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Virginia Woolf and the Flâneuse: A Geocritical Approach to Mrs. Dalloway and the Voyage Out

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VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE FLÂNEUSE: A GEOCRITICAL APPROACH TO MRS.
DALLOWAY AND THE VOYAGE OUT

By

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Abstract

Using the theoretical framework of Geocriticism, Psychogeography, and the literary concepts of the flâneur and flâneuse, I argue that Virginia Woolf’s female walkers have a unique aesthetic experience from the male walker of literature. Although this experience differs because of the strictures on Victorian and Modernist women in cities like London and Paris, I rely on the framework of both literary walkers to refute scholars who question the existence of the flâneuse. Through works like *Mrs. Dalloway, The Voyage Out*, “Street Haunting,” “Kew Gardens,” “Literary Geography,” and *A Room of One’s Own*, I contend through a mix of traditional scholarship and creative nonfiction prose techniques that Woolf’s female walkers make a sizable imprint on our modern ideas of women walkers that not only participate in Baudelaire’s idea of the flâneur but challenge it by suggesting that the flâneuse does not ignore the crowd, but rather engages with individual people. She does not have to walk alone to be a flâneuse but must rather challenge assumptions by continuing in her belief that the city is worth celebrating through walking its landscapes.
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Imagine for a moment that the city is your church,
that the city is where you make the great discoveries of your life.
The place in which all serendipitous ideas occur to you, where philosophical realizations are
regulated by traffic lights and stolen moments under doorways.
The city is your mental map.
You know its representations—spiritual, mental, metonymical.
It’s both a stand-in and thing, represented and representation.
And you know this is true because you walk this city every day.
This is the story of Virginia Woolf as writer and walker,
who knew London so well that her characters were just as aesthetically attracted and
overwhelmed by it as she was in all her wandering.
**But First, Topology**

We often underestimate walking by identifying it as a means to a destination instead of the way by which we dispel a mood, solve a problem, or encounter a new place for the first time. Yet Leonhard Euler solved one of the most significant mathematical problems of the eighteenth century by walking; in 1736, Königsburg had seven bridges that connected its islands. Little did the builders of those medieval bridges know, they successfully traced an unsolvable math problem into the cartography of the city. Euler found that it was impossible to create a map that would take a walker over each bridge one time only, but he used graph theory and topology to determine the answer, the first record we have of these concepts in use. Before we had a name for the study of the relationships between spaces, Euler charted by walking a way towards an answer even if it wasn’t the solution people hoped for (Shields).

Euler’s lack of resolution isn’t the first or only example of the connection between spaces and walking. Literature is filled with fictional examples of characters walking the streets and concretely describing their relationship to space. But when we describe our own walks through time and space, it’s simpler to remember the cinematic experience than the ways in which we both catalog and become cataloged by other walkers. While mathematics has topology, writers have other methods of studying our cities. Like Psychogeography.

I first encountered Psychogeography on Tumblr, the ubiquitous land of internet wandering, a topology of its own. It’s a realm where you can find anything, nefarious or innocent, a dark internet hole or a place of exploration. One of the blogs I follow is Wordstuck, a community of wanderlusters who want to understand concepts missing from their own languages. The blogger in charge of the account is interested enough with the recent cultural obsession with untranslatable words that every time I logged onto Tumblr there was yet another
new word I’d never seen before from a critic named Guy Debord. This was just one of the thousands of entries:

Dérive (French; lit “drift”): a spontaneous journey on which the subtle aesthetic contours of the landscape and architecture subconsciously attract and move the traveler, encountering an entirely new and authentic experience (Cuyos).

It appeared in white text, the background a stock photo of a Paris Street that appealed to the wanderluster in me who has never left the country but believes it is possible to experience this level of engagement with a city. This French word is the gateway; when I look back at my posts, I realize that it was one of the first untranslatable words I saved for future use. Oddly enough, my first foray into geocritical scholarship was not so scholarly after all. Sometimes the doorway we walk towards isn’t the one we choose to go through because sometimes scholarship isn’t a doorway we enter knowing all the answers to our questions. Instead, it’s a walk filled with twists and turns.

Euler had to calculate his way across Königsburg, but the writer studies the cracks in the sidewalk and those who tread them. They may not always have a notebook, but her sketches of city life always make it into some written form. Part of this study may include a dive into the inscrutable, a quality that most cities have no shortage of. Sometimes this takes the form of those things that we have difficulty phrasing. What topology offers us is the ability to examine “the dynamics of time as well as space,” which ultimately has cultural implications (Shields). The relationship between spaces can be mapped according to this branch of mathematics. In the same sense, topology is of importance to the walkers of literature and the writers who portray them, the reason fundamentally related to the ways in which experience often resists language.

