describes women as being beautiful creatures,
objects to be desired. They are inspirations, subjects for artists to portray. The woman is a being:

For whom, and through whom, fortunes are made and unmade; for whom, but above all through whom, artists and poets create their most exquisite jewels; the source of the most exhausting pleasures and the most productive jewels ... (30)

Women are represented in Baudelaire’s writings as objects to be admired and be inspired by. They are seen but do not see. The exception from this, the female passer-by, is particularly interesting in relation to female flânerie, as it demonstrates the possibility of a flâneuse.

‘To a passer-by’, from Flowers of Evil, describes the flâneur’s encounter with a mysterious, beautiful woman in the street. The scene is characteristic of Baudelaire’s flânerie poems; a brief, fleeting encounter with a stranger amidst the bustling city environment. The narrator passes the woman, notices and admires her beauty:

The deafening street roared on. Full, slim, and grand
In mourning and majestic grief, passed down
A woman, lifting with a stately hand
And swaying the black borders of her gown;
Noble and swift, her leg with the statues matching

The first part of the poem shows this female passer-by as a passive figure, an object of the flâneur’s gaze. The narrator measures out her appearance and dress, in a characteristic way for the Baudelairian flâneur. He is eroticising her, attempting to place her in one of the traditional categories, a mourner, but then suddenly she looks up and meets the narrator’s eyes:

A lighting-flash - then darkness! Fleeting chance
Whose look was my rebirth - a single glance!
Through endless time shall I not meet with you?
(Baudelaire 1952:63)
The flâneur’s shock, described as a lighting-flash, comes from his gaze being returned. The woman, instead of being a passive member of the surrounding crowd, establishes a gaze of her own when she looks up and at the flâneur. When she turns her gaze to him, the flâneur experiences a mutual encounter, making him the object in the encounter. The female passer-by is an unnerving presence in the city of Baudelaire’s flâneur because she challenges the superiority of the flâneur, her gaze places her as an equal of the flâneur.

Walter Benjamin analysed ‘To a passer-by’, in Charles Baudelaire: a Lyrical Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1983). He does not, however, recognise her as an urban observer herself, but rather focuses on her attraction for the narrator-poet. For Benjamin, the meaning of the poem lies in the idea that ‘this very crowd brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates. The delight of the urban poet is love — not at first sight, but at last sight’ (25). Benjamin thus fails to recognise the female passer-by as a parallel to the flâneur, but considers her only as an erotic object.

Janet Wolff also notes the female passer-by in her article, but she does not believe her to be a sufficient manifestation of female flânerie:

What is missing in this literature [of modernity] is any account of life outside the public realm, of the experience of ‘the modern’ in its private manifestations, and also of the very different nature of the experience of those women who did appear in the public arena: a poem written by ‘la femme passante’ about her encounter with Baudelaire, perhaps. (45)

Wolff even suggests that the female passer-by might be a prostitute, as ‘we may also ask whether a ‘respectable’ woman, in the 1850s would have met the gaze of a strange man’ (42). However, as Parsons has pointed out, the extreme shock the narrator experiences at her look ‘seems at odds with the common sight of the prostitute’, and furthermore, her ‘dark mourning attire prevents the identification of her as a prostitute’ (2000:73). Wolff’s refusal of the female passer-by as a flâneuse is based on her argument that there could not possibly be a flâneuse in the nineteenth-century city, because of women’s restricted access to the urban environment. However, that argument is based on a rigid a premise and leads to a complete refusal of the possibility of female flânerie.
The female passer-by’s importance lies in the fact that she cannot easily be placed in one of the categories of Baudelaire’s city, such as the prostitute, the widow or the lesbian, and thus cannot be controlled. She cannot, Parsons has pointed out, be ‘placed in the familiarized city of the male flâneur’ (2000:4). Rather than deny that female flânerie could exist in the nineteenth-century city, a more useful approach is to focus on its manifestations that do exist. Using this approach, the female passer-by becomes significant and her presence in the city of Baudelaire becomes the starting point for what we can call the development of the flâneuse. As explored in the third chapter of this dissertation, she forms an important link between Baudelaire’s Paris and the interwar London of Virginia Woolf: we come across her again in Mrs. Dalloway, in the unknown woman Peter Walsh follows in the streets.
2. Private and Public Spheres in *Mrs. Dalloway*

