

**Solitude, Sociality and Self-Concept in
*Mrs Dalloway and Good Morning, Midnight***



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1. Introduction

This thesis will be an analysis of two Modernist texts - Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) - as a means of exploring how the contrasting states of solitude and sociality influence self-concept and consequently self-knowledge. As both these texts engage with concepts of selfhood amid themes of social engagement and social isolation, they make ideal candidates for an investigation of this kind. Moreover, given that these texts both have modernist traits, their literary context is important too. Modernism was a literary movement which engaged seriously with the science of psychology, a science which has much to say about the creation, maintenance and interpretation of the self, particularly in terms of its being shaped by interactions with others.

The primary aims of this thesis are, firstly, to show how the texts reveal that perceptions of self can be moulded by these contrasting states of sociality and solitude, and, secondly, to highlight the novels' depictions of the benefits and consequences of each state. The reason it is worth considering these subjects, particularly as represented by a literary movement which so carefully scrutinised the dichotomies of perception and reality, self and other, is because the perceptions of self these states generate can manifest themselves in real-world behaviour and essentially influence self-creation. This can have enlightening or devastating repercussions for a person's sense of self and wellbeing, and where the mark falls on this sliding scale depends not only on how this solitude and sociality is experienced, but also on the experience and degree of the interaction between the two states. Further, recent work in the field of psychology has revealed that the ignorance we have of our own motives, intentions, feelings and capacities is much vaster than we realise. Overcoming this ignorance by finding the best path towards accurate self-insight may circumvent much hardship and suffering by revealing to people what they really want and need (instead of what they feel they are supposed to want and need based on faulty self-perception).

Before moving any further, it would be pertinent to define some of the key terms used in this thesis. Solitude, to start, does not mean simply an absence of physical company. It is possible to find solitude in even the most crowded of places; consider the sense of peace which can be found by passing time in the arrivals terminal of a busy airport. Neither does solitude mean the state of being alone. One's aloneness can be an excruciating source of mental anguish in certain conditions, and this is what separates the concept of solitude from that of loneliness (a state which is nonetheless still important to this discussion). Instead, my definition of solitude for this investigation is the condition of finding oneself with the space and opportunity to sit with and reflect on one's own self, one's own thoughts, feelings, memories and other defining features, uninterrupted by social obligations or the overwhelming compulsion to seek company. Because of the use of free indirect discourse in many Modernist texts, a style which allows the reader insight into the streams-of-consciousness of characters, it is possible to analyse the characters' thoughts when they are in this solitary state and assess how this impacts their perceptions of themselves.

Sociality, on the other hand, is the state of being social with others. This can be in a group, such as at a party or a meeting, or it can be in a one-to-one setting. In any social case, the mind is engaged in the mentally taxing business of social interaction, of receiving, processing, synthesising and producing information. If the conscious deliberation of the self is possible at all when in this state, it must be of a very different sort to that offered by the quietude of solitude, and thus the outcomes for the self of such opposing states are worth investigating. Naturally, we can expect there to be some overlap with regards to how these states impose upon self-perception: when in states of reflection during time alone, studies have shown that, "like a reflex", we recall or invent times when we were social (Lieberman, 20), and these dwelt-upon social events can be integrated into our interpretations of self. And when spending time with other people, the judgements we have made about ourselves when in solitude may impact how we relate to others, providing further material for self-assessment. This overlap and interaction between the states will be key to the discussion.

Finally, the term self-concept is intended to convey how one interprets, understands and defines one's own identity, bound and shaped by all its physical, emotional, mental and intellectual contours, and all its unique preferences, intuitions, feelings and behaviours. Self-concept, as the term is used here, refers less to one's ability to recognise oneself *as* distinct from others than to *how* one is distinct, in what ways one is distinct, from others. It is the collection of beliefs about one's individual nature, rather than the sense of separateness one feels from one's environment, which is being investigated in this paper. The terms 'self-perception' and 'self-understanding' will be used interchangeably with self-concept. A further key issue relates to whether or not the definitions generated by self-concept in these opposing states are an accurate reflection of reality. In fact, two secondary questions I wish to answer over the course of this investigation are, firstly, how solitude and sociality might increase or decrease one's attainment of accurate self-knowledge (where accurate self-knowledge is a form of self-perception that perfectly matches reality), and, secondly, whether such flawless attainment, based on perfect historical accuracy, is possible or even desirable.

The almost limitless number of outcomes of the experience and interaction of the opposing states of sociality and solitude naturally means that there is great variability in self-perception as generated by these states. Such variability suggests that a psychological character analysis of particular characters from the novels would make an effective method of approach in conducting this research, ideally with characters who can show the effects of being on different parts of the spectrum of states. In other words, it would be useful to see how the novels' characters experience a high degree of solitude as opposed to a high degree of sociality (and as opposed to a balance between the two) in order to observe how these states impact their views of their identities. To this end, I aim to investigate certain characters, selected for their extensive range of experience on the spectrum aforementioned, in terms of their personal relationships with sociality and solitude, and how their lives are positively and negatively influenced by each. I expect to see a wide variety of outcomes since the characters I will be selecting each carry vastly different personality traits, back-

grounds, beliefs, circumstances, and perceptions of what it means to be alone or with others. Works of literary criticism, psychology, and philosophy will all be drawn upon in conducting this research.

The first novel I will analyse in this regard, composing the subject of my first chapter, is Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. The two characters I have selected for my character analyses are Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh. The primary aim of this chapter will be to use this novel to analyse an influential theory of self-construction envisioned in the early nineteenth century by Charles Cooley: the looking-glass self. By assessing the various social and solitary experiences of these characters, it should be possible to see how closely their process of identity building aligns with Cooley's theory, a theory which posits that we rely on others to provide us with a definition of who we are. Through their interactions with and private thoughts about one another and themselves, Clarissa and Peter should provide useful insight into how much the opinions of others actually contribute to the self-concept and how well the resulting ideas about the self align with reality.

The subject of chapter two will be Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*, and it is here that I will take an opposite path to chapter one and unearth the darker side of both solitude and sociality in terms of their influence on self-understanding. By following the path of Sasha Jansen in and out of her Parisian hotel rooms, I hope to reveal how blurred and indistinct the boundary can be between solitude and loneliness, a hazard which, if unnoticed, can leave one unconsciously ravenous for company and thus vulnerable to exploitation. The form this exploitation takes in the novel is, in large measure, roped to self-perception, and a number of the protagonist's internal struggles appear related to the battle for ownership of self-definition and personal narrative. As will be highlighted, this is an extremely high-stakes battle, with consequences for the victor and the vanquished, for the definer and the defined, and for the human condition itself, which are difficult to overstate.

In the third chapter, I will investigate the role of memory in the construction of self-concept. Since both novels feature characters who frequently move back and forth between past and present, they provide excellent models in this regard. This chapter will detail how and why we use memory

to help us build a story around our life and, in the process, give it a sense of structure, congruity and direction. However, in analysing this process, the dangers and drawbacks of such an approach will also become evident. Through a close reading of Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, the first half of this chapter will demonstrate the compulsive and constrictive nature of narrative building and reveal the importance of placing an interpretive lens on this narrative in order to imbue it with meaning. The second half will take these findings and discuss them in the context of *Mrs Dalloway*. An analysis of Clarissa's party will be a critical feature of this section. By analysing how the form of the party can be seen as allegorical of self-formation, we will be better able to see the influence of sociality and solitude on self-concept. This, in turn, will lead to important conclusions regarding the limitations singular narratives pose to the self and, consequently, the liberating value of constructing a multiplicity of narratives.

It is worth highlighting that both of the novels studied were written by female authors, and throughout each of the main chapters I intend to touch upon the role of gender in this ever-shifting interaction between sociality, solitude and self-perception. Although my focus will primarily be on the psychological aspects of the novels' characters, it would be both difficult and unwise to ignore the role gender plays in stories which are so concerned with such gender-influenced themes as society, social interaction, self-and-other, and self-perception.

Having analysed the two novels in this fashion, I will draw conclusions as to my findings on how solitude and sociality impact our perceptions of our selves, for better and for worse. From these conclusions, I hope to provide a clear picture of what these authors suggest to be the most fruitful path to travel between the states of sociality and solitude so as to converge at a point of accurate and beneficent self-concept.

2. *Mrs Dalloway* and The Looking-Glass Self

The literary critic Alex Zwerdling chose his verbs carefully when he wrote that “Woolf is deeply engaged by the question of how the individual is *shaped* (or *deformed*) by his social environment” (69; emphasis added). The way we are perceived by others, or at least the way we believe we are, can alter, for better and for worse, the very form of our identity as it appears to us. As this chapter aims to show, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel which is sensitive to these alterations, as well as to the process that produces them. By allowing us access to her characters’ thoughts instead of just depicting their behaviour through her use of free indirect discourse, we gain greater insight into what this process might look like on a cognitive level. Although the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* appear more concerned with judging and labelling others than themselves, there are important moments of self-analysis in the novel which reveal the impact of these external judgements on a character’s self-concept.

This is the view of the self known as the looking-glass self, first formulated by Charles Horton Cooley in 1902 in his book *Human Nature and The Social Order*, which postulates that we seek out, accept and internalise the features of our identity based on the judgements of those around us, just as how we accept and internalise the physical features of our bodies from looking into a mirror (Hattie 17). It is important to stress that this looking-glass element is only one component of Cooley’s theory on self-construction, but it is an essential component. Cooley believed that our idea of self is generated via a three-step process. We first imagine how we must appear to an other. Next, we imagine how that appearance is likely to be judged. The final step is the integration of “any idea he [the self] appropriates” (Cooley 183) from these imagined judgements, such as shame or pride, into the self-concept. Sociality gives us, for Cooley, an endless array of opportunities to build our identities by taking information from more and more mirrors, and we “often adopt that reflection - called the *reflected appraisal* - as part of our self-concept” (Wilson 195). In Woolf’s novel, Claris-

sa's thought on seeing Peter standing in the corner at her party represents this concept perfectly, as she feels that, like a mirror, "[h]e made her see herself" (*MD* 184).

Yet Cooley understood and warned of the flaw in this line of self-analysis, in writing that we "live with our eyes upon our reflection, but have no assurance of the tranquility of the waters in which we see it" (141). As will be demonstrated by my analysis of Woolf's characters, the appraisals of others can be deeply flawed for a variety of reasons, all of which can disturb the "tranquility of the waters" we need in order to have an accurate self reflected back at us. Cooley also believed that although we are chiefly guided by the imagined analyses of others, this is not our only method of self-assessment, and he stressed the importance of private reflection in order to flesh out a healthy conception of self: "[we] must be both vigorous and plastic, a nucleus of solid, well-knit private purpose and feeling, guided and nourished by sympathy" (247).

The scene in *Mrs Dalloway* where Peter enters the home of Clarissa, which happens to be the only present-day scene in the novel where these two characters have an extended moment together, provides a useful case study for testing the validity of this concept of the looking-glass self and investigating the effects of an intimate sociality on self-perception. Tellingly, the scene begins with Clarissa hiding her dress before Peter enters the room, "like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy" (43). Although this action does not discredit the idea that we base our self-concept on others' perceptions, it immediately suggests a problem with relying on sociality to provide us with a form of self-concept which is accurate: the version of ourselves which we project onto the social world is usually a modified one, one decreed as appropriate for public viewing. Clarissa is not even aware at this point that it is Peter who is about to enter, but knowing that the unknown guest is "running upstairs ever so quickly" (44), her move to hide her dress indicates the instinctive compulsion we have to share only this social version of our selves. The care she takes to avoid her dress being seen, this dress with the imperfection of a tear, makes even more sense when we con-

sider her almost prideful habit of “never showing a sign of all the other sides of her - faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions” (40).

When Peter does enter, the first thought that comes to his mind upon seeing Clarissa is that “[s]he’s grown older” (44). Interestingly, this validates Clarissa’s belief earlier in the novel about what Peter would think of her if he saw her now: “What would he think, she wondered, when he came back? That she had grown older? Would he say that, or *would she see him thinking* [...] that she had grown older?” (39, emphasis added). Clarissa appears to have interpreted the mirror’s reflection accurately. It is possible that Peter can see that Clarissa has read his thoughts (as she predicted she might), and under her gaze - “[s]he’s looking at me, he thought” - he feels “a sudden embarrassment coming over him” (44). Within mere seconds of Peter’s abrupt entry into the room, mirrors appear to have been erected and reflections reflecting reflections are coming into view: Clarissa is correctly interpreting Peter’s gaze on herself, while Peter is confusedly feeling the heat of Clarissa’s gaze on himself. Regardless of whether the looking-glass self is an accurate way of describing the way people conceptualise their selves, it certainly seems to be the case that they search for mirrors when in social settings, as the reflections these mirrors generate help them to orient themselves in that unique social environment.