What we often think of as untranslatable simply refers to that which we don’t have words for. Perhaps it’s a hapax legomenon, the one-time appearance of a word in a particular context. More likely, the concept is well-traced in other languages besides our own. The connection
between supposedly untranslatable ideas and walking is one that figures significantly into my approach to writing. Now that seemingly untranslatable experience becomes the critical focus for viewing the walkers of Virginia Woolf’s essays and novels. Woolf’s emphasis on the moment is so transcendent it’s quite possible we still have only the vaguest idea what she means. In a sense, the moment Woolf describes is much the same as what the walker experiences every day in London. The concepts she navigates in her work aren’t untranslatable—it’s just that there is rarely one word to describe what Woolf writes towards and through. Often, the debates she engages in most fundamentally are implicit in the sense that her spiraling prose alludes to but dallies away from the “myriad impressions” she seeks. Upon first read, we don’t know the critical strains and hierarchies, the map of all meaning-making, but we walk through them hoping that the overlapping, constant metaphor of time and space that’s so apparent in works like Mrs. Dalloway translate into our own understanding of Woolf as a critical figure. Woolf engages us constantly in questions involving the walker’s relationship to space. Although this is also true of place, the two do not necessarily form a dichotomy because space is meant to represent the area a walker navigates, which isn’t necessarily tied to one geographical location.

Perhaps it’s fitting that I walk into Woolf’s work as an urban explorer reading temporally across texts. A product of Victorian notions of walking, Woolf sought and celebrated woman’s prerogative to walk the streets of London. In “Street Haunting,” the narrator leaves home on an errand to obtain a pencil. We know in reading the essay that it’s not the errand that matters but the walking for walking’s sake. That is where we start our journey.
A Word on the Flâneuse

“Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day,” Virginia Woolf writes in “Modern Fiction,” one of her most famous essays on the craft of writing. “The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms…” Although “Modern Fiction” more specifically makes an argument for writers to break away from the restraints of publishers and the public to instead depict life and its unknowns, this essay also provides an important delineation of the mind of the flâneuse, the female walker hotly contested by scholars. Woolf notably spent her life walking the London streets and identifies them as one of her most valuable stores of inspiration. The “myriad impressions” sharp as steel are the impressions that inundate Woolf as she walks. Woolf continues to elaborate that “[l]ife is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” Although the sentiment is universal, Woolf’s reference to gig lamps indicates her level of familiarity with the streets as a female walker. It’s a concrete detail, one that contrasts with her conception of consciousness as a disembodied halo and tells us something about the flâneuse.

Lauren Elkin defines the flâneuse in Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, London, and New York as “an idler, a dawdling observer, usually found in cities” who possesses “an imaginary definition” because “most French dictionaries don’t even include the word” or, worse yet, define the term “as a kind of lounge chair” (7). Oxford English Dictionary defines her as “a woman who saunters around observing life and society; a leisurely woman about town.” The irony in Elkin’s found definition is undeniable because it clearly demonstrates the extent to which the flâneuse has been dismissed in scholarship when placed
next to the male figure called the flâneur. The OED definition is hard-earned evidence that the female walker exists. Because the male and female walkers are gendered by their identifiers, it’s often believed that they are mostly the same figure. Yet the differences don’t stop there.

A flâneur is a male walker, “[a] figure of masculine privilege and leisure, with time and money and no immediate responsibilities to claim his attention … he has memorized [the city] with his feet” (Elkin 3). Charles Baudelaire worked extensively with this concept in the Victorian era in his work The Painter of Modern Life, which elucidates the privileges and requirements of a flâneur, who was explicitly gendered as a man. Although Baudelaire is not solely responsible for the concept, he does describe the “perfect flâneur” as one who “set[s] up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite” (39). It’s no accident that Baudelaire emphasizes the importance of setting up house in the street; in the nineteenth century, a woman’s place was in the home, but a man could set up his home anywhere. The “multitude” is also of importance to Baudelaire’s description of the flâneur, as the movement of the city begins with the crowd, which is “fugitive” and “infinite” because it is always moving. The flâneur is an anonymous man that Baudelaire even calls “a man of the world” and “the spiritual citizen of the universe” (39), proving just how seriously he took himself as just that. However, the flâneur was also a solitary figure despite his fixation with bustling city life:

In the city, one is alone because the world is made up of strangers, and to be a stranger surrounded by strangers, to walk along silently bearing one’s secrets and imagining those of the people one passes, is among the starkest of luxuries. This uncharted identity with its illimitable possibilities is one of the distinctive qualities of urban living…. (Solnit 186)

Not only does Rebecca Solnit place importance on aloneness, but she also focuses on the pleasure of walking anonymously among strangers. This description of the urban walker depicts the geographical and temporal state that makes the flâneur such an interesting figure; while
strangers know nothing of the flâneur’s personal life, he observes them, digesting their experience and creating something new. Solnit also makes a geographical metaphor when describing the walker’s identity as “uncharted” and “illimitable” because it reveals a potential reason why Baudelaire calls the flâneur “a man of the world,” which the female walker did not have the societal privilege to become in the Victorian era. As Richard Sennett explains, “the right to escape to public privacy was unequally enjoyed by the sexes” (217) because “even by the late nineteenth century, women could not go alone to a café in Paris or a restaurant in London” (41).