‘Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself’ (Woolf 1996:5)

This chapter explores the gendered division of private and public spheres and how they are represented in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Following the opening lines, quoted above, the novel starts with Clarissa Dalloway’s walk in London on a sunny day in June. While Clarissa’s walk portrays her as a flânerie in certain ways, this chapter will demonstrate how her relationship with the city is in fact highly ambivalent. Born in the 1870s, Clarissa is not entirely free from the inhibitions experienced by women in the urban environment throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. By exploring Clarissa’s character, we encounter a number of the Victorian ideals of femininity that linked women to the home and thereby excluded them from the public sphere of society.

The dichotomy of private and public spheres is central to the exploration of female flânerie and women’s strong link with the private sphere has led critics to argue that female flânerie was altogether impossible in the nineteenth century. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, Janet Wolff based her article on the impossibility of female flânerie, ‘The Invisible Flâneuse’, on women’s exclusion from the public sphere. While this dissertation does not exclude female flânerie in some form during the nineteenth century, it is clear that women’s increased access to the public sphere is essential for a new flâneuse to be born, one that corresponds to the Baudelairian flâneur.

In a historical context, women’s association with the private sphere of society and their exclusion from the public sphere has prevented women from gaining power to the same extent as men. Anna Snaith (2003) has called the dichotomy a ‘conceptual justification for various practises of patriarchal oppression’ (9). She uses the example of classical Greece, where the division between the private and public sphere was decisive and society was based on this division and on the power of men over women and slaves. Women were ‘characterized by their maternal role […] [which] deemed them unfit for participation in public debate’ (8). Similar versions of this argument then kept many nineteenth-century British women ‘trapped in the private home. Biological and moral degeneracy was feared if women entered the public sphere’ (8).¹ As Snaith has noted,
various texts from the end of the nineteenth century use discourse that links woman with the home so that they merge into one, the home being, like the woman, ‘a fortress to be guarded, composed of a virtue which must not be tainted’ (17). Fears and anxieties concerning women’s increased access to the public realm were evident from the end of nineteenth century and especially with the rise of the New Woman, as explored in the next chapter.

As Snaith has pointed out, it was not until the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth that British women became significantly present in the public realm, thereby challenging ‘the deep-rooted association in nineteenth-century cultural discourse of women with the private sphere and men with the public’ (16). The first part of the nineteenth century, in fact, was characterised by the separation of home and work, with women generally inhabiting the former:

The development of industrial capitalism, and the replacement of home production with factory manufacturing meant that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the home became important as a place apart from the competition of the industrial economy [...] It was a place of ease and comfort provided by women for men. (Snaith 2003:16-17)

Women’s status as home-makers and caretakers for their husbands and children is embodied in ‘The Angel in the House’, a concept derived from the title of a nineteenth-century poem. The concept epitomises the Victorian ideal of womanhood; a woman who is modest and selfless, a devoted mother and submissive to her husband. Besides depriving women of independent will, the concept links femininity strongly to domesticity and the private sphere. Woolf herself satirised this ideal Victorian woman in her essay ‘Professions for Women’:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it — in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own. (2003)
The end of the nineteenth century saw more women working outside the home, allowing them more access to the public sphere. As well as employment, increased consumerism and political involvement were also factors in giving women access to the public realm of the city (Snaith 2003:16). Although, as Snaith has pointed out, employment for women at the time was largely bound to schools and local governments, and therefore somewhat an extension of their role as caretakers and homemakers, the change was important in challenging the period’s private/public dichotomy. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, further advances in women’s employment opportunities came about during the First World War and with the rise of the New Woman.

As a female writer writing in the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf would have been highly aware of the significance of women’s increased access to public spaces. Her attention to the private and public spheres is apparent in that the terms recur throughout her writings, in various contexts, where she reworks them and questions them (Snaith 2003:1).