This embarrassment that Peter experiences also indicates the vulnerability one can feel when the self is under scrutiny. An instinctive reaction to vulnerability is to put up a shield or to draw out a sword, and sometimes both. In terms of defence, one method utilised by both characters seems to be to regain control of the situation by interpreting an absence of change in the other. “Exactly the same”, thinks Clarissa of Peter, proceeding to justify this claim with a list of only his physical attributes: “the same queer look; the same check suit” (44). Peter pulls his knife from his pocket, and “[t]hat’s so like him, she thought” (44). Peter’s view of Clarissa is no less reductive, privately condemning her for “mending her dress as usual [...] here she’s been sitting all the time I’ve been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties” (44). By judging each other to be exactly

the same, to have not changed in the slightest, each character feels a greater sense of control over the situation. By believing they can anticipate how the other will act, they can assure themselves that their expectations will be met, that the future can be known, that they will not be blindsided and left defenceless, and that they can act in a fashion appropriate to the context.

This reactive view of one another as unchanged and somewhat one-dimensional, and therefore knowable and thus manageable, is, as one might expect, not a view which they have of themselves. Clarissa's understanding is that "her self" is something which "Peter hardly knew now" (48). Moments prior to this, she remembers her distress at Peter for "always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used" (47–48). Importantly, this sentence is followed by the revealing "But I too [used to feel that way], she thought" (48), lending credence to the idea that our conceptions of our selves are strongly influenced by the perceived views of others. However, this refers to Clarissa's past. In Peter's long absence, Clarissa has been able to effect a more generous view of her self, and although Peter's surprise entrance has left Clarissa's self exposed "like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected [...] so that anyone can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her", she is capable of "summon[ing] to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short [...] all to come about her and beat off the enemy" (48). She recruits her current self-concept to fight off the old self-concept, fearful that Peter will once again designate a definition of her self for her.

This calls forth the language of militarisation, beginning with the Queen, her guards, and the enemy. The next paragraph takes this battle-coloured language further, demonstrating the offensively-minded side of the vulnerable self, or the weaponisation of the self. This is the self employed as a sword with which to attack the other and resist other-definition:

So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting by side on the blue sofa,

challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. He assembled from different quarters all sorts of things; praise; his career at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done a job. (48)

Peter calls to his defence (and offence) aspects of his self which might be defined as material: his career, his marriage, things he has done. As can be seen above, Clarissa's list is very similar. It appears that under these heated conditions, the self which each character holds up for inspection - or, looked at from the offensive angle, forces the other to behold - is heavily skewed in the direction of their physical achievements. In neither case do these achievements extend to the immaterial: to their personal growth in terms of their character, their mental strength, the overcoming of their inner battles, to say nothing of their more neutral and negative attributes. It is as if these sorts of attributes must be tucked away when one is called upon in a social setting to reflect upon one's self. This may be why Peter does not fully embrace his list of self-defining factors as indicative of who he really is. Having assembled these powers to form a weaponised self, he experiences "the feeling at once frightening and extremely exhilarating of being rushed through the air on the shoulders of people he could no longer see" (48). These "people he could no longer see" could be the features by which he defined his self in the past (hence "no longer"), but now seem distant, obscured by the passage of time, experience and relocation. They are employed here to present an image of authority and success, and thus elevate him to an exhilaratingly heightened position, but he cannot truly identify with these attributes. In the emotional panic of defending and fortifying this self, he loses a sense of what that self is. The lack of accurate judgement each character has of the other extends to a lack of accurate understanding of themselves. Cooley's "tranquility of the waters" is disturbed in both directions.

Peter's lack of accurate self-perception comes to a head when, after revealing to Clarissa that he is in love, he is "to his utter surprise, suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable forces" and he breaks down in tears (50). It would appear that Peter's grip on self-concept is weakened, made

hazy, when he is compelled to defend and present it, and this is something which only happens in social settings. Rather than being in control of the moment, riding into battle atop the unshakeable shoulders of core identity features and thus able to view the battleground from a stable heightened vantage point, he is so overcome by the exhilaration and fright of being carried forward by rusting, transient, possibly invented aspects of his self that he lacks sufficient awareness of his own emotional state.

In contrast, Clarissa seems to have a firmer grip on the situation and on her self. Admittedly, she too turns to extremes of judgement, believing for a moment that Richard has “left me; I am alone for ever” (51), and this is part of what Deborah Guth refers to when she writes of Clarissa’s private world being “itself a robe, a form of self-dramatisation created for herself and duplicating rather than contradicting the somewhat artificial external life she leads” (21). However, rather than being stuck with “a self she creates for her own edification, a story she tells herself and lives out in the privacy of the soul” (21), as Guth believes, I would argue this disproportionate reaction may be what shocks her into a realisation of the performative aspect of the two selves on show. She, for a moment, stands outside the story. After watching Peter looking out of the window and momentarily imagining him about to embark on “some great voyage”, the

next moment, it was as if the five acts of the play that had been very exciting and moving were now over [...] and, as a woman gathers her things together, her coat, her gloves, her opera-glasses, and gets up to go out of the theatre into the street, she rose from the sofa and went to Peter. (*MD* 51)

She acquires the capacity to see through the theatrics of two performative, defensive selves, while Peter goes on with his poetics, believing Clarissa “still had the power as she came across the room, to make the moon, which he detested, rise at Bourton on the terrace in the summer sky” (52). Peter follows this melodramatic thought by seizing Clarissa by the shoulders and asking if she is happy, an act which would not look at all out of place if it happened on the stage.

What we can gather from this scene, cut short by the entrance of Elizabeth and, simultaneously, the striking of Big Ben, is that one of the major obstacles to accurate self-perception which sociality must confront is the performative nature of the self in certain social settings. Granted, this particular scene shows two characters in a rather unorthodox situation: they have something of a romantic history and have not seen each other in a long time. Emotions and adrenaline are bound to enflame the moment and obscure clear-headedness. Nonetheless, if Peter's claim that "in some ways no one understood him, felt with him, as Clarissa did" (50) is valid, then we should expect to see Peter gaining at least a slightly improved understanding of his identity by being around the woman who understands him better than anyone else. Yet considering Clarissa's judgement that one of Peter's main flaws is "his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling," (50) then Peter's claim may not hold up to scrutiny.

The dramaturgical model of the self is worth investigating further, since, as we have seen, it is Clarissa who had the ability to see through the theatrics of the encounter, while Peter seemed stuck in the performance. In fact, if we follow Peter during a time of solitude, we discover a similar problem. This is after Peter leaves Clarissa and is walking through London alone. On the way, he begins stalking a woman he does not know, and as he does so, he starts inventing her personality in his mind, "for one must invent, must allow oneself a little diversion" (58). But it is not only this woman he applies imaginary attributes to; he also thinks up rather generous attributes for himself. He repeatedly refers to himself as a "buccaneer" and declares himself "an adventurer, reckless, [...] swift, daring" (58). Although these labels are not entirely antithetical to Peter's nature, they seem more Peter Pan than Peter Walsh. Peter himself admits as much as soon as the escapade is over: "it was half made up, as he knew very well; [...] made up, as one makes up the better part of life, he thought - making oneself up; making her up" (59).

Such findings may damage the notion that solitude has the edge over sociality for revealing a more authentic, less performative sense of self since some individuals may be compelled towards

identity invention even when in solitary states. However, this would entail an unchallenged admission that Peter really is in a solitary state in this moment. This may not be the case as he is, in a sense, engaging with another identity, even if that identity is, firstly, invented, and, secondly, not aware of or returning the engagement. Rather than exposing the performative self as a problem which must be faced not just by sociality but by solitude too, this seems instead to expose a problem specific to Peter: that of being dependent on others to shape and define his own identity. In a truly solitary state, without the chance to interact with others, Peter might have more of an opportunity to conceive of and understand himself as a separate entity.

Peter would likely understand this differently. Rather than seeing this as a problem of his nature, this is a moment where he sees himself “escaping [...] from being precisely what he was”, a moment where he is “utterly free” (57) as a result of “standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square” (56). He would see the invented adventure with the unknown woman as proof of his defining himself *for* himself, since, if this is truly a moment of utter freedom, then it suggests complete autonomy over the way he defines himself. However, the choice of language gives him away. Because Peter sees being alone and unknown as an opportunity to *escape from* precisely what he is, rather than an opportunity to *return to* precisely what he is, this demonstrates his belief that his *precise* self exists on the basis of the knowledge, definition and judgement of others. Even when he is “utterly free”, he still ends up inventing an identity which needs an other to find fulfilment. He defines himself in this moment as a “buccaneer” not due to an intrinsic, deep-rooted recklessness, a recklessness that needs no other-interaction to be validated, but instead due to his approach and reaction to others. What is the self without other? For Peter, it seems, the self at this moment is nothing; it is a blank canvas onto which can be painted a completely invented identity. But the paradox here is that the painting itself cannot begin without others to interact with and thus influence its composition.

Nietzsche took the opposing view, believing that a complete aloneness would offer one the opportunity to *return to* a true sense of self, to the original painting, to self-knowledge. Very few, however, are capable of achieving such a state. Of “the herd animals and apostles of equality wrongly called ‘free spirits’,” he wrote, “not a single one [...] would be able to endure loneliness” (Notebooks 101). This is certainly true of Peter: despite his view of himself as a bit of a radical, not caring a straw for the opinions of others, he is still deeply embedded in the social system and admits that he “could not keep out of smoking-rooms, liked colonels, liked golf, liked bridge, and above all women’s society” (174). Besides the general impulse, as a social animal, to seek company, Peter’s compulsion for sociality may exist because it gives him the opportunity to detect impressions of himself that he can then use to build an agreeable identity. His generously applied identity as a buccaneer, after all, was dependent on an invented social encounter with another, one which could not be refuted. Entirely alone, Peter may be forced to painfully confront less flattering aspects of his character, a potentially terrifying prospect as Nietzsche acknowledged: “We are afraid that when we are alone and quiet something will be whispered into our ear, and so we hate quietness and deafen ourselves with sociability” (*SAE* 5). It is these types of confrontations that justify Nietzsche’s argument for solitude as the path to a more complete and untainted, if uncomfortable, self-knowledge.

As Katrina Mitcheson has noted, Nietzsche felt that solitude was “necessary because it is needed to remove the limitations on the pursuit of truth of caring about the opinions of others and of being attached to the shared set of ‘herd’ beliefs” (336). It is interesting to note that Peter only becomes aware of, or is at least willing to acknowledge, his dependence on others, despite his desire for self-sufficiency, when he is entirely alone in his hotel room: while he fantasises that “he could [...] be alone, in short, sufficient to himself”, he follows this with the admission that “nobody of course was more dependent upon others” (173–174). When he is not able to slip into and perform the roles determined for him by others, he may be more alive to his true self, but if so, this aware-

ness would necessarily entail a painful acknowledgement of the less appealing aspects of his identity. And these less appealing aspects need not be particularly negative, just undesirable by the group. Of this class of society, Zwerdling claims that “it blunts, denies, trivialises or absorbs [...] transforming the young rebels into wooden creatures whose public lives no longer express their buried selves” (78).

We can see something similar happening with Clarissa and her desire for company. Part of the reason she may enjoy surrounding herself with others is that doing so gives her the chance to reaffirm parts of her identity she is happy to possess and display: “Thank you, she went on saying in gratitude to her servants generally for helping her to be like this, *to be what she wanted*, gentle, generous-hearted” (42; emphasis added). Although this can be useful for self-esteem, it may create a distorted view of the self by unfairly skewing it in favour of positive attributes. We may use other people in the same way we use mirrors, to acquire a clearer conception of our selves, but such a theory does not take into account how we might use others to inflate our more desirable features while simultaneously ignoring those which are less savoury. It is as if we are in a house of mirrors but are only standing in front of the mirrors which maximise our favourite features and minimise our worst. After all, “gentle” and “generous-hearted” are not exactly features which Peter Walsh would unflinchingly apply to Clarissa. Even if he might see her this way at times, he also defines her as possessing a “coldness”, a “woodenness” (66), and, later, “like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone” (70), “as cold as an icicle” (88). Perhaps sociality could be an effective path towards complete self-knowledge, but only if the subject is willing to notice every side from which they are perceived as an object.