The word flâneur is not new; the first mention of the word was in 1585, defined as “a person who wanders” (Elkin 10). The Oxford English Dictionary defines flâneur as “a lounger or saunterer, an idle ‘man about town’,” the first use referenced in Harper’s Magazine in 1854: “Did you ever fail to waste at least two hours of every sunshiny day, in the long-ago time when you played the flâneur, in the metropolitan city, with looking at shop windows?” it reads. Elkin suggests that the concept was not gendered until 1806, at the earliest (10). Baudelaire is partially responsible for gendering the concept, ultimately connecting the word to nineteenth-century Parisian literature and, by extension, the English tradition in which writers like Charles Dickens, Thomas de Quincey, and Robert Louis Stevenson incorporated the movement of the city street into their prose works (Solnit). Janet Wolff best summarizes the flâneur as “the modern hero” because “his experience … is that of a freedom to move about the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others” (40). Walter Benjamin, a contemporary of Virginia Woolf, continued to work with Baudelaire’s concept in the twentieth century in The Arcades Project in which he considered the implications of urban living on the psyche, cementing the flâneur’s place as a male in the cannon
We should be troubled by this because the concept is coded into cultural studies to exclude women. This isn’t without reason: women in the nineteenth century did not have the same freedoms to wander the streets. Private space has always been considered the realm of women; were they to venture from their homes they were expected to come and go with specific purpose. Nineteenth-century society was obsessed with the appropriate hours that women should walk the streets; several European governments associated women walkers with prostitution and therefore tried to dictate when men could buy their services (Solnit 237). Unfortunately, this meant that women could not walk the streets past a certain hour without inviting suspicion or even arrest. This often meant that a woman could be subjected to a “humiliating medical examination” that penetrated her to find out if she had been “a bad girl” (Solnit 233). It was thought that a marriageable woman should not walk at night or else be deemed a “streetwalker,” a pejorative term for a prostitute laden with double standards, for we do not also think of male streetwalkers as selling sexual services (Solnit 237).

Scholars establish that the flâneur exists in a hypothetical realm to suggest that his presence in literature doesn’t indicate that wandering aimlessly was every man’s lot in nineteenth-century Paris, yet male fixation on the artistic figure did not erode. If anything, the flâneur permeates scholarship to such an extent that several notable scholars like Rachel Bowlby deem it impossible for the flâneuse to exist in the same manifestation as these men of privilege for one sole reason: “you, the man, have the money which she, the woman, is going to want to make you lose” (Bowlby 209). Implicit in the original conception of the flâneur is the idea that men are the ones who enjoy the street, while the women are the ones that provide the dallying amusements. Society women only walk the streets during the day. They walk with purpose, run their errands, and come home at a reasonable hour. In this regard, “the woman, the object par
"excellence" (Bowlby 209) is “analogous to the shop window” (Bowlby 210), a figure tied to consumerism in that she represents in daylight the purchasing power of the household and at night the subject of the male gaze meant to be purchased and possessed. The flâneur can “consume the women on the streets without the necessity of a monetary transaction,” writes Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall in *Imagining the Flâneur as a Woman* (31). The streets weren’t made for the flâneuse unless she has her body to sell. This even though the New Woman writers of the late Victorian era, as well as several notable female Modernists like Jean Rhys, Rosamund Lehman, Katherine Mansfield, and Woolf herself, wrote about wandering the streets as independent women, not prostitutes even if they did so with differing sensibilities and approaches to a life of walking.

The tension of connotation between a male streetwalker (presumed to be a simple wanderer) and a female streetwalker (considered a prostitute loitering on street corners) embodies the distance between the male flâneur and the female flâneuse as well as the ways in which we can begin to understand the female streetwalker with an expanded definition and use historical example to further scholarship. This means moving past a conception of the flâneuse as a prostitute, as “women’s walking is often construed as performance rather than transport, with the implication that women walk not to see but to be seen, not for their own experience but for that of a male audience, which means that they are asking for whatever attention they receive” (Solnit 234). This demonstrates the extent to which the female walker is dismissed and oversimplified as well as the problems with turning transport into sex; the mistake was conflating the prostitute’s mode of transportation with her work, an error that stays with us even into the twenty-first century.
Another important facet of the male figure is the clear connection between the flâneur and art; Baudelaire thought of himself as an “artist of modern life,” a concept which became attached to the flâneur. As Keith Tester explains, the male walker draws aesthetic experience from the crowds (2). Elizabeth Wilson reveals in *The Invisible Flâneur* that the flâneur is “a mythological or allegorical figure” that walked nineteenth-century cities (93). While prominent male writers of the nineteenth-century canon may represent the flâneur and even take inspiration from the streets to write both fiction and memoir, their status as such is on par with their flâneur characters. In a sense, the flâneur is a rhetorical figure that reveals key elements of culture, and he is an amalgamation of masculinity. The problem is not that this figure is male, but rather that scholars do not see the possibility of a female answer even in the twentieth century when the concept was extended and carried out beyond its original applications by Woolf. Also, the concept of art is not necessarily tied to the flâneuse because simply redefining her as a solitary walker who can enjoy the same aesthetic pleasures of walking as a man suffices. The flâneuse has the potential to be more; while she has more cultural roles to balance, women writers have done so and treated their characters to the same intensity of conflict as they experienced in real life. In Woolf, the flâneuse receives “a myriad impressions” to such a degree that she is overwhelmed by stimuli, the “innumerable atoms” of life on the street. Andrew Thacker explains that Woolf’s characters are “overwhelmed by the immensity of the city” (159). To the female walker, it’s the sensations that make the walk, not the concrete elements of the landscape, nor even the crowd that makes her walk exploratory and life-giving. This has less to do with her gender and far more to do with how society perceives her.