As critics have pointed out, the dichotomy of public and private spheres is central in Mrs. Dalloway. Susan Squier (1985) has noted how the novel sets up an opposition of the private, domestic world of women like Clarissa Dalloway, and the public, professional world of men like Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway (93). In the novel, Woolf explores this gendered division of spheres, as well as challenging this binary opposition. She does this by contrasting how different people in the novel experience the urban space. Each person’s experience of the city reveals to us something about their character, as well as about the society at large.

Through Clarissa’s eyes, we see the city as a bright, lively place:

the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (6)

The city is bustling with life and Clarissa drinks it all in. She feels a part of the city, it is the city where her forefathers lived and where she has lived for over twenty years. At first, Clarissa’s relationship with the city might seem to suggest a flâneuse who strolls the streets in her own right. She deeply enjoys walking in the city: ‘I love walking in
London [...] Really, it’s better than walking in the country’ (8). However, Clarissa’s flânerie shows many of the obstacles women face as flâneuses. While Clarissa enjoys walking the streets, she is very conscious of herself and her appearance, as is revealed when she runs into her childhood friend, Hugh Whitbread; all of a sudden she feels girlish and insecure, and ‘oddly conscious at the same time of her hat’ (8). Ironically, Clarissa’s feeling of belonging in the city is mainly connected to her forefathers; it is the city in which ‘her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges’ (7). Passing Bond Street, she stops in the shop in which ‘her father had bought his suits for fifty years’ (13); rather than having her own place in the it, Clarissa’s love of the city and its streets is largely bound to her forefathers. Throughout the novel, Clarissa repeatedly defines herself in terms of other people; she belongs in the city only as the wife of Richard Dalloway or as a descendant of Londoners.

Susan Squier (1985) has noted that Clarissa’s walk through London shows her lack of ability to distinguish herself from the environment; she cannot distinguish internal occurrences from external ones, cannot distinguish ‘the pause between heartbeats from the silence before Big Ben strikes, the heart beating from the bell ringing’ (96). Her inability to distinguish herself from the environment marks her as ‘a classic product of patriarchal society’ (98). Her lack of a fixed identity is the result of a society in which women’s main role in life is that of being a wife and a mother. As a woman in her fifties, having fulfilled those roles — her daughter now grown up, she is overwhelmed by a feeling of emptiness:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen, unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (Woolf 1996:13)

The ‘progress with the rest of them’ is the progress of growing old and the slow walk towards death. While her husband has a career ahead of him, Clarissa, although only in her early fifties, is overwhelmed by her loss of purpose.

Being from a generation which judged a lady ‘by her shoes and by her gloves’, Clarissa has learned to value herself not in terms of herself, but as an ‘accessory, as a consort’ (Squier 1985:100). She defines herself in terms of being good at knowing
people and at social relations; sending letters and gifts to the right people, throwing parties, all in the interest of her husband’s political career. When Peter Walsh calls her ‘the perfect hostess’, it upsets her because she knows that he is right — her regret for the past comes from knowing that she has lost her own identity by her marriage. Woolf further asserts the notion of the ideal Victorian woman in the description of Doctor Bradshaw’s wife. Mrs. Bradshaw embodies all the qualities of the period’s femininity: ‘[S]he embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son’ (110), then, slowly, broke under her husband’s power: ‘It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his’ (111). The quick insight that Woolf gives us into the Doctor’s wife mirrors Clarissa’s status as the traditional Victorian wife, and what Peter Walsh calls her ‘waste of spirit’ on Richard Dalloway. With the characters of Clarissa and Mrs. Bradshaw, Woolf draws on the representations of the ideal, Victorian womanhood; ‘The Angel in the House’.