It is during moments of solitary reflection that characters seem more willing to entertain, or at least are more frequently forced to confront, aspects of their characters which their social class urges them to ignore, suppress, or deny. “In her world”, writes Zwerdling of Clarissa, “the soul has no public function and can only survive in solitude” (80). Having already seen how Peter, once

alone, can see how dependent he is upon others, we can also point to how Clarissa unhappily observes her hatred for Miss Kilman when walking in a state of solitude through London. Tellingly, she is only able to dismiss this “brutal monster” when she enters into a social situation with Miss Pym: “Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry’s the florists” (13). The darkness, which is always there, rapidly becomes obscured when solitude gives way to sociality. Clarissa embraces this relief (which is unsurprising considering that her view of herself as “gentle and generous-hearted” must create a painful sense of cognitive dissonance), feeling that “Miss Plym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all” (14). But it is important to note that the thought of “this brutal monster”, which roams around “in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul” (13), is only conceived when Clarissa begins thinking about an other. This is worth observing in more detail since it is not entirely dissimilar from Peter Walsh defining himself by his feelings about and interactions with others.

Clarissa defines herself as possessing a “brutal monster” due to her feelings about another. And, crucially, she herself realises that “it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal which was not Miss Kilman” (12–13). What is striking about this idea is that it could quite easily apply to the self; it is possible for someone to accrue ideas about their self which, gathered together, represent a great deal which is not true of that self (consider Peter’s view of himself as a radical). One reason for such inaccuracies may be due to the instinct we have for defining ourselves and others by way of comparative judgements (again, Peter’s view of himself as a radical is dependent on the more conventional attitudes of those around him). Clarissa describes Miss Kilman as always making her feel “her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were” (12). Miss Kilman is poor in relation to Clarissa’s wealth, but in relation to someone on an even lower rung of the social ladder, she may not be defined in the same way. The compulsion to define self via relative descriptions against an other leaves one unable

to define oneself *without* an other, and thus unable to realise any stable truths about oneself. If Clarissa can only see Miss Kilman through the lens of comparative judgement, then she will naturally be limited to perceiving Miss Kilman via “a great deal which was not Miss Kilman”. Clarissa in some sense realises this, thinking that “with another throw of the dice [...] she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world” (13). This train of thought, taken in solitude, leads Clarissa in two promising directions in terms of self-knowledge: she confronts her secret capacity for hatred, and she comes closer to imagining what Miss Kilman’s true self might be, free of relative comparisons. If she can think of others in this way then she may be able to do so of her own self as well. That said, applying this mode of analysis to the self is compromised by the fact that we are both the subject and the object in this type of investigation, in contrast to being exclusively the subject when analysing the other. Because, in self-analysis, the subject is necessarily *part of* the object of enquiry, the object being studied is constantly shifting in motion with that study. The best Clarissa can hope for might be to simply increase her awareness of patterns of thought and action that continually reappear, regardless of social context, and track them as impassively as possible to come to a stable conclusion regarding core features of her identity.

Comparative judgements, and the looking-glass line of self-perception in general, are also flawed in that they can only be made on the basis of what one can see, and much of what defines a person is their inner life, their unseen life. Peter makes this mistake when he judges Clarissa to “have a perfectly clear notion of what she wanted. Her emotions were all on the surface” (83). If this were really the case, Peter would be confronted with Clarissa’s “brutal monster”, her “faults, jealous, vanities, suspicions”. We know, however, that Clarissa keeps these out of sight. A mirror can only reflect what is on the surface, not what lies beneath. The mirror of an other arguably carries the same limitation. This might be one reason why Clarissa makes the claim to “not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (8), even and perhaps especially extending this to her self: “she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (9). Perhaps Clarissa has a keen-

er appreciation for how much exists beneath the surface of others, even beneath her own consciousness. Yet Clarissa's frequent judgements of others and of herself appear to make her claim more wishful thinking than lived ideal. It also appears to show more evidence of the disconnect between one's beliefs about oneself and the reality of that self.

It would appear, then, that the problem for the looking-glass theory of the self, and the problem of using this theory as a mode of self-analysis, is that although the judgements and expectations of others play an important role in how an individual perceives him or herself, they do not tell the whole story. Numerous issues persist. If much of what constitutes a person's perception of selfhood exists beneath the surface of visibility, and if so much of the self is buried under the rules and conventions of social classes, and if all human mirrors are marred by the imperfections of subjectivity which disturb "the tranquility of the waters", then how much credit can we give to the looking-glass self, even in its fuller guise, as a complete and accurate theory of self? It may certainly be valid as a contributor, and it does have the distinct advantage of volume: a multiplicity of mirrors gives us more data regarding how the self acts, reacts and adapts in different social environments. But the looking-glass self, possible only in sociality, should be seen as only one constituent (itself broken into several constituents) of a larger concept of self, a self which includes much that goes unseen, distorted, or misperceived by the mirrors around it, and, vitally, a self which is not constrained to exist within the confines of extrinsic definition.

This is acknowledged by Horace Romano Harré, who not only gives more weight to context in defining self-concept, but also stresses the agency afforded by the performative nature of the social self. Harré adopts a more dramaturgical model of self-concept and considers each interaction between individuals as a kind of scene played out by actors, with the performance of that scene (the lines delivered, the emotions played out) dependent on the individuals' interpretation of the episode itself. That interpretation, in turn, is influenced by "theories, beliefs and expectations held about him by those who have encountered him directly and indirectly" (34). However, rather than reacting

solely to the image projected in the mirror and identifying with that image, as per the looking-glass self, the dramaturgical self gives more emphasis to an individual's own plans, intentions and emotions. These inner processes compose part of the act being played, endowing individuals with a greater sense of agency for initiating change and transforming the world around them. Individuals are not exclusively reacting to the perceived image of themselves, and the perceived judgement of that image, leaving them at the mercy of the other. Instead, their self's unique preferences and predispositions also have significant influence over the entire performance.

This is important, as one of the main problems of the looking-glass self, at least in terms of personal well-being, is that it somewhat robs the individual of the chance to define themselves on their own terms and, consequently, places a strict limit on their autonomy. Harré's model accepts the power of the other to influence an individual's self-concept, but this influence does not extend to complete control. In fact, the amount of power ceded to the other (or, conversely, claimed for oneself) may come down to the amount of self-knowledge a person possesses. With sufficient self-knowledge, the self would not feel dragged around like a puppet on a string, primarily influenced by others, but in command of the performance as a result of its careful investigation into the acting role. Harré describes this form of knowledge as one which "involves not only knowing my dispositions and abilities but the situations and conditions in which I may be able (or liable) to have them" (282). It follows that if one is to acquire the power of self-directed action that comes with self-knowledge, it is not enough just to know one's attributes, but one must also know which of those attributes are likely to shrink and which are likely to grow in different social conditions. In the following chapter, I will explore in more detail this idea of self-knowledge as a crucial component of agency and wellbeing, investigating the damage that can be done to self-concept through *particular* forms of sociality and solitude.

3. *Good Morning, Midnight* and the Health of Self-Concept

Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* is a work painted in dark shades. Misery, shame and paranoia chase one another throughout the novel, leaving its protagonist Sasha Jansen in a near-permanent state of unease as she flits in and out of Parisian bars, cafes and hotel rooms. Her disposition towards human nature is not a positive one, as indicated by her labelling "the whole bloody human race [...] a pack of damned hyenas" (*GMM* 144). The view she holds of her self is no more flattering: "stupid," (25) "demented," (57) "comical," (64) and "a monster" (136) are just a few of the ways she describes her self in the novel. A pervasive sense of guilt, anguish and incongruity colours Sasha's self-concept, and the repeated betrayals which mark her past singe her with a despondent fatalism and resignation. Despite this, *Good Morning, Midnight* also offers glimmers of hope that a deleterious self-concept can be changed for the better, overturning such fatalism and vastly improving well-being. This chapter aims to explore how solitude and sociality might contribute to this upturn in Sasha's self-perception, however brief, while also demonstrating how, and more importantly why, the same states can leave her feeling "tied up, weighted, chained" in her fearful and supposedly fixed identity (88).

To begin with her personal disposition, Sasha could be easily mischaracterised as misanthropic. References abound to her distrust and dislike of other people: as well as describing people as "hyenas", Sasha also refers to human beings as "cruel — horribly cruel" (41), so savage that the purpose of a room in her mind is to "hide from the wolves outside" (33). Certain critics have indeed made this mischaracterisation, with one going so far as to describe Sasha as "a mere shell of hate" (Mellown 462). Yet the label of misanthrope would be short-sighted considering her sense of solidarity with and compassion for "all the fools and the defeated" (*GMM* 25), and her ability to "still give myself up to people I like" (51). The reason for Sasha's pessimistic worldview comes into some sort of focus as the novel progresses, but whatever the reason for her cynicism, it is clear

that her default mode, her safety setting, is one of self-sought solitude. And so it transpires over the course of her wanderings around Paris: her moments of company are never instigated by her but instead by those around her. Sociality is the exception, solitude the rule.

The purpose of solitariness, for Sasha, is often less a means of establishing one's identity or gaining self-knowledge than a means of finding sanctuary from the other. Much like Clarissa Dal- loway, who felt "it was very, very dangerous to live even one day," (*MD* 9), Sasha struggles to es- tablish a sense of peace in public unless cloaked in an armour cultivated in private: "Today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home" (*GMM* 42). Naturally, this fear of other peo- ple leaves her without much experience of interaction. The consequence of this is that Sasha is bur- dened with a distorted view of how she is perceived by others. Her paranoid interpretation of others' actions incessantly steers her towards the negative. Her statement, "[i]t was something I remem- bered, I told the waiter, and he looked at me blankly, not even bothering to laugh at me," is fol- lowed a paragraph later by "[h]alf-shutting her eyes and smiling the smile which means: 'She's get- ting to look old. She drinks'" (11). It would appear that Sasha is reading others' faces for the same reason that she often looks into a mirror: for confirmation of how she appears. The problem, as dis- cussed in the previous chapter, is that our perceptions of the mirror-image are not necessarily accu- rate, which in Sasha's case leads to innocuous actions like a smile or a blank face being imbued with subterranean malice and derision. Because her past is pockmarked by betrayals and castiga- tions, these "past experiences of judgment must be made to serve for something, must be trans- formed into a protective mantle, and harnessed to the vital task of anticipating and imagining rejec- tion" (Elkin, "Getting" 71). A vicious cycle of paranoia is thus established: imagining rejection dis- courages her from seeking company; this avoidance of company allows her vision of rejection to go unchallenged; the increasingly negative view of others this creates deepens her conviction of future rejection.

This misinterpretation of the many mirrors which surround Sasha lead her to develop a self-concept sullied by shame and discordance. In fact, even when she is truly alone, in the confines of her supposedly safe hotel room, Sasha applies prosopopoeia to the space itself to create another mirror with which she can inspect herself. The novel opens as such: “‘Quite like old times’, the room says. ‘Yes? No?’” (*GMM* 9), and later, after Sasha has considered moving rooms but decided against it, the room “welcomes [her] back. ‘There you are,’ it says. ‘You didn’t go off then?’” (34). Although these lines suggest the room’s congeniality, a friendliness afforded by providing Sasha with the solace and comfort she craves, there also seems to be a conspiratorial undertone of taunting determinism. This is exemplified when the first line is repeated later in the novel with a vital extra word: “The room says: ‘Quite like old times. Yes? ... No? ... *Yes*’” (120; emphasis added). If we read the novel’s architecture as being reflective of the self, as Emma Zimmerman has argued, there is a sense of inescapability within one’s self here through the declarative “Yes” administered by the room. This is a declaration echoed throughout the novel in the refrain “always the same stairs, always the same room” (28, 120), and in Sasha’s feeling that “things repeat themselves over and over again” (56). Thus, although solitude may provide security from the wolves for Sasha, its outsized presence in her life may be more damaging than she realises. Not only does her predisposition for solitariness leave her self-concept vulnerable to harm via her distorted, paranoid interpretations of others’ actions, it may also rob her of the agency to mould her identity for the better by keeping her locked in the negative spirals which characterise her thinking patterns.

These thinking patterns are typical of those who are trapped in loneliness, as detailed by John T. Cacioppo in his work on the need for social connection. He describes the problem of loneliness as a self-perpetuating cycle in these terms: it is “a state of mind that puts your head front and centre. By engendering fearful, negative cognitions, it allows the mind to interfere with various forms of resonance that might otherwise flow very naturally into social connection” (156). The experience of rejection, an experience Sasha has encountered (or at least imagined) so many times as

to have internalised it, “makes us far more aware of social cues,” yet lonely individuals approach these social cues “from a defensive, self-protective posture, which tends to distort that perception” (119). In other words, although the lonely feel a greater compulsion to seek out cues from others which they could potentially then use to build up their self-concept, the fearful, defensive state of mind such loneliness engenders causes the interpretation of these cues to be skewed towards the negative. This sharpens the fear-of-other instinct and consequently keeps the lonely from venturing outside their solitary comfort zones, hindering the possibility of growth, happiness and healthy self-concept through positive social connection.