Writers used to have no choice: if they wanted to write about a city, they had to walk it first. That’s where urban fiction started—in the simple wandering of city streets. Its precursor is
the nature walkers, Romantics who deeply understood the connection between writing and walking. Male authors have always wandered as participants of the world, returning from these ramblings to write about their adventures. In a sense, these male walkers who were also writers explain why the adventure story is one of the early forms of the novel and why European fiction is loaded with imagery that could only be understood from a walker’s perspective. It’s interesting to consider that nineteenth-century Parisian authors were so interested in geography that they gave their characters real addresses in the city (Solnit 210); English authors use this technique to similar effect.

Through prose women writers had to claim their right to streetwalking, and Virginia Woolf is more than just a notable example of this: her characters are the ultimate flâneuses in novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Voyage Out* because Woolf’s own wanderings served as direct inspiration. In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf writes, “[t]he streets of London have their map, but our passions are uncharted.” In a sense, this draws the relationship between space that Woolf so assiduously works to correlate with the narrative topology and characters of her novels. Although readers also remember *A Room of One’s Own*, they often recall the extended essay “as though it were literally a plea for women to have home offices,” explains Solnit, instead of a work that “in fact deals with economics, education, and access to public space as equally necessary to making art” (245). While even the most casual of readers remembers Woolf’s belief that a woman needs a room of her own and a fixed monthly income to write, readers don’t often remember that the interplay between private and public space figures significantly into Woolf’s work. The relationship between space and the flâneuse is inimitable. Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth acknowledge that critics do not emphasize public space enough; although scholars are interested in interior space (7) as it appears in works like *A Room of One’s Own*, there is a failure
to transcend the drawing room to realize the wider applications of space not only on its own but also as it applies to the flâneuse. Too often, critics examine domestic interior space as it was understood in the Victorian era in relation to women, but don’t do so often enough stretch the limits towards women streetwalkers outside of and beyond prostitution.

Interestingly, cities and ships are almost always referred to by the pronouns she or her, as is imagery in any way associated with the earth. The city is female, yet women don’t feel safe in urban spaces: Women, Violence and Social Control reports that two thirds of women in America fear walking by themselves in their neighborhoods. Another poll reports that fifty percent of British women do not feel safe going out after dark without a companion (Solnit 240). If at least half of all women don’t feel safe walking around the cul-de-sac in the twentieth century, the number would likely have been far higher in the twentieth century, making access to public space and safe immersion in city life difficult for women who did not have a companion or the wayward security of daylight.

For this reason, scholars like Janet Wolff even question whether there could be a female flâneur: “[t]here is no question of inventing the flâneuse, such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century” (45). Deborah Parsons agrees that “[t]he opportunities and activities of flanerie were predominantly the privileges of the man of means, and it was hence implicit that the ‘artist of modern life’ was necessarily the bourgeois male” (4). But why can’t there be a flâneuse that defies male categorization? Why does she have to be the exact same figure if the male writers who invented the aesthetic flâneur purposely chose to exclude her, to cast her as a whore, widow, or angel? As Anke Gleber contends, “the flâneur is the precursor of a particular form of inquiry that seeks to read the history of culture from its
public spaces” (4), which suggests that the flâneur is a precursor not only to literary geography but to Geocriticism on the whole, concepts which I discuss in later sections.

Elkin notes the tension between women’s opportunities and the walking they sought out in different terms, and came across multiple problems with the flâneuse as prostitute:

Firstly there were women on the street who weren’t selling their bodies. And secondly there wasn’t anything like the flâneur’s freedom in the street prowler’s prowl; prostitutes didn’t have free range over the city …. Our most ready-to-hand sources for what the streetscape looked like in the nineteenth century are male, and they see the city in their own ways. We cannot take their testimony as objective truth; they noticed certain things and made assumptions about them. (11)

Oversimplifying is a mistake. If we simply identify the flâneur as a serendipitous streetwalker enjoying the privilege of community, place, and leisure and the flâneuse as streetwalker, prostitute, and whore, the field becomes narrow, eliminating the possibility of recasting women streetwalkers as capable of something other than prostituting.

While prostitutes have their place in the history of the flâneuse, the scope of this project is instead to look at scholars redefining the concept and taking her beyond the arguments that simply call for her dismissal. Elkin is right: we cannot simply believe one group of male writers who saw a city in their own particular way. Now we have to consult the experts, the women who made the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European streets their locale, reclaiming their right to walk and create societies that actively worked against their personal freedoms.