Rachel Bowlby (1997) has noted how Woolf sets up Clarissa and Elizabeth, mother and daughter, to parallel each other in terms of certain life events. Elizabeth is in her eighteenth year in the novel, the same age as Clarissa is in the earliest memories the novel describes. Clarissa’s homoerotic relationship with Sally Seaton in her youth reflects that of Elizabeth with her history tutor Miss Kilman. Finally, Clarissa’s vacillation between Richard and Peter in her youth mirrors Elizabeth’s vacillation between her mother’s will on the one hand, who tries to push her into social life, and Miss Kilman’s will on the other, who tries to push her increasingly to religious life. Clarissa’s main concern for her daughter is whether she will marry well, and she worries that Elizabeth is not more concerned about her appearance:

For it was beginning. Her mother could see that — the compliments were beginning. That she did not care more about it — for instance for her clothes — sometimes worried Clarissa, but perhaps it was as well with all those puppies and guinea pigs about having distemper, and it gave her a charm. (Woolf 1996:149)

Clarissa fails to realise that the changes in women’s realities offer her daughter more options for her future than mere marriage. She fails to understand that Elizabeth is far more interested in a career than in parties and social events.

16
The contrast Woolf sets up between Clarissa and her daughter Elizabeth serves to demonstrate the changes in women’s relation to the public, and urban, space. Elizabeth’s confident trip on the omnibus, discussed below, contrasts with Clarissa’s dreamy walk in a way that shows a definite shift between those two generations. While Clarissa relates to the nineteenth century’s ideal domestic woman, Elizabeth represents the break in the private/public dichotomy and the possibilities newly opened up for women in the urban environment.
3. The New Flâneuse

‘And every profession is open to the women of your generation’ (Woolf 1996:150)

While the social changes in Britain at the turn of the century are too complex to discuss here in detail, there are two particular factors that help explain the changes in women’s roles and their relationship with the urban environment. Firstly, the rise of the New Woman, a social and literal phenomenon starting from the 1880s, and secondly, the effects of the First World War that pushed British women out into the public job-market more than ever before. The two factors are of course related and are not created in a void. The rise of the New Woman and women’s increased access to the work market exist within the larger context of women’s emancipation and the suffragette movement that in Britain started in the 1870s.

The first part of this chapter will explore how the First World War changed the nature of women’s presence in the public sphere, and how this is reflected in the character of Elizabeth Dalloway. The second part will then go on to explore how the New Woman challenged the conventional gender roles of the nineteenth century thus paving the way for the new flâneuse we encounter in Woolf’s novel. In Mrs. Dalloway we find signs of the New Woman in Elizabeth, but also in the female passer-by that Peter Walsh pursues in the street. This woman links back to the female passer-by in Baudelaire’s poem.

3.1. The First World War

The changes in London society in the years following the war are reflected in Peter Walsh’s thoughts as he walks the streets of London for the first time in five years:

Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different […] And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff, and making up in public. (80)

Having left for India the year the war ended, Peter’s fresh view of London society underlines the change of the times; women’s putting on make-up in public is foreign and new to him.
Historian Charles Loch Mowat (1955) describes the war’s effect in England and the subsequent change in society:

No man of middle age and comfortable means, contemplating the condition of things in the early twenties, would agree that the postwar England bore much resemblance to the country he had known before the war. The old order had passed away. (201)

The war shook British society and challenged traditional values in its every aspect. In particular, traditional gender roles were questioned following the war, and the nineteenth-century dichotomy of private and public spheres was challenged.

The influence of the war in relation to women’s emancipation, both in legal and social terms, has been stressed by many critics. Susan Grayzel (2001) has explored the effect of the First World War on women and notes that ‘the war brought about tangible evidence of a changed world where women could wear khaki uniforms, drive trains, trams and ambulances, and take on industrial tasks previously defined as beyond their capabilities’ (101).

Women’s contribution to the work force during the war was significant to their status in society, as it established their competency to work in the public job-market and helped weaken the largely unchallenged link between women and domesticity. With approximately 5.7 million British men serving in the war (Bates 2008:432), women were needed, if only temporarily, to take over their jobs. Success in the war depended heavily on women’s labour. They entered into occupations that never before included women, such as wartime factories, but also ‘banks and places of business and government as clerk, typists and secretaries. They were found running trams and buses, delivering milk’ (Grayzel 2001:27). The need for women in the job-market brought them increasingly out of the home environment and into the public world of decision making. The war gave women freedom in the public space and at the same time offered them an opportunity to redefine themselves as ‘modern women’ (Bates 2008:435). The ‘modern woman’, or the corresponding ‘New Woman’, decisively parted from the Victorian ‘Angel of the House’ in terms of her relationship with the urban environment.