It is therefore unsurprising that some (though by no means all) of Sasha’s social encounters, when they do happen, open her up to a different mode of thinking and introduce the possibility of forming a self-concept which is far more forgiving of its own nature. The scene with the younger Russian, Delmar, is particularly important in this regard. Sharing their philosophies on life, Delmar responds to Sasha’s question of ““don’t you ever want to be rich or strong or powerful?”” with the answer, ““I prefer to be as I am [...] I know I am not guilty, so I have the right to be just as happy as I can make myself”” (55). Arnold E. Davidson accuses Delmar of “self-centredness” in this regard (356), yet his philosophy, although certainly questionable, may paint a vision for Sasha that happiness can be part of her present and future, that her self-concept can be enhanced, that things need not “repeat themselves over and over again”. Such thoughts, should they be assimilated, may open the door to a deeper and more lasting transformation than the method of fashion Sasha currently utilises to seek improvement in her identity. This is reflected in Sasha’s thought that “[t]his young man [Delmar] is very comforting. Almost as comforting as the hairdresser” (*GMM* 57), supporting the idea that time spent with another person could be as much of a catalyst for positive self-transformation as the hairdresser who physically changes how that self looks by dyeing Sasha’s hair blonde cendré.

Delmar further highlights the power of sociality for improving self-knowledge and raising self-esteem by sharing his intuition that Sasha is lonely, explaining this feeling with the admission that “for a long time I was lonely myself. I hated people. I didn’t want to see anyone” (56). Rather than Delmar sentencing Sasha to “a definitive opinion as to who and what she is” (Davidson 356), his verdict of loneliness seems instead to be a genuine and brave attempt to help another human being by applying the consoling balm of shared experience. He tells Sasha that, having once been lonely, “now I go about a lot. I force myself to. I have a lot of friends; I’m never alone. Now I’m much happier” (*GMM* 57). By making these remarks, Delmar gently undermines Sasha’s dubious claim on her first meeting with the Russians that “I am very happy [...] I am over here for two weeks to buy a lot of clothes to startle my friends — my many friends” (40). Delmar, it seems, is able to recognise that Sasha is trying to “anxiously avoid displaying some outward sign of difference, some indication that [she has] been [...] in the ‘deep, dark river’” (Elkin, “Getting” 70), perhaps because he has been there himself and has discovered the mutual benefit of sharing those signs with others.

Delmar’s advice to go out and meet more people is privately treated with a sardonic cynicism by Sasha, but it is his suggestion of going to meet his friend the painter, and her acceptance of that invitation, that leads to an important transformative event which will be discussed in more detail below. Sasha’s cynicism is understandable: it is one component of her armour as it keeps her from being crushed by the miscarriages of trust and hope which have defined her past, but her ambivalence towards Delmar in this scene suggest that cracks in this armour may be appearing: “I don’t know why I don’t quite like him. This gentle, resigned melancholy — it seems unnatural [...] One moment I feel this, another I like him very much, as if he were the brother I never had” (*GMM* 56). Interactions with others are risky - Sasha has been branded by enough bruises and betrayals to have almost given up on “these damnable human beings” (78) - and this may be why she finds it difficult to entirely trust Delmar, seeing his gentle nature as “unnatural”. More quietly positive in-

teractions like this, however, should help Sasha wipe away the dark stains of paranoia which impair the mirrors she uses to perceive her self. A more positive view of human nature, acquired through this careful interaction with others, could then enable more benign ideas to percolate and proliferate within her self-concept.

Despite these telling changes to her inward and outward perceptions as a result of social interaction, Sasha still seems to think something else to be the more effective antidote to correcting her uneasy sense of self: fashion. It is only through new hats, new gloves, new shoes, new hair that Sasha believes she can truly be lifted out of her old skin and into a new one in which she feels comfortable. Yet the speed at which she forgets the new colour of her hair, despite agonising for days over the decision to dye it, indicates how superficial and transient self-transformation through altered image can be: “I had expected to think about this damned hair of mine without any let-up for days [...] But before the taxi has got back to Montparnasse I have forgotten all about it” (53). However, as Linda M. Scott points out, there is no possibility of avoiding the process of identity projection and construction through dress altogether: “Nobody can dress in a way that signifies nothing” (12). Even though *she* may feel no different, Sasha at least believes that *others* may perceive her differently based on how her fashion choices signal her identity, a function which makes fashion dependent on sociality in order to be fulfilled. As she uses the perceptions of others to build part of her self-concept, continually finding new clothes may at least reflect back the possibility of change. In contrast, wearing the same clothes over and over again is likely to leave her feeling trapped in her current identity. Although ultimately unsatisfying, new clothes may nonetheless function as a release valve for the frustrations of identity fatalism, and this may be why Sasha spends so much time alone but among others, in bars and restaurants, “carefully watching the effect of the hat on the other people in the room” (*GMM* 60) but avoiding the dangers of actual interaction.

This desire for and belief in the possibility of self-transformation through fashion is one consequence of what Rhys termed “the perpetual hunger to be beautiful and that thirst to be loved

which is the real curse of Eve” (*TLB* 34). The hunger exists because of the expectation that it can be satiated, that the self can be changed. Maroula Joannou views this as reflective of Rhys’ work as a whole, stating that “Rhys’s fascination with the sartorial - her women characters’ propensity for self-fashioning or dressing up - [is] a textual metaphor for modernism’s refusal of the stable, unitary self” (464). Fashion, then, with its potential for endless modulations and combinations, may both symbolise and facilitate the disappearance of a “stable, unitary self,” yet for this to be the case, we should see Sasha’s self changing along with her fashion. This does not occur. It should come as no surprise that even after the new hat and the new dress are bought and she has continued with “the transformation act” (*GMM* 53), her self-concept remains unchanged. And part of what remains unchanged is this belief in the potential for change through fashion. Fifteen years earlier, Sasha was under the same illusions. After being chastised at work, Sasha falls into a fit of tears and hides inside a fitting room, inside of which she sees a dress: “It is my dress. If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid” (25). Later, she “start[s] thinking about the black dress, longing for it, madly, furiously. If I could get it everything would be different” (28). The same mode of thinking colours her present-day thoughts, the consumerist creed of ‘if I could just have *this*, then I’d be happy’. This is not to say that a stable, unitary self exists or does not exist, just that fashion seems only to offer the enticing promise of a deep and lasting change of self without ever delivering on that promise, with “each discarded object ceasing to be a signifier of transformation but serving instead as a signifier of corrosive ennui or coruscating despair” (Joannou 476).

Sasha’s experience with Delmar and his friend Serge, the painter, shows how the shallow promises of fashion to develop a healthy, desirable self-concept can be entirely usurped by the capacities of sociality. The scene opens with Sasha feeling the pockets of her coat, momentarily surprised by the fur of the fabric, before she realises “that old coat had its last outing a long time ago” (*GMM* 76). Briefly imagining that she was wearing the same check coat as she was wearing in Paris fifteen years ago, we are given another subtle suggestion that fashion has little if any power to

create lasting change in one's self-concept. Sasha then enters the room of the painter, and the first objects she notices are the masks on the walls. Sasha's initial reaction to the mask which is handed to her by Serge is one of pain: "The close-set eye-holes stare into mine. I know that face well [...] That's the way they look when they are saying 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?'" (76). However, when Serge tries to make her laugh by dancing while he holds this mask to his face, the text takes on a dreamy, liminal quality, one in which Sasha appears to be in the grip of an epiphanic and transformative moment.

This is the only moment in the novel where language appears both in parentheses and italics: "(*Have you been dancing too much?*) 'Don't stop.' (*Mad for pleasure, all the young people.*) 'Please don't stop'" (77). The quotes in italics relate to Sasha's memory of a time when she was suicidal, had not eaten in three weeks, was wearing her old check coat, and got drunk with a man who subsequently made the statements written in italics. After telling this man that she has had nothing to eat for three weeks, he gets into the nearest taxi, slams the door and leaves her. Sasha describes this as an event which did not affect her, since at this time she was "plunged in a dream, when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets" (75). Presumably, the mask which Serge wears as he dances evokes this memory for Sasha, but she pleads with him not to stop dancing. There is something curative about the performance, the cruelty of the mask neutralised by the strange motions and kind intentions of the dancer beneath. As Serge dances, Sasha describes the feeling of "lying in a hammock [...] The sound of the sea advances and retreats as if a door were being opened and shut [...] The hills look like clouds and the clouds like fantastic hills" (77). These images have a strong suggestion of liminality and permeability (doors) and transformation (hills/clouds). Doors can open and be walked through, and, on the other side, a change in self-perception is possible. This is a visual representation of what Terri Mulholland deems the "threshold zone", in which "the individual can create and

recreate notions of self in multiple ways as identity becomes destabilized and boundaries porous” (457).

The vision causes tears to come to Sasha’s eyes. The painter compels her to “[c]ry if you want to. Why shouldn’t you cry. You’re with friends.” (*GMM* 78). As suspicious as ever of others’ kindness, particularly having “once again [...] given damnable human beings the right to pity me and laugh at me,” (78) she aggressively asks Serge to go out and get her a bottle of brandy, ordering him to get the cash from her purse. Serge neither accepts nor refuses the money, but ignores both the request and the tone in which it is made, an act which Sasha defines as Serge “get[ting] hold of [her]” (78). Serge’s subsequent story about the “mulatto” woman he met in London, who “had been crying so much it was impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old,” (79) leaves him philosophising on human cruelty, remarking how sad it is that from a young age people know “so exactly who to be cruel to and who it [is] safe to be cruel to” (81). This story is followed by Delmar attempting to push the canvases of Serge’s paintings into their frames so that Sasha can see them better, only for the canvases to curl up and resist. The combination of Serge’s story of the mulatto woman and the resisting paintings serve to represent society’s intolerance of and cruelty towards the outsider, of those people who resist society’s defining and identity-diminishing frames.

Conversely, Serge’s sensitivity around Sasha’s sadness, rage, and discordance, along with referring to her as a friend (the scene will end with Serge referring to Sasha and Delmar as ‘Amis’, which makes her “feel very happy” (84)), suggests to her that this cruelty need not be inevitable, an inextricable poison present in all humans, and thus she might some day manage to merge her self-concept with a kind of self-acceptance. With Sasha surrounded by the pictures finally placed in their frames, all of which show outsiders of some sort (“misshapen dwarfs,” a “four-breasted woman,” an “old prostitute” (84)), our protagonist feels an exquisite sense of relief for how natural and vivid they appear: “Now the room expands and the iron band round my heart loosens. The miracle has happened. I am happy” (83).

This scene illustrates the opportunity sociality presents of breaking through the armour-plated masks people wear - Serge smiles at Sasha “disarmingly” (84) - in order to find a true sense of connection with an other. This power, in turn, offers the possibility of true change within the self as one is opened up to the possibility of new ways of thinking. However, sociality does not always have a positive influence on self-concept and identity construction. In fact, it can have precisely the opposite effect, not only robbing a person of their identity but replacing it with a disastrously destructive, other-constructed version, and for evidence of this we can turn to Sasha’s experience with the gigolo, René.

Just as with the Russians, Sasha is approached by René rather than the other way round, and by immediately interpreting who he is, a male prostitute, Sasha instantly and simultaneously interprets how she appears: “a wealthy dame trotting round Montparnasse in the hope of —? After all the trouble I’ve gone to, is that what I look like? I suppose I do” (61). Simply by being approached, Sasha's self-concept has been altered, diminished and ultimately taken out of her hands by what that approach supposedly implies. Ironically, it is Sasha’s fur coat, a self-directed fashion choice intended to project confidence, which enhances this vulnerability by falsely signalling to René that she is a “wealthy dame”. This struggle for ownership of self-definition is a conflict which will define the interactions between Sasha and René, with his frequent attempts to define her and overrule her protestations a recurrent theme: “Why are you looking so frightened,” asks René, to which Sasha responds, “I’m not, I’m vexed”. René ignores or, more likely, overrides this claim by authoritatively stating, “Oh no, you’re looking frightened. Who are you frightened of? Me? But how flattering!” (125). Not only has René revoked Sasha’s right to define her own feelings, but he has also imposed his own definition of the nature of her feelings towards himself. And Sasha is particularly vulnerable to internalising René’s judgements since, as Capaccio has observed, “[r]ejected individuals also have a heightened tendency to conform to the opinions of others” (119). Yet, although the weakened Sasha is therefore at risk of accepting these definitions, and consequently of being

steered in any direction René chooses, Sasha does not allow the gigolo to play his game so easily. She has been here before. Davidson acknowledges this in remarking that “[s]he will let him recite his piece; will savour the performance of a fellow professional who thinks he is playing to an amateur,” (357) while at the same time considering how she herself “might be able to get some of [her] own back” (*GMM* 61). The battle for personal narrative is now in motion, but unfortunately for Sasha, this man is a professional and his strategy is a calculated one.