Although the origins of the flâneur problematically exclude the female walker, its use to the study of both urban writing and impressionism contains a multitude of intersections important to studying Woolf’s work because of its direct correlation with the moment as she understood it. Baudelaire writes that the flâneur is “the lover of universal life” who joins crowds like they are “an immense reservoir of electrical energy” (40):

[W]e might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the
multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all elements of life. He is an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’, at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive (40).

While Baudelaire uses the gendered pronoun “he,” his definition of the flâneur is nuanced and narratively motivated. The flâneur is more than just a male walker with time and a street corner: he’s also a visionary who pauses to see beyond appearances, a writer interested in the impressions and movement of life, determined on transferring their form to paper. The flâneur seeks to capture experience, which is itself “unstable and fugitive.” The kaleidoscope, an invention of the nineteenth century, comes from the Greek and means “observation of beautiful forms,” an image that clearly places an emphasis on the flâneur’s role to understand, develop, and create by aesthetics implicit to the landscape of urban living. As a kaleidoscope of consciousness, the flâneur turns over concepts in unexpected ways, challenging and inquiring of them. The street is his inspiration, and he is its mirror. By living in a great city, the flâneur extends his reach not only to the street corner but to the universe; the milling crowd of a nineteenth-century street was for Baudelaire a representation of both the minutiae of reality and the macro world-view that could be gleaned by studying people.

Related to this is Woolf’s assertion in *A Room of One’s Own* that “[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” and this is why men like Napoleon and Mussolini “insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge” (35). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf makes a metaphorical connection between women and mirrors, casting men as the receivers of visualization, the figures in the mirror. Instead of simply ascribing women the quality of being a mirror, a surface with reflective qualities only for the receiver, Woolf disparages men because they don’t realize that women do reflect their egos back to them. In a sense, this metaphor is culturally embedded. Baudelaire does
not impute women with the quality of projecting an image of manhood, but rather depicts a male aesthetic figure as the mirror of experience. Baudelaire’s conception depicts a clear difference between societal expectations of the flâneur and the flâneuse: he often profiles types like the prostitute or the widow (Wolff 41). While Baudelaire’s idea of a male walker as kaleidoscope is easy to accept on its own, problems arise if we accept his gendered appraisal of the male walker as the sole mirror of experience. While the flâneur gets to be a “kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness,” Woolf derides men for ignoring the female perspective by not acknowledging that they have been cast into the role of mirror, thereby meaning that they were also gifted with discernment. Although Woolf does not directly refer to mirrors in “Street Haunting,” it’s evident that the recurring imagery of the eye serves a similar purpose.

In “Street Haunting” Woolf writes that when we close the door behind us, “[t]he shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye.” To Woolf, the female walker may reflect the male ego but she is also “a central oyster of perceptiveness” who experiences urban life in her own sense. Although the female narrator thinks of herself as “an enormous eye,” this moment is not imputed with gender. The “shell-like covering” is in opposition to the “luminous halo” that Woolf depicts as the disembodiment of consciousness in “Modern Fiction” because it has a particular shape that makes it concrete. These concepts pair seamlessly with Woolf’s stances on the aesthetic. The “shell-like” covering could be interpreted as the body, which makes society associate a person with a certain gender identity that once disembodied from the soul becomes genderless. Yet public space may be where we are most significantly gendered; “Street Haunting” is about a woman who breaks away from her life for an hour just to take a walk, the
excuse to buy a pencil is the lie she tells herself to enable a certain freedom to forget her life even if for a moment. In this sense, the covering is a figurative casing of our deepest selves, a social consciousness we must take on when in the society of people we know. Strangely, when a walker experiences the city alone, it’s not the body that falls away but rather the sense that we are known. The female walker is still imputed with sexual connotation, so she must remember her body even as she steps into the role of mirror.

While the flâneur is a walker who can be anonymous in a crowd, losing himself in aesthetic experience, the flâneuse is dismissed because she is thought to be on display. It is expected that what she wears and how she appears in public should somehow reflect the expected behavior of the (male) observer. What happens within Woolf’s flâneuse is much different than male writers who only depict the angelic or fallen qualities of women instead of ascribing them a wider range of qualities: to Woolf, the flâneuse doesn’t take on the qualities of a kaleidoscope by moving away from the self and decentralizing bodily experience from thought.

Isabel Carrera Suárez writes in *The Stranger Flâneuse and the Aesthetics of Pedestrianism* that

The universal vocation of the modernist flâneur is thus replaced by physical and emotional engagement with the city, a space shared and inhabited. Rather than becoming the all-encompassing kaleidoscope and ventriloquist described by Baudelaire, this pedestrian-artist acknowledges her body and urban boundaries as located sites of interaction with the world. (857)

While Suárez acknowledges the modernist flâneur’s dual engagement with the city, she connects the flâneuse to aestheticism by identifying her as a pedestrian-artist, not in the sense that she is a painter or writer but that she understands the artistry of the street and looks to her body as connected to the street. These elements are ultimately inseparable. While Baudelaire’s flâneur loses bodily experience, Woolf’s flâneuse is inundated with aesthetic experience but must remember herself even as she experiences the city both as it appears and as we metonymically understand it. As Richard Lehan emphasizes in *The City in Literature*, “the crowd dominates the
urban fiction of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” and shows us a different way to read the city (8). Indeed, “[t]he city often presents itself metonymically, embodied by the crowd” (9). It is important to remember the city as metonymic representation because of the walker’s place within the urban landscape; this is the source of the flâneuse’s aesthetic experience. As Wolff mentions, the flâneur is known for his interest in the crowd but not his engagement with individual personas within it.