In the aftermath of the war, partly because of women’s contribution towards it, came an ever increasing push towards changes in women’s roles, both social and political. Many countries, including Germany, the United States and Britain, saw
women gaining basic voting rights in the years after the war. In Britain, laws were passed in 1918 that gave women over thirty the vote, as long as they were householders or married to householders. Although this victory was only partial, and left out many women, it was still a milestone in British women’s emancipation. It was in 1928, only three years after *Mrs. Dalloway* was published, that women gained full voting rights, equal to those of men. Of course, this boost to women’s legal rights after the war did not come out of nowhere; on the contrary, it was a peak of a social and political movement in which the issues of women’s voting rights were already in the forefront of politics in 1914 (Grayzel 2001). The war, then, gave women’s voices increased weight and helped bring forward the goals that the women’s movement had been fighting for.

Just as crucial as the legal advances British women saw during the period, was their increased presence within the job-market and their access to previously male only professions. Although it was considered a temporary situation — at the end of the war women were expected to return to their jobs as mainly housewives and mothers — some of the changes of the period altered women’s situation for good. Many professions opened up permanently for women during the war and in its aftermath, including law and civil service (Grayzel 2001:106). Miss Kilman’s words to Elizabeth: ‘Law, medicine, politics, every profession is open to women of your generation’ (144), reflect the shift that had occurred in women’s career opportunities. Elizabeth’s character serves to show the change in society in those inter-war years, illustrating a modern woman with a desire for independence and an interest in a professional career.

Woolf does not give us much insight into the mind of Elizabeth’s character, Rachel Bowlby points out, but rather lets her stand as a symbol; a symbol for a new generation of women. Through Elizabeth, Woolf ‘examines the impact of the new historical context on the course of women’s development’ (1997:95-96). Elizabeth is seventeen years old and just ‘out’, and throughout the novel people note her youthful beauty: ‘it was beginning. . . . People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies’ (Woolf 1996:148). Clarissa’s friends, Peter and Sally, watch the girl at the party and admire her beauty, although they cannot yet make anything of her personality. Elizabeth herself finds the attention of being ‘out’, tiring. Unlike Clarissa, seventeen-year old Elizabeth does not care for gloves and shoes, or about parties. Her tutor Miss Kilman is a poor, religious woman, suggested in the book to be in love with young Elizabeth. The two women, Clarissa and Miss Kilman, each struggle to influence Elizabeth, each disapproving of
the other’s values. Elizabeth though, is neither interested in being a hostess like her mother, nor does she let Miss Kilman influence her a great deal. Clarissa worries about her daughter’s lack of interest in her appearance, but tells herself it is only ‘a phase’. She fails to understand her daughter who is more fascinated with the idea of having a career than the kind of social events around which her mother’s life revolves.

The nature of the characters’ relationship with London is expressed not only through how they experience it, but also where they go. As Susan Squier has pointed out, the Strand, where Elizabeth goes with the omnibus, was a newly booming commercial and professional centre in the 1920s. The fact that Elizabeth takes a trip there implies her interest in a career and the public sphere of life. Clarissa’s walk in the city starts from her home in Westminster and takes her up Bond Street; an area that traditionally symbols ‘male political and female social power’ (1985:102).

The Strand, with its business and workers, inspires Elizabeth with thoughts of having her own career:

And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane. It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into the Parliament if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand. (150-151)

Woolf stresses the importance of the location itself; it is as if the place itself has the power to change the young girl, to evoke in her an ambition for a career: ‘all because of the Strand’. Elizabeth is fascinated with the seriousness of people working, thinking about important things. Her interest in the business and professional side of the city sets her apart from the other female characters of the novel and relates, rather, to the novel’s male characters, such as Peter Walsh. Peter, walking in London for the first time in five years, is fascinated with the efficiency and seriousness of people: ‘doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable’ (62).