His first technique is to draw information out of Sasha while remaining reticent himself. Initially pleading the lie that he “must tell someone everything otherwise he’ll die” (61) in order to engage Sasha’s sympathy and create a fraudulent image of his own need for her, he later allows Sasha to tell him “everything” while he only “says his name is René, and leaves it at that” (66). On being questioned about his history in Morocco on their second meeting, René says “I don’t want to talk about it” (138). René’s reluctance to discuss his story while subtly drawing out Sasha’s shifts the power dynamic in his favour because of the power narrative holds to impact self-perception. As Laura Elkin writes, “we are never so vulnerable as when we recount our life stories” as we risk “losing control over the possible interpretations and (mis)understandings of [our] stories” (“The Room” 71). Timothy Wilson’s comparison of self-inquiry to literary criticism emphasises this danger. “Just as there is no single truth that lies within a literary text, but many truths,” writes Wilson, “so are there many truths about a person that can be constructed” (162). What this suggests is that others can deliberately interpret our stories, should we be willing to share them, in ways that only highlight negative “truths” and thus further their cynical aims. With Sasha sharing “everything” and René next to nothing, she makes herself vulnerable to having the interpretation of her story, and thus of her self-perception, stolen away, practically commandeered. As remarked by Mr Horsfield in Rhys’ *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, “your life is your life, and you must be pretty definite about it. Or if it’s a story you are making up, you ought at least to have it pat” (39). This link between narrative and self-concept will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

René's second technique is to circumvent any possible attack Sasha might be planning by responding to her question of "[w]hy do you want to talk to me?" with the pre-emptive "[b]ecause I think you won't betray me" (*GMM* 62). Having thought a moment prior that "perhaps I should manage to hurt him a little in return for all the many times I've been hurt", Sasha is then forced to conclude that "[n]ow it won't be so easy" (62). This is further evidence that Sasha is not simply a "shell of hate," as some have argued, but instead retains a capacity for compassion for those who have experienced trials similar to hers and who can therefore understand her jaded outlook on humanity. It is important to note that it was not enough for René to reply with "because you look so kind" or "because you look as if you'll understand", as Sasha was prepared for (62), but rather he had to lean on the bonding power of shared experience to bring her onto his side. This represents a dark twist on the same technique used by Delmar and Serge to try and help Sasha through her struggles with loneliness and self-acceptance, illustrating how context and intention are vital in determining the value of sociality in forming a healthy self-concept.

On their second meeting, the battle for narrative intensifies, with Sasha acknowledging René's dizzyingly quick repositioning as he navigates the battlefield: "Very quick, very easy, that change of attitude, like a fish gliding with a flick of its tail, now here, now there" (127). The self which René presents is a fractured, fully performative self, constantly adapting to the fluctuations of the interaction. Despite Sasha's claims that she can "take [her mask] off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail," (37) René has the edge over her in this regard, chameleonic in his ability to hide his true self regardless of what the conversation throws at him. There is little cohesive sense of character to René, a technique surely intended by Rhys to illustrate the multiplicity of masks René carries and the duplicity they suggest. In the process of telling his "unlikely tale[s]" (Davidson 358), "he looks straight into my eyes all the time he is talking, with that air of someone defying you" (*GMM* 130). This "defying" could be read with any and perhaps all of the three definitions the verb holds:

as resistance (against Sasha's attempts to define him), as an elusion (from her attempts to know him), or as a challenge (daring her to resist his own claims on her narrative).

In contrast to René's mendacity and "meaningless" tattle (132), Sasha becomes increasingly, and uncharacteristically, open and honest about her self as the night progresses, foregoing her usual strategy to, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (3). The precise reason behind this openness is one of the many unexplained features of the story, but as it has important consequences for the understanding of the self, it is worth investigating. Although anonymity is a contributing factor - Sasha remarks that "a strict anonymity is a help on these occasions" (*GMM* 142) - the sequence of the story's events may also be key. Sasha first encounters René after she has been in the company of Delmar, and her second and more confident encounter with him follows her time with Delmar and Serge. As explored above, the happiness and solidarity these experiences generated, particularly the latter, may have led to a transformation in her view of others and correspondingly of her self. As opposed to Thomas Staley's claim that "René's gaiety and ebullience have lifted her out of herself," which gives the credit to René alone for Sasha being "witty, charming, clever, and sarcastic" (93), I would argue that it was Sasha's self-directed, brave decision to accept Delmar's invitation to visit the painter, and the resulting optimism this encounter produced, that enables her to be "quite calm, also quite confident" with the gigolo (*GMM* 129). She senses another opportunity for growth and self-transformation in the company of an other, and rather than shying away or hiding her true self out of fear, she takes the courageous if danger-laden step of removing her armour and trying to form a connection.

A large degree of the novel's exhausting bleakness is in René's attempted exploitation of that decision, leaving Sasha facing the possibility of yet another experience of being defined, used, and discarded by an other. Sasha on some level knows what the gigolo is doing, and the knowledge of this causes her calmness and confidence to drain away due to the reacquaintance with human cruelty the knowledge carries. After René describes her as "rather stupid" (134) not long after in-

sisting he would “never say cruel things” to her (135), she describes herself as “a monster” (135) and sinks even deeper into her pessimistic outlook on human nature and on her self. Her suicidal thoughts return - “[i]f I thought you’d kill me, I’d come away with you right now” (144) - and declares her hatred of the “whole bloody business” of the human race: “It’s cruel. It’s idiotic. It’s unspeakably horrible” (145). This ushers in Sasha’s lowest moment of the interaction, likely because it recalls all her most painful memories, circulating them in the stagnant air of her mind. “Everything spoiled, all spoiled,” she thinks, words which also appear after the death of her baby, following this with, “now I am lying in a misery of utter darkness. Quite alone. No voice, no touch, no hand. ... How long must I lie here? For ever?” (145).

With monumental effort, Sasha is then able to “heave [her]self out of the darkness slowly, painfully,” and, crucially, this is the first time where René might just exhibit a vulnerability of his own, sharing the admission that he has also “been wounded” (146). Whether this is all part of René’s game is unclear - it is certainly a possibility - but his puzzled expression, rather than boastful or complaining, at least gives Sasha the belief that he is being sincere. Intending to exploit this woman with minimum fuss, it is possible that René is instead shook by the remedial power of her shared grief, a possibility given weight by René’s decision not to take as much money from Sasha as he might have done after the near-rape in the hotel room. Through her vulnerability, Sasha may have momentarily unmasked René, an example of Rhys drawing attention to “the struggle between public surface selves and private ‘deep’ selves” (Zimring 223). Although their interaction ends on a disastrous note, Sasha’s subsequent embrace of the commis next door and her pledge to “despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time” (*GMM* 159) suggest that she aims to no longer allow her dark view of human nature to cloud her self-judgement, and she will take the opportunity for connection, of any kind, when it is offered to her. Crucially, this is a decision that Sasha makes entirely of her own accord, under no influence of being defined by the silent, ghost-

like commis himself; it is she who takes the decision to “put my arms around him and pull him down on to the bed,” leading to the affirmative and self-affirming ““Yes - yes - yes. ...”” (159).

4. The Role of Memory and Narrative in Forming Self-Concept

Both *Mrs Dalloway* and *Good Morning, Midnight* deal extensively with the topic of memory. While the first novel sees Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh and others looking back on their younger years at Bourton, the second novel finds Sasha Jansen slipping into memories of her past life in Paris as her present self wanders the capital. This chapter will explore how these moments of remembering influence the characters engaged in that remembering, moulding their life narratives and consequently shaping their self-concept. As will be shown, one's history is not composed of a set of cut-and-dried facts, but instead is a narrative crafted through inference, interpretation and the language of retelling, and these in turn are in large measure configured by one's culture and social group. Thus, the impact of sociality and solitude on this particular aspect of self-construction is a vital component to consider, with each state having a marked effect on the process of memory recall, personal narrative formation, and, consequently, self-understanding. Examining both of these novels through this dual lens of memory and sociality will reveal the important contributions made by Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys to this strand of the self-concept conversation.

Within our memories are located past events that can be perceived as confirming certain ideas about ourselves while invalidating others. In the process of calling forth these memories, we paint a bolder and more detailed picture of our identity, fleshing out a sense of self that feels comfortably consistent, coherent and enduring. Why does a clear sense of identity comfort us? Daniel Albright suggests that “[o]ur lives would be intolerable without some predicate, some ballast of identity, to provide a context for the wisps of thought and action that constitute our instantaneous selves” (21). In other words, this compulsion to cultivate the self and locate a clear identity is borne of a need to contextualise the moment-to-moment activity of the present self in order to give it meaning and direction. Identity protects us from the thought of a pointless, rudderless existence. It follows, therefore, that an evaluation of the self which is consistent, regardless of whether it is posi-

tive or negative, might help one fend off the disturbing prospect of nihilism. In order to achieve such a static self-concept, the memories brought to the surface of the mind, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, would need to mostly adhere to and validate this singular, unchanging evaluation. They would need to provide meaningful linkage between past and present. This is what can often be seen when observing Sasha Jansen in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sasha's conception of her self is clouded by cynicism and criticism. This self-perception is the legacy of a personal history punctuated by loss and betrayal. But why hold onto a past which is haunted by so much pain and anguish? Why not let go of this past, and with it the deleterious self-concept it engenders, and embark instead on the construction of a new sense of self which maximises wellbeing? Mark Freeman suggests that this reluctance has something to do with the fear of loss. "It simply isn't easy to give up one's old self," he writes, "no matter how neurotically enchained one knows it to be" (41). Despite Sasha's happiness being impeded by the negative self-evaluation foisted on her by her history, the resurfacing of this history offers a defence against "the onslaught of time" (99). It clasps a moment in cognition and allows it to be repeated over and over, defying the inevitability of loss. A paralysis of this kind defies death, an enticing idea since "no one likes to witness the death of a loved one, particularly if it is oneself" (42). This is why Sasha chooses to "pull the past over [her] like a blanket" (*GMM* 49). Memory comforts at the same time as it incarcerates. The self is trapped in stasis when memory is used to escape the present and forge links with the past, but it is those forged links which defend against the loss that change inevitably entails. It is why Sasha possesses a belief in certain defining, inextinguishable features of the self, even if they are features which harm her self-concept: "there always remains something" of her time in the "deep, dark river," thinks Sasha, despite all attempts at self-transformation (10).

At the same time, a recollection of the past is vital if Sasha is to construct a personal narrative in which she can place her self and correspondingly, as per Albright's remark, give meaning to

her thoughts and actions. Despite its potential for calcifying the self, there can also be no vision of narrative development, conventional or otherwise, without a remembered past to track progress. As Freeman puts it, rather than being focused exclusively on the future, development is a “retrospective idea” (44), a concept which requires the subject to continually be looking back in order to see the path taken. Yet if Sasha is constantly reacquainting herself with her history, thereby satisfying this condition for narrative, why does her story seem to lack coherent development or, arguably, any aura of meaning? The problem might be in the absence of interpretation. It is not enough to recount the past, claims Freeman. Rather, one must interpret history in order for it to be integrated into the self-narrative. Interpretation is an act of creation, but the problem for Sasha is that her recounting is often compulsive rather than creative. She ends up inhabiting the past, not understanding it. In order for a narrative to be constructed, memory needs to be “an interpretive act, the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self” (41). Only through interpretation can memories be contextualised, neutralising their power to ensnare the self in the cruel comforts of repetition. “An event that has been explained and assimilated into one’s life story,” writes Timothy Wilson, “is less likely to keep coming to mind, triggering attempts to suppress it” (178).