Angeliki Spiropoulou turns over interpretations of Baudelaire’s kaleidoscopic flâneur in *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* that hinges on Woolf’s view of the past. Spiropoulou notes that a controversy in modernist studies questions whether it prefers a technological, newer world or a nostalgic, traditional past, and Woolf’s ideas of the past are different from other modernists (30). She not only expresses a regret in rejecting older forms (30), but like Walter Benjamin, she “celebrate[s] modernity’s fertile possibilities with regard to women’s increased opportunities for autonomy, self-definition and creativity” (32). Spiropoulou looks to Woolf’s “How It Strikes a Contemporary” to draw connections between her views of the past and Baudelaire’s flâneur. Woolf writes about “[a] shift in the scale—the war, the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages—has shaken the fabric from top to bottom, alienated us from the past and made us perhaps too vividly conscious of the present.” Spiropoulou draws a connection between Woolf’s “masses” and Baudelaire’s “crowd” by explaining that each writer sees it as a definer of modernity that “sets new tasks to the artists seeking to portray ‘life’” (34). In this sense, Woolf’s “myriad impressions” are also connected to Baudelaire’s kaleidoscope flâneur (34).

Joyce’s *Ulysses* also takes place in a single day, employs aesthetic techniques, and reveals a walker’s perspective of the city. Yet far too many scholars dismiss *Mrs. Dalloway* as a
lesser work, second-in-line to a greater masterpiece; what they miss is that *Mrs. Dalloway* was paradigm-changing, and its emphasis on “myriad impressions” is a testament to Woolf’s truism that “life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged.” Clarissa Dalloway is a hallmark flâneuse, and as Elaine Showalter explains in the Penguin Modern Classics introduction to the novel, “For Woolf, the external event is significant primarily for the way it triggers and releases the inner life” (xvi). Just as the flâneur is a kaleidoscope who collects and reflects experience, Woolf’s flâneuse is the experiencer of aesthetics, the narrative mode that Woolf embodies in the form of the flâneuse. It’s not the big-picture view of the skyline and landscape that makes urban fiction deserving of its place, as a flâneur might believe, but the carefully rendered aesthetic experience that makes readers believe they can wander, too. This is how great works give us the feeling of being *there* without so much description. It’s the emotional resonance that makes us believe the city exists at all.

In *Psychogeography*, Merlin Coverley argues that *Mrs. Dalloway* is “a difficult book to warm to” because “its sophisticated form and acutely rendered observations may demand admiration, but the characters themselves inspire little of the emotional engagement to be found elsewhere in the London Canon” (44). Coverley may be right that *Mrs. Dalloway* has sophisticated form and keen observations, but the dismissal of Virginia Woolf’s use of pathos is another way of oversimplifying the novel that has much to do with the argument against the flâneuse as a prostitute. The exuberance and vitality of the story demand both a celebratory perspective of the city and a reverence for fleeting life so elegantly embodied in the temporal connection between Septimus and Clarissa. *Mrs. Dalloway* is unique even among Modernist urban novels. Robert Alter indicates its celebration of the city as unusual in contrast with other European novels in the early twentieth century that emphasized the city as a place of alienation.
(qtd. In Larsson 108). It is this celebration of the city that we should pay attention to in studying Virginia Woolf’s work, in which the flâneuse is an apprehender of experience who incorporates aesthetic experience outside herself that transcends the flâneur’s awareness of the crowd as a facet of himself and her identity as a mirror.

While the flâneur and flâneuse have their parallels, they are not the same figure. The flâneuse should not be examined as a female iteration of a male concept, and my aim is to make a statement that specifically pertains to Virginia Woolf’s work, including how she writes about walking women differently, not only by celebrating the city in a more optimistic way but also by depicting the fictional city as a map of palimpsestic memory inscribed onto a historical, nostalgic view of the past. Like a walker, Woolf’s narrative meanders without concern or rush, taking its time to feel the metonymic city as it really appears.

Look to the book reviews like “Literary Geography;” the essays like A Room of One’s Own, “Street Haunting,” and “The Docks of London”; the novels Mrs. Dalloway and The Voyage Out—all can be viewed from a geocritical lens that not only accounts for the narrative perspective of the flâneuse but also explains why the narrative strategies Woolf employs, such as impressionism, seem so interrelated in everything she writes.
Digital Wandering

London is one of the most literary cities. I’m not claiming that it’s everyone’s dream to visit, but that’s often one of my templates for thinking about what a city should be—historical, walkable, and, most of all, lovely to explore. This last criteria is a bit naïve, considering that cities are lived-in places with an aesthetic long ago determined by forces beyond the inhabitants’ control. A notable example is Paris. While most tourists love the architecture, little do they realize a single architect named Haussman is responsible for its uniformity and wide avenues. You can’t ask for a particular street corner to be lovely for the one moment you walk by. It’s possible that you mentally paint over graffiti or ignore the homeless woman on the corner, but then you’re ignoring reality so you can take home a neatly-packaged ideal of what you wish this place was.