Elizabeth’s interest in a professional career, when contrasted with Clarissa’s social ambitions, stands as a symbol of changed times, of women’s increased access to the public, professional world, until then, largely the dominion of men.
3.2. The New Woman

In the late nineteenth century a new literary and social character came into existence. The New Woman became a cultural icon that embodied the changes that were happening in women’s social reality. She represented a new female lifestyle: life without marriage, children and domestic duties. She was often depicted smoking and/or riding a bicycle, actions that represented her freedom of movement and behaviour. She was a dominant preoccupation for writers and journalists of the period; between 1883 and 1900 over a hundred novels were written about the New Woman (Richardson and Willis 2002:1):

She was called “Novissima”: the New Woman, the Odd Woman, the Wild Woman, and the Superfluous Woman in English novels and periodicals of the 1880’s and 1890’s. A tremendous amount of polemic was wielded against her for choosing not to pursue the conventional bourgeois woman’s career of marriage and motherhood. (Ardis 1990:1)

Challenging Victorian definitions of femininity, the figure of the New Woman caused anxiety and controversy among contemporary society as it was feared she threatened its very foundation; marriage. The discourse surrounding the New Woman at the fin-de-siècle often focused on her supposed excessive sexuality and denial of maternal instinct. The age of marriage gradually increased during the period, as women were entering universities and the job-market more than ever before and single women increasingly sought independence and work in cities.

A contributing factor to the rise of the New Woman was the problem of the so-called ‘redundancy crisis’; in mid-nineteenth-century England there were estimated to be between a half and one million more women than men. Those surplus women were seen to be a great problem for society, as many of them were young women who, was feared, would never marry. The redundancy crisis, worsened by the loss of men in the First World War, was partly responsible for the increased challenge to the separation of spheres and was used by feminists to promote education for girls and insist that women could train for an occupation as an alternative to marriage (Steinbach 2008:397).

In many ways, the New Woman was a specifically urban phenomenon: a result of the circumstances and qualities of a growing metropolitan society (Parsons 2000:82).
She represented an increased female presence in the city. Women’s access to the metropolis was expanding in terms of leisure and employment and the figure of the New Woman embodied these changes. As Deborah Parsons has pointed out, the number of women who actually did go to the city in search of independence was still relatively low, however, ‘their position and ambitions were sufficiently unorthodox to provoke widespread debate and criticism’ (82).

Just as the roots of the New Woman lie in the late nineteenth century, so it can be said that the roots of a ‘new flâneuse’, the one we come across in *Mrs. Dalloway*, can be found at the same time, as the period marks the beginning of what Parsons calls a ‘sustained female presence and observance of the urban environment’ (83). While the New Woman was certainly a fin-de-siècle phenomenon, in that the period’s novelists and journalists were obsessed with her figure, the extent of her real-life manifestations was still relatively small.² Late twentieth-century critics have often divided the phenomenon of the New Woman into two periods: the first covering the 1880s and 1890s, and the second the 1920s and 1930s (Ledger 1997:1). Virginia Woolf was an active writer during the second of these periods, a period characterised by women’s access to urban spaces becoming a common reality. As discussed above, the years after the First World War brought a boost to women’s rights and social status, and it is during those years that the figure of the New Woman became an established social reality. Although she didn’t directly address the figure of the New Woman in her writings, Virginia Woolf, as well as other urban-based writers of the interwar years, certainly responded to the character in her writings.

Elizabeth Dalloway’s independence and interest in a professional career clearly establish her as an example of the New Woman. The description of her trip with the omnibus stresses the novelty and the significance of Elizabeth’s character and her relationship with the city:

Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on the top. The impetuous creature — a pirate — started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself, for a pirate it was, reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down

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² Critics have debated to what extent the New Woman was a reality at the fin-de-siècle, and to what extent she existed only as an idea, on the pages of novels and periodicals. See e.g. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (ed.) 2002. *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between. (149)

The confident and competent way in which Elizabeth moves around contrasts greatly with Clarissa’s feelings of invisibility within the city. The likening of Elizabeth to a pirate implies a daring entrance into an unknown territory, and in fact, ‘no Dalloway came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting’ (152). Using words like ‘penetrating’ and ‘squeezing’ in describing Elizabeth’s movements around the Strand, Woolf stresses the masculinity of the space she is moving around in. The description emphasises the way Elizabeth is crossing borders; a young, unmarried woman travelling on her own, in her own right.