Unlike a simple black-and-white recounting, however, an interpretation of one’s history denotes an element of intention and subjectivity. It should not be an objective, automatic report, such as the one Sasha’s mind plays on autopilot: “The gramophone record is going strong in my head: ‘Here this happened, here that happened ...’” (15). Rather, an interpretation of the past requires a consideration of causes, reasons and meanings. Admittedly, when it occurs, this consideration is often instinctive and given little inward scrutiny, but even when a conscious, willed choice to interpret is made, this choice is still heavily constrained by certain factors. One of these factors is the influence of a social group. Just as one’s self is influenced by sociality, so is one’s evaluation of that self, and this includes an evaluation of its history. This is not necessarily something we must begrudgingly accept. It is something we often seek out. We want to share our narratives with others, haphazard-

ly built as they are from the patchwork of memory, for the reason that “as we share our personal stories with others [...] they take on coherence and meaning and become part of our individual life story” (Fivush, 75). When we share our narratives and have them articulated by others, they take on greater shape and substance and thus we can acquire a firmer grip on them, strengthening our self-concept. Of course, this also means that if we do not want our stories given such substance, if they contain traumatic events for instance, then we, like Sasha, may be reluctant to share them with others, leaving the self struggling for clarity. Worse, these absences in our shared narratives may even confer them with greater influence over our self-construction, as Jean Braham points out: “The ‘holes’ define the ‘shape’. What is left repressed, or what cannot be uttered, is often as significant to the whole shape of the life as what is said” (37).

If by sharing our stories with others we essentially change their nature, then it might not be fair to say we are the sole authors of our own narratives. This does not need to be a problem, and our awareness of it may even be to our advantage. If one believes one has total agency over self-construction, it follows that the world one sees is also autonomously self-constructed since it is a unique and subjective projection of the individual. This suggests, rather solipsistically, that everything that happens within that world carries an element of personal responsibility. The language Sasha uses when recalling the death of her child speaks to a certain culpability in this regard. After giving birth to this child, Sasha experiences intense bouts of insomnia and anxiety, symptoms which might suggest post-natal depression, a possibility strengthened by her ambiguous feelings towards her newborn: “Do I love him? Poor little devil, I don’t know if I love him” (*GMM* 50). A “solution” proposed by the woman looking after her is to tightly swathe her in bandages as a means of arranging it “that you will be just like what you were before. There will be no trace, no mark, nothing” (51). The operation is a success. She is just as she was before, without a single distinguishing mark, line, wrinkle or crease. However, the exact same language is employed in chilling circumstances a paragraph later: “And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one

wrinkle, not one crease. And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease” (52). The unsettling use of repetition suggests an interpretation of accountability for this tragedy. In the effort to assuage her panic and sleeplessness by erasing the marks and creases in her self’s history, Sasha may have, to her mind, instigated the erasure of another part of herself: her child. She may, like her child, appear faultless on the surface, but beneath she feels anything but.

Sasha’s response to these devastating effects is to essentially go in the opposite direction and renounce not just her sense of responsibility but the self that had carried it. It is after Enno leaves her that Sasha says she “began to go to pieces,” (119) suggesting that a gradual dissolution of the self has begun. She has struggled to find a clear sense of identity and agency ever since. A pertinent characteristic of *Good Morning, Midnight* is its aimless drift, the sense that there rarely feels like any direction to the protagonist’s Parisian existence. Sasha’s definition of her daily life is “Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel” (120) and a telling refrain throughout the novel is her own insistence that she “pull [herself] together” (18, 27, 76, 101). This might be why a specific contradiction appears in the way Sasha defines herself. “Just like me - always wanting to be different from other people,” (12) she claims early on, only for this to be contradicted later by “Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you” (88). Inverting her paradigm of responsibility has muddied the coherence which had previously undergirded her identity. Sasha is caught between wanting to claim ownership of herself and wanting to dilute responsibility by refusing her individuality. This may also reflect her ambivalence towards social encounters, simultaneously hungry for and fearful of both solitude and society. The former threatens the self with negation, the latter (as explored in the previous chapter) with unsolicited and exploitative definition. It seems that her solution is to find a middle ground. This is why she spends so much time sitting in the quiet corners of cafes, bars and restaurants, defining herself simply and derisively in

the minds of others so as to keep from slipping into total self-cessation: “They all know what I am. I’m a woman come in here to get drunk” (89).

Sasha appears torn between competing impulses. On the one hand, she needs her memory to deny the reality of loss and to feel like a tangible, coherent presence in the world, and on the other she reviles and wants to relinquish her memory for reminding her of painful events which she interprets as self-instigated. Sasha saw her narrative as authored solely by her self, so when tragic events appeared within this narrative, the blame for them was placed at her door alone. Her solution was to destroy the narrative and live without any overarching sense of purpose - “I’ve had enough of thinking, enough of remembering” (37) - but this leaves her with the creeping unease of a dissolving and disordered identity. This dissolution comes to a head towards the end of the novel when Sasha’s entire self is momentarily submerged in the anaesthetising bath of timelessness and, correspondingly, selflessness. After being asked what she is afraid of, triggering the memories of loss and betrayal, she has the image of “walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That’s the past — or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same” (144). This is her panicked and last-ditch defence against the pain that accompanies her recollection of “[e]verything spoiled, all spoiled,” (145) the same words she had used previously on recalling her child’s death (116).

“The better a person understands the degree to which he is externally determined,” wrote Mikhail Bakhtin, “the closer he comes to understanding and exercising his real freedom” (139). Although the belief in a fully self-authored narrative may seem on the surface to suggest absolute freedom, Sasha’s adoption of this narrative shows how Bakhtin’s viewpoint, with its emphasis on external determinism, may be of greater value. However, with Sasha’s gramophone playback of the past appearing so compulsive, and with her interpretation of blame and punishment so instinctive, she may well be unaware that the option to rewrite the self is open to her. Yet it is, and it is precisely this option, made possible through reinterpretation, that could resolve her dilemma. But how should

it be rewritten? How should we judge the value of any one narrative interpretation? Is the best narrative the one which sticks most closely to the facts? Historical accuracy may be a worthy aim for the reason that to “manage the present or survive the future, we often need an honest account of the past,” (Neisser, 2) but it is one which possesses some thorny problems.

The first of these is its questionable achievability. By conferring meaning on past events, meanings which did not exist at the time, the event is instantly transformed into something it was not. Furthermore, is it possible to view the past from a position which corresponds with the truth of our past selves if we are now viewing it from the vantage point of the present? In the same way that an event can be seen differently from two different angles, it must surely also take on a particular edge when seen from a different time. These epistemological and spatiotemporal issues highlight the problems with the idea of one historical truth. It is also possible that if we attempt to stick too closely to the past as experienced by our past self, we will actually *lose* historical accuracy. George Gusdorf saw memory as offering the potential of a more expansive, top-down view. For the present self, “the agitation of things ordinarily surrounds me too much for me to be able to see it in its entirety,” yet when looking back, “[m]emory gives me a certain remove and allows me to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space” in the same way that “an aerial view sometimes reveals [...] the map of the city invisible to someone on the ground” (38). We learn more about an event when given the luxury of hindsight.

When Sasha thinks “I’m here because I’m here because I’m here,” (*GMM* 18) the thought seems to encapsulate another difficulty with understanding the self based on historical accuracy alone. Absent of subjective inference, the chain of cause and effect is too complex to be articulated and too sterile to provide meaning. As Immanuel Kant wrote, “[w]e can never, even by the strictest examination, get completely behind the secret springs of action” (24). One ends up exasperated and returning to the only verifiable, if meaningless, truth: I’m here because I’m here. But if historical accuracy is too problematic a concept to be the basis of a workable, valuable narrative, what should

take its place? In terms of producing a self-concept which maximises wellbeing while also generating greater self-understanding, one potential route might be to envision a multiplicity of narratives, gathered through a balancing of solitary self-reflection and social interaction. The obvious drawback of such an approach is in its threat to the idea of a coherent, unified self, since it is difficult to preserve a sense of coherence and unity if the self needs to follow disparate yet simultaneous story threads. As discussed, the tethering stability this coherence offers is the basis of Sasha's need to believe in certain inextinguishable features, no matter how damaging they are to her self-concept. It is why, when she looks into one of her "well-know mirrors", she hears it say, "of all the faces I see, I remember each one, [...] I keep a ghost to throw back at each one — lightly, like an echo — when it looks into me" (*GMM* 142). However, a close look at the characters in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* will reveal the value of remaining open to a plurality of storylines and the reasons that sociality and solitude can mitigate this fear of the fragmented self.

If there is any plot to *Mrs Dalloway*, it finds form in the gradual lead-up to Clarissa's party. The party is thus a central feature of the novel, and it is particularly pertinent for our examination of self-concept as influenced by society and solitude. Clarissa struggles to articulate from where exactly her predilection for throwing parties originates, but her best attempt to describe it is as "an offering; to combine; to create;" a description which she follows with the revealing question, "but to whom?" (*MD* 134). The idea of this party being an offering to an unknown entity suggests an element of religiosity, of ritual, of sacrifice, as if Clarissa herself is giving something up in order to satisfy a higher purpose. The exact nature of this higher purpose is unclear, but a clue might be found in the content of Clarissa's theory, formulated by her younger self and expounded by Peter later in the novel. Dissatisfied with "not knowing people; not being known," Clarissa felt that,

to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places ... It ended in a transcendental theory which ... allowed her to believe ... that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the un-

seen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death. (167)

This theory seems to posit that in order to be successful in the project of self-construction, we must locate those who “complete” us. Just as individuals cannot survive in total isolation, the self cannot fully take shape without the other. The reason Clarissa hosts these parties may therefore be to help people “complete” themselves by facilitating the fusion of self with other. “Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair [...] and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; and so she did it” (133-4). Her combining leads to her creating, and this constitutes her offering.

Clarissa’s theory also calls to mind a section of the novel which seems, in contrast to much of the indirect discourse within the book, to be written from the viewpoint of an omniscient, impartial narrator. Following Lady Bruton’s lunch, her guests leave and she begins to doze off on the sofa. “And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread [...] which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London,” until, upon finally falling asleep, she “let the thread snap” (123). This thread broken, another soon appears, “as a single spider’s thread after wavering here and there attaches itself to the point of a leaf, so Richard’s mind, recovering from its lethargy, set now on his wife” (125). The image is apt since it calls to mind a spider’s web, a structure which brings different threads together in an interlinking, interweaving pattern, but one which usually remains invisible. Considering its narration by a disembodied, impartial presence, the passage also suggests an invisible deeper structure undergirding all life, a view espoused by Woolf herself in her philosophy “that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art” (*MOB* 72). What all this suggests is that, hidden from view like a spider’s web, a larger network holds us in place and yet is dependent on each of us for its integrity. In the same way that Morris Philipson describes *Mrs Dalloway* as an arabesque in the

sense that “each separable element is an indispensable part of the whole,” (125) the same is true, for Woolf, of every individual within his or her society. Therefore, to fully understand one’s self, to get a firm grip on one’s self-concept, one must also appreciate the social web in which one lives.

This is not to suggest sociality is wholly beneficial for self-concept. As we have repeatedly seen, context is crucial. The metaphor of the spider’s web is particularly pertinent when considering how a social group can leave a person stuck in terms of how they conceive of themselves and what they believe their future selves can be. Lady Bruton is a good example of this constraining effect of the social web. Despite her lofty position in society, she “often suspended judgement upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe” (*MD* 120), and thinks privately about the “futility of her womanhood” (119). “Debarred by her sex,” (198) it is only when a man takes her ideas and puts them on the page to write a letter that Lady Bruton can even perceive her own self’s true presence in the world, asking in awe, “[c]ould her own meaning sound like that?” (121). The effect of this is that Lady Bruton’s self-conceived essence, ““that fibre which was the ramrod of her soul, that essential part of her without which Millicent Bruton would not have been Millicent Bruton,” is comically whittled down to “that project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada” (119). Clarissa also finds her self constrained by the same social conventions of gender, her marriage causing her to be “not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (11). While social interaction may offer the potential for a person’s self-concept to reach a greater sense of completion, may substantiate the self through the sharing, echoing and interpretation of narrative, it may also shut off narrative paths, stunt self-concept, and obscure states of growth which may only be visible when placed outside this viscid web of sociality. To reach these states, one may have to extricate one’s self from the web and, at least temporarily, find self-knowledge in the introspection afforded by solitude.

It is therefore necessary to obstruct the influence of others and spend time reflecting on the self from the singular view of the self: the ‘me’ should sometimes be explored by the ‘I’ alone if it is to be properly understood. One reason for this is that only the individual holds the exact set of memories that make up a person’s known history. Others see us in the here-and-now, and they may also have specific memories of us in their minds, but neither their here-and-now nor their memories carry the subjective perspective experienced by the subject. Only we have access to what it really feels like to be us, and, through memory, only we have access to what it felt like to be our past selves. If we are to fairly interpret our past in order to build a narrative, a consideration of the self’s perspective is a prerequisite. The need for solitude in the process of building self-concept is therefore vital, and this is understood by Clarissa in spite of her social tendencies:

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one’s husband, without losing one’s independence, one’s self-respect - something, after all, priceless. (131)

This solitude is priceless precisely because it allows people to hold onto who they are. It keeps them independent of one another, enabling them to retain their individuality and not simply exist as an indistinguishable cog in the grand social machine. Clarissa accepts the gulf that exists between her and her husband since this gulf gives him the chance to privately reflect on his past experiences, enabling a more autonomous self-construct to materialise through the processing and narrativising of memory. The alternative would be for Clarissa to fill the gulf by insisting on her husband’s total openness, but her interpretations of his stories would almost certainly lead to them being altered in his mind, in turn modifying his sense of self. Having all stories modified in this way would essentially make Richard a creation of Clarissa’s making. Keeping at least some thoughts private allows individuals to retain a measure of “self-respect”: a respect for the self *as* self. It is one of the reasons

Clarissa feels “she had been right” to marry Peter rather than Richard, since “with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into” (8).