Anyway, there are other sets of criteria for what a city should be. There are those who say a city should have X amount of residents or a sports team to qualify. Richard Sennett theorizes that a city should be “a place where strangers meet,” a “public realm” where life happens. Sennett draws a connection between the inhabitant as walker and space itself. Before I was even aware of urban studies, I wanted to accomplish something similar in my writing.

Three years ago I wanted to write a story about a teenage boy who didn’t understand women. It’s not that he willfully did so, but the death of his brother and the thousands of miles distancing him from his family is so consuming that the girl he encounters on his walk can’t get through to him. He never gets past seeing her as a sexualized figure, and they part even more unresolved than they were before meeting. We don’t get to know her problems and secrets because Noah casts her as a manic pixie dream girl. Arden registers this, giving up on him when he can’t reciprocate her efforts to understand. This was the vague idea I had for a story with an
elusive location. It was as though the characters had no concept of their own constancy, moving like shadows in and out of memory. For some reason, the geography of this story mattered to me and I couldn’t write until I figured it out.

At first, I wanted to portray two individuals in a long-term relationship and extend the work into a novella. But every time I tried to place them in Las Vegas, but it didn’t work because the motivation always felt wrong. This was when I used the internet to scout a location for my story and came across the Brooklyn Bridge.

How was I supposed to write about a bridge so ubiquitous in pop culture that anyone who had been there would know that I had not based solely on my perception as the narrator? I didn’t want to fictionalize the bridge, exaggerating its arches and cables. I had to use Google Maps, which saw me spending hours at a time writing in one tab and gazing through the lens of some unknown visitor in the other window to see just how separate the pedestrian bridge was from the cars. And just how tall were those arches? Were they made up of brown bricks or red? I also mapped the distance between the bridge and NYU, the school my characters attended, to make sure a twenty-five-minute walk wouldn’t be impassable for the characters. My story had to be in the moment. Any flashbacks to the past happened solely within the narrator’s mind, unspoken. He compares his old life to New York City, the way he feels foreign there. I can’t say I’ve had that experience, but the only way I could understand was to digitally walk in their footsteps.

“We had no idea you’ve never made it to New York,” my editor Helen said via email. I tried to imagine her Australian accent. I had seen her speak in a YouTube video, but we never met.

That was another oddity of experience: the publisher that wanted my story in an anthology was in Australia. “Ripple Effect” was one of my first experiments in acutely
grounding a story in a particular place, which would have never happened without a realist approach. It wasn’t the last. But as I wrote more of these stories, I took the experience personally.

When you can’t travel, wandering the streets becomes even more romantic. I was obsessed—probably because I was convinced that I’d never have the chance to set off on my own. I spent way too much time collecting Danish cafes, French arrondissements, and English landmarks on Pinterest, my target-board for dreams. It was at this time in my life that I found the words for dérive and flâneur. The first definition I ever saw of flâneur did not gender the figure. In this sense, it was easy to be swept away by wanderlust. That’s another word I hadn’t spent much time thinking about. *The desire to travel*. Maybe because it was so obvious to me.

Didn’t we all want to see outside ourselves? But opportunity and desire don’t always correspond.

I’ve heard it said that walking the streets and seeing new places isn’t the same. After all, we can press our faces against the porthole windows of airplanes, trains, and cars to view entire worlds without once stopping. When we merely consider walking, there’s no assumption about the level of experience with a place: the flâneur and the flâneuse know their streets and commune with them often. If you buy into Baudelaire’s idea that the flâneur is the artist of modern life, then it might feel right to think of the aestheticized pedestrian as an artist who uses their experience of city life to fuel their art. But for some, simply walking is the art.

Elkin explains that we leave traces “perceptible only to the most sensitive of our descendants, who may feel the slightest atmospheric shift as they walk over some subway grate or threshold, without knowing why or who has crossed there before them” (240). It’s thinking like this that makes us draw cultural connections between a historical city and its walkability. We
romanticize place through the work of others before we can even experience it for ourselves. This will almost always mediate our experience of places.

In “Ripple Effect,” my characters take a purposeful walk. They don’t really discover anything unexpected about the city; dérive was a concept I had to meditate over. They start on Brooklyn Bridge, but then they cross the bridge to walk past Tribeca and Lower Manhattan, all the while passing parks, stoplights, and city buildings. Noah and Arden’s purpose was in a way to meander, but they have a fixed destination, a stop at the end of the line they know they are headed towards and nothing but the pace of their step can change that.