Deborah Parsons points out the significance of omnibuses in women’s writing at the turn of the century:

The omnibus, supreme symbol of commercial London, is frequently employed by women writers as an expression of their entry into once restricted public spaces. The bus offers ‘the freedom of London’ as contemporary slogans advertise, as well as a panoramic yet moving view from its top deck, a means of traversing the city that passes through different social and class-defined spaces, independence amidst the crowd, and shelter from both the elements and the appropriating gaze of others. (97)

The motorised omnibus was a recent phenomenon in Woolf’s lifetime; the transition from horse-drawn omnibuses to motorised ones was in full stride around 1912 (McNees 2010:31). Around that time, new, independent omnibuses, generally called ‘Pirates’, gained ground in the city. Woolf’s likening of Elizabeth on the bus to a pirate therefore has a double meaning; it portrays her as a daring figure and at the same time juxtaposes her with the omnibus, this new symbol of freedom and modernity. The movements of the bus are united with Elizabeth’s movements: ‘and to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body in the fawn-coloured coat responded freely like a rider’ (Woolf 1996:150). Eleanor McNees has noted that in the omnibus journey ‘the bus itself has metamorphosed into a pirate ship steering Elizabeth on a forbidden route’ (2010:35). Indeed, Elizabeth’s trip is doubly ‘forbidden’ as she is not only crossing traditional gender borders but borders of class as well. Omnibuses were mostly a middle-class
mode of transportation at the time, as reflected in Clarissa’s revealingly snobbish thoughts: ‘The British middle classes sitting sideways on the tops of omnibuses with parcels and umbrellas, yes, even furs on a day like this, were, she thought, more ridiculous, more unlike anything there has ever been than one could conceive’ (20).

The ‘forbidden route’ on the omnibus provides Elizabeth with a moment of freedom and space for her thoughts. Having just escaped from Miss Kilman’s stifling admiration, Elizabeth, instead of going home to her mother’s party, impulsively boards the omnibus. The trip gives her a sense of freedom; freedom from Miss Kilman and from her mother’s social ambitions: ‘And did Elizabeth give one thought to poor Miss Kilman who loved her without jealousy, to whom she had been a fawn to in the open, a moon in a glade? She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious’ (150). Flânerie as a mode of escape and of gaining freedom links directly back to Benjamin’s flâneur, whose flânerie works as a ‘means to escape the dullness of domestic life’ (Tester 1994:2).

Elizabeth’s experience of the city also links her to Peter Walsh, the story’s most obvious flâneur. Peter, having walked from Clarissa’s house in Westminster after an emotional reunion with her, finds himself standing in Trafalgar Square. The anonymity of the crowds gives him a feeling of freedom and youth:

He had escaped! was utterly free — as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding. I haven’t felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was ... (58-59)

Throughout the novel, Woolf endows Peter’s character with the dominant qualities of a leisured flâneur; a simultaneous attitude of rebellion and detachment and a sense of freedom in the streets (Parsons 2000:73).

In a manner typical of the Baudelairian flâneur, Peter is depicted objectifying women in the urban environment when he pursues an unknown woman in the streets. The scene is in part a parody of a typical Baudelairian scene: it mirrors the poet’s encounter with the female passer-by in his poem ‘To a passer-by’. Woolf reworks the interaction of the flâneur with the female passer-by in the scene where Peter spots a beautiful woman as he is aimlessly wandering the streets:
But she’s extraordinarily attractive, he thought, as, walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, came a young woman who, as she passed Gordon’s statue, seemed, Peter Walsh thought (susceptible as he was), to shed veil after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet; black, but enchanting.