This need to acknowledge the importance of solitude for achieving self-knowledge takes on greater precedence when considering how much of the self goes unnoticed when in social conditions. It is only when switched off from the burdens of social interaction that certain thoughts and feelings can reach our conscious awareness. Elizabeth perceives this when she finds herself wandering through London after pulling herself out of the oppressive orbit of Miss Kilman. It was “when one was alone,” immersed in the dispassionate landscape of “buildings without architects’ names, crowds of people coming back from the city,” that it was possible “to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind’s sandy floor, to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms” (150). This vision of “breaking surface” is echoed later by Peter when he describes the self:

This is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled wave; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping. (176)

As well as the idea of rising to and breaking through the surface, both metaphors also use the imagery of quiet, brooding depths to explain those parts of the self that exist yet are buried too deep to be noticed. However, whereas Elizabeth’s metaphor speaks of solitude’s ability to imbue subconscious thoughts with the energy necessary for them to break the surface of consciousness, Peter’s hints at what follows this puncture: the desire to reestablish social ties, “to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping”. This desire is not necessarily universal. As discussed in chapter one, Peter has a self-professed (if sometimes denied) dependency on others. Elizabeth, meanwhile, feels spending time in society has turned life into “a burden” since her elders spend all their time imposing their own narrative of innocence and purity by comparing her “to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths,

fawns, running water, and garden lilies,” all of which leave her desirous of “being left alone to do what she liked in the country” (147). Although both characters emphasise solitude’s quality of stimulating subterranean thoughts and correspondingly enhancing self-knowledge, their differing interpretations of sociality may be influenced by their genders. Peter’s masculinity gives him a greater degree of control over his narrative, encouraging him to authenticate his story by sharing it with others, while Elizabeth, as a woman, must be more vigilant of the dangers sociality presents to her self-definition.

If the quietude of solitude is a necessary condition for a self-examination free of the narrativising influence of others, and if sociality, despite its dangers, is required for the self to reach a state of substantiation and completion, how might these two opposing states be reconciled in the project of constructing accurate and beneficent self-concept?

It may be useful to begin by questioning the assumption of sociality and solitude being opposing states. Considering the frequency with which we call others to mind when alone and lost in thought (Lieberman, 19), and considering how alone we can often feel when in the company of others, the distinction between these two states is not clear. The same can be said of self and other. It is problematic to dichotomise in this way since, as we have seen, the two are in constant flux. Rather than being two separate states, cordoned off from one another, in reality self and other are unavoidably interrelated. From the moment of birth, the self is dependent on the other for survival, and the impressionable, pliant mind of the child self means that it is being endlessly shaped by the influence of this other. It is, to an extent, the creation of an other. At the same time, the other is not necessarily separate from the self since it is also a creation of the self. Due to the specific set of memories and beliefs each individual carries, a person can never be perceived in exactly the same way by two people. Those memories will colour the other in a specific and unrepeatable hue of associations. There will, naturally, be some overlap, and it is here that we might locate the essence of a person,

but in its entirety the other is a product of each person's unique subjective mind. In this sense, the other, rather than being separate from the self, can be argued to be an extension of the self.

This has important consequences for self-concept as affected by solitude and sociality, and it is here we can return to Clarissa's party. The party encapsulates this idea of a muddled, questionable dichotomy between self and other, solitude and sociality. This is explored by Philipson, who argues that, through the form of the party, Woolf illustrates how "[b]y oneself one is only a fragment of oneself" since "a person is an event, a performance, an ongoing activity effectuating that existence through a rhythmic pattern of participation with and withdrawal from others" (138). This is why he argues that the "significance of a party" is to facilitate and ritualise the "individual integration arising out of the social engagement in which it achieves fulfilment and, therefore, peace" (137). Sociality leads to integration, and integration leads to completion and peace. This partly explains Peter's comparison of Clarissa to the bells of St. Margaret. Peter sees that Clarissa is careful not to alter the narratives of others by imposing her own - "her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality" - and yet she is still "like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest" (*MD* 54). Peter later criticises Clarissa for the fact her "exquisite sense of humour [...] needed people, always people, to bring it out" and that this had the effect of "blunting her mind, losing her discrimination" (86), yet it might actually help to blunt the sharp divide between self and other and abandon the discrimination it engenders. If the view of an unreconcilable separation between self and other is maintained, it will not be possible for the self to be fully understood, and this sense of peace - this "rest" - will therefore remain a distant and unachievable prospect.

This is why Philipson sees the party as the perfect visual representation of the self. It is a single entity composed of numerous different parts, each part carrying its own individuality. "In this sense, *the self is a group* and *the image for individuation is a successful party*," Philipson writes, concluding that "the self is a party of one" (130). If a successful party provides a symbol for indi-

viduation, where each party guest is easily distinguishable as a unique individual, this suggests that individuation is also necessary for the healthy self-concept of a singular self. Recognising and even emphasising the multiple selves within us, borne of our interactions with other people and our various stages of history, should allow for inner peace and harmony. Doing so requires that we give individual but intermingling narratives to each of these parts, in the same way that individual guests at a party will be characterised by their own narratives, influencing and being influenced by the narratives of others in the spider's web of sociality.

These ideas help us understand why hosting her party is, to begin with, “too much of an effort” for Clarissa: “It was too much like being - just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it” (*MD* 187). It is at this moment that she is restricting many parts of her character to perform the role of the host, a role so constrictive as to leave her feeling “she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven into the top of her stairs” (187). We can here appreciate the sense of sacrifice suggested earlier, with Clarissa taking on a totemic appearance. Yet as well as being “unreal in one way”, she is also giving herself full licence to express a part of her usually concealed from view, and thus she is “more real in another” (187). In order to fully understand the self and form an accurate, helpful self-concept, it is important to acknowledge these hidden aspects, even if they contradict and thus threaten our view of who we are. Just as Philipson notes that Clarissa's party contains “the anarchist and the conformist; the irresponsible, wilful adolescent and the repetitively plodding administrative adult; the hedonist and the puritan” (130), so too does the self contain such contradictions. These cannot be explained through any singular narrative, and any attempt to do so will leave one repressing, but not eradicating, thoughts and memories which challenge a clean and coherent self-concept. Wilson thus suggests that we “adopt the postmodernist perspective that it is pointless to judge self-narratives by their accuracy or historical truth,” making the argument that “people live in multiple crosscurrents of conflicting social forces, and they construct many narratives specific to particular relationships and cultural circumstances” (217).

“[S]elf-knowledge is intrinsically multimodal,” writes Ulric Neisser, “[i]t cannot be reduced to any single source of information” (10). Basing our self-concept on the findings of, exclusively, solitude or sociality, memory or present experience, the evaluation of others or the evaluation of ourselves, is not just unwise but also impossible, and the view of self as entirely separate from other only compounds this problem. We instinctively gather information about the self from a variety of sources, and the process leaves us with a different self from when we started. It is natural that we would struggle to integrate all these conflicting data into a single workable narrative that can orient our past, present and future selves. Multiple narratives are therefore necessary if we are not to succumb to defeat in the process of their writing. “The use of the term ‘narrative’,” argues Wilson, “is meant to convey that there are many ways of telling a person’s story, and not just one historical truth that must be discovered before positive self-change can be achieved” (216).

Rather than giving up on the project of writing the self because certain events and inner changes do not fit the originally conceived narrative, as Sasha does when the traumas of her life and the inner changes they cause cannot be integrated into her singular agency-centric narrative, one can instead consider the value of opening up new narratives in order to accommodate chance, the passing of time, and the contradictions we all carry within us. Setting new narrative pathways enables us to circumvent such obstructions and continue on the road towards self-growth. Yet one might argue that in order to avoid losing coherence and sacrificing meaning, there needs to be some way of tying these multiple storylines together, just as a good host must organise and harmonise the interactions of the disparate personalities which make up her party: “She must assemble” (*MD* 204). It is not clear that such a means of assembly exists, and this is a valid criticism which we will explore in the conclusion. As we turn to this conclusion, we will also attempt to establish a clear meaning of our own by assembling the assortment of ideas over the last three chapters into a coherent statement on solitude and sociality’s impact on self-concept.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with the question of how solitude and social interaction impact the way we conceive of and evaluate ourselves by focusing on how the characters in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* behave in and react to these states. An attempt will now be made to summarise the ideas presented over the course of the previous three chapters in order to tie these divergent threads together into a coherent final statement on the topic of sociality's effect on self-concept.

The first chapter focused on Charles Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self as a means of explaining how we rely on others to help construct our self-concept. According to Cooley, the ideas we hold about our selves are based on our perceptions of what others think about us. We begin this three-step process by first imagining how we appear to others, after which we predict how we are judged based on this appearance, and finish by building impressions of ourselves based on these judgements. In this sense, the people around us are used as mirrors, but rather than reflecting our physical appearance, these mirrors help to produce an idea of how we appear on the inside: our traits, goals, motivations, fears and flaws. Within this looking-glass theory of self, then, the role of sociality is essential to self-construction since without other people we are unable to establish a complete image of our selves.

However, our investigation into the ways Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh evaluate themselves in *Mrs Dalloway* revealed how perceiving ourselves according to the mirrors of others produces a self-concept which is frequently unaligned with reality. This is because the self we present in social settings is often a chameleonic self, a self which adapts according to the needs and personnel of the specific social situation. We often sanitise, censor, amplify, and generally alter different aspects of who we are when communicating with others. How we do so, and how much we do so, will depend on with whom we are interacting, but it is not necessarily the case that we are most au-

thetically our selves when in the company of those who we believe know us best. Peter, for instance, makes the claim that Clarissa understands him better than anyone. Yet he cannot help but descend into a state of self-estrangement when he is in her presence, becoming dizzied, frightened, and disassociated from his anguish when he calls upon his purely material achievements to help define who he really is.

Peter here is doing what many of us do in social settings: we are presenting our best selves because we want to see our best selves reflected back at us. Doing this helps us to build a self-concept with which we want to identify, one absent of the incongruities, weaknesses and hostilities which more accurately colour our true selves. Because, like Clarissa, we want to believe that, deep down, we are good people, we do our best to obscure from view all the vanities and jealousies we carry with us since these rock our belief in our inherent goodness. Instead, we emphasise those agreeable parts of our selves, and we seek out those who confirm the presence of these qualities within us, like Clarissa's servants helping her "to be what she wanted, gentle, generous-hearted" (*MD* 42). Further, the qualities regarded as good or agreeable depend on what is deemed desirable by our society. The looking-glass self thus creates a conception of self which is almost entirely the creation of one's society, leaving no essence of self to claim as one's own.

Yet despite "the tranquility of the waters" (Cooley, 141) in which we see ourselves being muddied by these issues, Cooley's looking-glass self is not an inaccurate theory of self-perception. It is important to remember that Cooley did not believe we are influenced by the opinions of others but instead by what we interpret those opinions to be. And, as the behaviour and thoughts of Peter and Clarissa show, imagining how we are judged by others is one way we construct an idea of our selves, regardless of accuracy. However, it is not the only way. To imagine that this theory offers a complete account of the process of self-concept construction is to neglect multiple other sources of self-analysis, one of which is the introspection of solitude. In terms of contributing towards a self-concept free of society's distorting influence, Nietzsche's version of solitude is perhaps the most

conducive. In contrast to the soft solitude that sees Peter inventing a fiction between himself and an unknown woman he stalks around London, Nietzsche recommends a hard solitude, a complete abandonment of society, in order to return to an original sense of self that has been obscured by societal norms. By taking us away from “the herd” (101), we no longer feel the need to inflate attributes that culture labels desirable and deny those it labels unacceptable. It is only when Peter is forced into a solitude like this that he is able to confront his extreme dependency on others.