Peter highly eroticises the chase, imagining her to single him out, choosing him from the crowd. As he pursues her Peter fetishises her clothes, noting ‘her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows’ (60). The scene shows the flâneur exert his superiority and ownership over the woman. In a Baudelairian manner, Peter attempts to categorise her: ‘Was she, he wondered as he moved, respectable?’ (59). Just like the narrator in Baudelaire’s poem, Peter objectifies the woman, attempting to place her in a category. Crucial to the idea of the female passer-by is her resistance to being defined as a type — prostitute, widow, etc. — and as a result she is ‘the most perfect reflection of the characteristics of the urban narrator-observer’ (Parsons 2000:73).

The irony of the scene lies in the fact that even while Peter plays out his fantasy with the woman, he all the while knows it is not real: ‘it was half made up, as he knew very well; invented, this escapade with the girl; made up, as one makes up the better part of life, he thought’ (61). Just as Peter is enjoying the fantasy, thinking of himself as an ‘adventurer, reckless, [...] a romantic buccaneer’ (60), the chase ends abruptly, ending the fantasy. The woman turns into a little street, stops and takes up a key from her bag ‘and with one look in his direction, but not at him, one look that bade farewell, summed up the whole situation and dismissed it triumphantly, for ever’ (60). By ending the scene with showing Peter as the passive figure of the pair, as he is helpless to stop the woman from disappearing, Woolf gives the otherwise familiar scene a twist. As Parsons points out, the triumphant woman’s key to her house indicates her independence and own place in the city (2000:74).

By stressing the woman’s independence, Woolf plays with the idea of the female passer-by. In Baudelaire’s Paris, the female passer-by was an important manifestation of female flânerie in the nineteenth century and by giving her a new life as an early
twentieth-century New Woman, Woolf exerts and emphasises change that has occurred in women’s relationship with the urban environment.
Conclusion

In this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate the way in which *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays a changed relationship between women and the city. With the rise of the New Woman and women’s increased access to the job-market, the streets were opening up; women were obtaining their place in the city.

Clarissa Dalloway’s character brings up some of the restrictions women faced in the urban environment at that time, especially concerning the traditional association of women with the private, domestic sphere. Although Clarissa’s walk in London shows her enjoying the city and experience some sort of freedom within it, her walk also reveals her insecurities and lack of an independent position within the city.

In contrast to Clarissa, Elizabeth Dalloway and the mysterious female passer-by demonstrate an unapologetic, independent female presence in the city. Elizabeth’s fascination with having a professional career reflects women’s increased access to the public sphere of life, and places her as a manifestation of the New Woman, and, as a flâneuse. Travelling alone in the city provides her with a feeling of liberation and an escape from the domestic life her mother lives.

The female passer-by symbolises a stable female presence in the city. She appears in Baudelaire’s poem as an unnerving figure, an exception from the otherwise established categories of women. Her gaze and her resistance to being categorised present a challenge to the male-dominated city. When the female passer-by appears again in Virginia Woolf’s novel, in London between the wars, she has become an established social reality; she is a manifestation of the New Woman who has her own place in the city.

As an early twentieth-century female writer, who also loved to walk in London, Woolf would have been highly aware of the changes occurring in women’s relationship with the public, urban sphere. The subject of private and public spheres was central to her, both in terms of finding her private space for writing – a room of one’s own – and in having access to the public life of the city, in which she drew her inspiration for her writing.

There are abundant accounts of flânerie in Woolf’s essays and diaries that describe her intense relationship with London. The enjoyment she had from her walks in the city, and the ease she felt on the streets, suggests the writer herself as a flâneuse and relates back to the Baudelairian flâneur, who leisurely strolls the streets and drinks in the environment. In 1924 she wrote in her diary:
London is enchanting. I step out upon a tawny coloured magic carpet, it seems, and get carried into beauty without raising a finger […] One of these days I will write about London, and how it takes up the private life and carries it on, without any effort. (2003:61)

Woolf never followed up on her idea of writing a book about London but, I believe, *Mrs. Dalloway* comes closest to being that book, as it portrays women crossing the borders between the private and public, and in doing so obtain a place in the city.
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