Further, when we escape from the burdens of sociality for a while, we can take a moment to reflect on our previous social experiences. We can view the interactions for what they are: performances. The idea of the performative self is key to fully understanding the self and forming an accurate self-concept since it is not entirely removed from the true self. Our performances are, to a degree, dictated by our desires, even if those desires themselves are, to a degree, dictated by cultural conventions. Understanding the performative nature of our interactions, a mode of analysis which can only really take place in the quietude of solitude, can help us to acquire a sense of awareness when we instinctively transition into this performative self when in social settings. This awareness leads to a greater degree of control, and this control extends to how one defines one’s self, meaning that one is no longer wholly reliant on the judgements of others for self-definition. Without this self-awareness, however, the performance is in danger of resembling a form of puppetry, and the strings can sometimes fall into the hands of exploitative puppeteers.

Chapter two focuses on this danger as it investigates the threats to self-ownership which Sasha Jansen must confront in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha’s interaction at the end of the novel with the gigolo, René, is particularly illustrative of this kind of threat. It reveals how exploitation can be achieved through a commandeered life story. By imposing a narrative upon our lives, or insisting on a deleterious interpretation of the life narrative we share, other people can mould our self-concept to suit their pernicious aims. René attempts to do this with Sasha, subtly inflicting on her a narrative of rich old spinster eager for sexual relations while insisting that his own story is that he

only needs Sasha's money to acquire a forged passport. This enables him to achieve his financial aims while simultaneously denying the reality of how he meets these aims - prostitution - in order to smooth over his self-concept: "the gigolo is, in effect, a prostitute who diligently pretends that he is not" (Davidson, 356).

Yet the threats to Sasha's selfhood do not necessarily come from her social interactions alone. The pain of loneliness also poses a risk to Sasha's identity, and this reveals the dark side of solitude's impact on self-concept. Because her past experiences have left her distrustful of other people, Sasha's default setting is to seek out the safety of solitude, but solitude of a specific kind. She still needs the attention of other people in order to track how the mission of her own self-transformation is progressing, but actual interaction is too risky. The result is that she spends much of her time alone in the quiet corners of Parisian bars and cafes, interpreting the gazes of other people on her sartorial and behavioural choices. However, these interpretations are heavily skewed towards the negative: "voices that they brandish like weapons" (*GMM* 44). This paranoia is a common side effect of loneliness, as explored in the work of Cacioppo. Being lonely generates a downward spiral of perceived threat, fear, and self-protective isolation. Those increasingly negative perceptions, all imagined in the mind of the lonely individual, then impact the self-concept for the same reasons proposed by the looking-glass self theory.

When Sasha is more completely alone, such as when she is by herself in her hotel room, she perceives herself as being safe "from the wolves outside" (33). Yet she is not necessarily any safer in terms of her self-concept. Hemmed in by the walls of her hotel room, she feels equally hemmed in by the memories which encroach upon her: the "damned roomed, it's saturated with the past" (91). These involuntary memories seem to sentence her to an agency-robbing determinism, entrapping her in a narrative she does not want to own. In contrast to the characters in Mrs Dal-loway, then, Sasha's self-concept is at risk when she is in a solitary state, both in public and in private. In fact, despite the aforementioned danger sociality poses to self-ownership, it might only be

her reengagement with society that can equip her with the tools to break her negative thinking patterns and revivify her sense of self.

Sasha's experience with the Russian, Delmar, offers the reader a small glimpse at this potential. Delmar leans on the bonding effect of shared experience to try and pierce Sasha's armour. He discloses his previous battles with loneliness to Sasha so as to open her eyes to the value of regular social interaction. As a remedy for the complex disease of loneliness, it is a somewhat simple approach, but it at least has the effect of opening Sasha to the idea of meeting Delmar's friend, the painter, Serge. Numerous passages in this section, many of which were highlighted in chapter two, show how Sasha's encounter with Serge had an enlightening effect on her stultified mind. Serge's unaffected manner, his stories and his paintings combine to, at least temporarily, erode the chains that Sasha feels have been placed on her identity throughout her life and loosen "the iron band round [her] heart" (83). Unlike fashion, which has repeatedly broken its enticing promise to transform her identity, this interaction demonstrates the genuine power sociality has for facilitating self-growth.

Nonetheless, the perils of other people, as illustrated by the exploitative René, cannot be ignored. This ushers in the central dilemma regarding the construction of a beneficent self-concept: when should we seek solitude and when should we seek sociality? How much of each should be prescribed? The answer is that there is no answer. There are numerous contextual considerations to be made. Where one is in one's life path is critical, as illustrated by the vastly different responses to sociality and solitude experienced by Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh and Sasha Jansen. The type of sociality one experiences is also crucial, as illustrated by the intentions of Serge and René. Even our own intentions need to be scrutinised, as well as the type of solitude we rely on for self-analysis. What is clear is that *Good Morning, Midnight* reveals the power of narrative, whether self-constructed or other-constructed, to impact this self-concept. And the foundation of any narrative is based in memory.

This investigation into the link between memory, narrative and self-concept, each influenced in their own way by solitude and sociality, was the aim of our focus in chapter three. We began this chapter by explaining why narratives matter: they provide us with a clear sense of identity. This identity building is important since it grants a sense of meaning to our thoughts and actions, preventing our instantaneous selves from feeling capricious, directionless and ultimately meaningless. The narrative which establishes this identity is constructed to a large degree from our memories, so in order for the narrative to be coherent, the memories we call to mind must fit this story. This can lead to a rather static self-concept, as it means we only recruit specific memories that validate and reinforce our narrative rather than evoke those which might challenge the narrative we want to tell. Even when these more dissonant memories are recalled, perhaps involuntarily, we still might intercept their power to overturn beliefs about the self by interpreting these memories in a way which, again, suits the overarching narrative.

Why do we find it so hard to give up long-held ideas about our identity? Certain scholars have argued that this is because keeping hold of a particular identity is one way of forming a clear connection with the past, a past which includes our prior selves, and this helps to fend off the prospect of loss. This is what we see with Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, the protagonist consistently regurgitating the past to a degree that it appears almost compulsive. This remembering allows her to mitigate the pain of her past betrayals and the loss of her child, yet at the same time it also emphasises the pain by putting it front and centre. Memory is undergoing the process of narrativisation in Sasha's life, but because this memory recall is occurring automatically rather than wilfully, Sasha does not interpret these memories in a manner conducive to her self-concept. The narrative she builds, when she does build one, is centred around agency and responsibility, a narrative which gives her a sense of control but also comes with disastrous consequences since it causes her to perceive all the negative events in her life as her own fault. And this is why we see her half-abandoning the narrative project, and drifting through Paris in an aimless, directionless fashion. She sees

her choice as between a single narrativised identity, which carries the pain of responsibility, and self-negation, which bears the burden of nihilism.

As we saw with Sasha's experiences with Delmar, Serge and René, both the composition and interpretation of this narrative is not set in stone but can be modified by our social interactions with others. If we are proud of our established narrative, we will often share these stories with others because doing so helps to substantiate them and thus reinforce a sense of self marked by coherence and continuity. However, sharing ourselves also puts our narratives at greater risk of being commandeered and manipulated by people like René. Yet it would be unwise to claim that our narratives are ever fully self-authored since our thoughts and actions, and the memories they produce, are the product of so many outside forces. Acknowledging the contribution of others to the construction of our narratives helps to minimise the risk posed by this contribution by increasing our awareness of how we might be manipulated by it. In the case of Sasha, this acknowledgement might also mitigate the sense of responsibility she feels for things which are actually beyond her control.

Then again, Sasha need not be burdened by choosing between the responsibility of self-ownership and the numbness of self-cessation since these are not the only choices open to her. The dilemma can be resolved by rewriting and reinterpreting the self. What form this new interpretation should take is a question which we considered, with historical accuracy the chief factor scrutinised. After seeing the various epistemological concerns which plague historical accuracy, however, it seemed that this should not be the guiding criterion. Instead, it was proposed that we look to Virginia Woolf and her vision of the party in *Mrs Dalloway* for an idea of how best to narrativise the self through memory in order to build a beneficent self-concept. Through this novel, it was argued that Clarissa's party represents how self-concept can and perhaps should be conceived through the construction of multiple narratives.

A party may be a singular event, with no two parties the same, but at the same time it is an event composed of a diversity of characters, all of whom are communicating, influencing and in-

terminingling. As suggested by Philpson, a party could then be seen as a symbol of the self. Although we are unique and singular organisms, with no two of us the same, we are also the product of multiple different personalities working within us, each carrying a different set of intentions, motivations and belief systems. These selves include our past selves, our present selves and our predicted future selves, as well as the selves which only surface around particular people and in particular environments, such as the self we inhabit in church versus the self we inhabit at work. The self which materialises when given the freedom of solitude is yet another guest at the party. Whether all of these diverse selves each share some essential trait that preserves the notion of an enduring, unified self is a question beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is undeniable that we act differently in different contexts, arguably to an extent that it would be very difficult to fit all of these selves into a singular narrative without resorting to selectivity and self-deceit.

Equipping ourselves with multiple narratives enables us to stop forcing square pegs into round holes. Singular narratives only produce the anguish of cognitive dissonance as we try to align the narrow ideas we hold about our true selves with the contradictory reality of our less predictable thoughts and behaviour. This dissonance causes such grief because it seems to threaten the idea of a coherent self, and, as we have seen, a coherent self is a necessary component of a meaningful life. It also seems to force us to confront self-death since it suggests we must abandon an old narrative, which links our past to our present, if we want to build a new one. Relinquishing our grip on singular narratives smooths out this dissonance and nullifies the self-death threat by allowing multiple narrative pathways to integrate these discrepant actions and experiences into our overall life story. As Wilson reminds us, there are many different ways of telling what is essentially the same story, and in order to prevent the self-concept from stagnating or getting stuck in a negative cycle, it may be useful to reacquaint ourselves with these narrative possibilities.

We ended the last chapter with the accusation of incoherence levelled at the multiple narratives approach. It may well be valid. Yet perhaps the accusation is even more legitimate for the sin-

gular narrative approach. After all, how can the self really enjoy coherence if work is always being done to deny or distort information to fit its singular narrative? This, as suggested above, produces the pain of cognitive dissonance. Any coherence it enjoys, therefore, is always transient, forever vulnerable to the frequent warping effects of disagreeable data. In contrast, the multiple narratives approach makes room for such discordances and is thus impervious to the damage they can do. This approach does not narrativise incongruities by blunt force or pretend that they do not exist but instead makes them congruous by assimilating them into the narrative which best suits them. Rather than producing incoherence and disunity, a multiplicity of narratives can, in a sense, provide stability, harmony, and an escape route from a deleteriously rigid self-concept. It can also permit a more accurate account of reality, which in turn can enhance our self-knowledge so as to guide us towards greater future well-being.

There will always be some degree of incongruity to the self since, despite our propensity to paint them as such, lives are not actually stories. The sequence of events which compose our minute-to-minute existence, including all our thoughts, feelings and actions, are too complex to be fully understood, and the innumerable outside forces which impinge upon us are too random to be neatly slotted into a storyline. Unlike many storybook characters, we can act and feel entirely differently at different times and within different environments, and in ways which cannot be explained as part of a narrative arc. Assimilating all of these unpredictable, contradictory, and inexplicable experiences into a single narrative necessitates that we ignore, embellish, and generally corrupt particular memories. Some sort of coherence might materialise from this narrativisation, but it is a sham coherence, a coherence which is endlessly buffeted by disturbances and must repeatedly work to recover from those disturbances. The multiple narratives approach, despite carrying its own form of incoherence, is much more flexible, facilitative and forgiving. It does not negate meaning, since it does not suggest the sequence of events in our lives is entirely without significance, but in-

stead is appreciative of the “multiple crosscurrents of conflicting social forces” in which we live (Wilson, 217).

To close, it is clear that sociality and solitude both have a significant impact on self-concept. Woolf and Rhys provide us with no definitive answer as to how much of each should be sought out in order to construct an accurate, healthy self-concept, and rightly so. A self-concept which consistently and accurately reflects reality is an unachievable aim since the self is always changing. What is important to acknowledge is when self-concept is being altered by other people, either through the imposition or interpretation of narrative or through our looking-glass perceptions. The detached introspection of genuine solitude is necessary in this regard to sort through our memories and see how we act differently around other people, to see how we might be being manipulated by them and how we might be being helped by them. We need to be careful not to seek out too much solitude, since this can lead to the vicious cycles of perceived threat and negative self-evaluation that characterise loneliness. It also cuts us off from those who might be able to open us up to more beneficent patterns of self-analysis. However, with the right amount of solitude, we can put the discordant series of events which makes up our memories into some sort of narrativised sequence, and we need not limit ourselves to singularities in this regard. Through a careful navigation of sociality and solitude, and with enough reflection on the self-concept these states produce, we can assimilate and integrate life’s experiences into a multiplicity of narratives that most enhances our health and happiness.

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