I had to consider whether this really was a dérive and the extent to which we do walk even in the most mundane of situations. It’s only recently that VR technology became affordable, and that’s where my next effort began. That happened when I began writing a novel in 2016, still unfinished and not that great. When I want the printed copy, I have to clear the bottom shelf of my smallest bookcase to drag out the brown hanging file box I bought at Target and draw the brown file folder from its flimsy metal supports. I don’t like most of what I wrote for the usual reasons: cheesy dialogue, trite description, boring opening sentences. But the one thing I got from that project is nostalgia for Savannah, Georgia, a place I have never been. A place I visited through surrogacy, a VR headset supported by Google Maps my only foray into its streets.

I know that Savannah once had twenty-four historic squares, veritable gardens in the middle of urban space intentionally mapped into the city plan. In Google Maps, the squares are so symmetrical I can see the urban planners with their parchment and metal rulers measuring the exact distance between each of them. The streets are exactly parallel. At least, that’s what it looks like from space. I always imagine Savannah to be an organized city with nary a wrong turn in sight, but I can’t reach past my own perceptions when I’ve never really seen it.
Two of the squares were lost to other development plans. A plaque behind city hall is the only physical evidence that a place called Liberty Square existed until the 1930s. It’s haunted by slavery, the Antebellum architecture a reminder of all that passed in this green, coastal town. My main character lives in the historic district and works as a dishwasher at a seafood restaurant up the street from Flannery O’Connor’s childhood home.

I’ve never been there, but I know where the Hilton is in relation to the Baptist church. I know how many blocks my characters’ home is from the riverfront.

I had, back then, a ridiculous hope to visit. At the last minute, it all fell apart. The friend that was going with me backed out before we could book the AirBnB even after we spent hours bookmarking places to stay. I gave up on going by myself, too afraid to make the drive from the airport by myself. I thought too much about the physical risk to my body. What happened if I stayed out too late one night and had to walk alone in the cold? What if I got lost and encountered someone on the walk back I’d rather avoid?

I’d rather not know than risk myself.

Something I used to get wrong was that writing about place was all about setting. It only mattered if I wrote the physical details with accuracy and realism. But now I know.

Setting is not a backdrop to life.

We are not just characters. The people walking have a relationship to the ground, if nothing else but the pace of their steps punctuates it.

These stories used to make me lose hope, but now I believe. I’ll find my way. After all, seeing new places isn’t the issue. It’s having the guts to walk them even when you’re afraid.
The “Neural Shimmer” of Geocriticism and Psychogeography

One of my goals is to turn away from the scholars who deny the existence of the flâneuse and instead look to her as a solitary figure, as Elkin does. Although our temporal idea of the concept ultimately includes Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Balzac, along with almost every other male writer who included a flâneur or even became one himself (Poe, De Quincey, Stevenson, Joyce, Dickens), I will look to how Woolf writes her way into the walking tradition through a closer look at the theories of Geocriticism and Psychogeography, both of which deal with the walker’s relationship to space.

In 1905 Woolf wrote a brief review of Lewis Melville’s *The Thackeray Country* and F.G. Kitson’s *The Dickens Country*. In reflecting over these books, part of a series called *Pilgrimage*, she declares that “[w]e are either pilgrims from sentiment, who find something stimulating to the imagination in the fact that Thackeray rang this very door bell” or “we are scientific in our pilgrimage and visit the country where a great novelist lived in order to see to what extent he was influenced by his surroundings” (32). Just as the Victorians historicized themselves into a name and identity in the canon before the period ended, early Modernists had much material to look back on literary England. The connection that Melville’s and Kitson’s books have to walking is not lost on Woolf: in reflecting over the stimulation of ringing the same doorbell as Thackeray she makes connections to walking places long tred by writers that came before her. Woolf titled the review “Literary Geography.”

She did not invent this term, but instead borrowed it from William Sharp who titled his 1904 book *Literary Geography*, which was “a readable companion in times of leisure for those who are in sympathy with the author’s choice of writers and localities; and if they share his own pleasure in wandering through these ‘literary lands’ he on his part will be well content” (1). The
book includes sections such as “The Country of George Eliot,” “The Brontë Land,” and “The Literary Geography of the Thames.” Although Sharp suggests that this book was not intended as a critical text, his early analysis of “literary lands” is the reason that Woolf repurposed it for her review. Snaith and Whitworth explain that in this review, Woolf is writing to a specific tradition in popular culture, the goal of which is to follow the author’s or characters’ footsteps through the lands of their fiction (8). These scholars dismiss the tradition because it “fetishize[s] authorial presence,” “assumes a static conception of place,” and is “positivistic” for focusing on the connection between the present and the past (8). Fortunately, a study of the flâneuse is saved of these issues because she is an aesthetic figure that can be analyzed through a geocritical lens. It is important to understand this distinction because the “literary lands” the flâneuse walks are the background, while she is the figure, an aesthetic comparison that lends itself to inquiry.

The spatial humanities would posit literary geography as a new term, the unexplored manifest destiny of disciplines that we have yet to really explore, the space that we will, in time, fill with interpretations. It’s partly true: if you try searching for anything related to Geocriticism, literary cartography, geopolitics, or geopoetics, all roads wind back to Robert T. Tally. Although he admits to building the framework of Geocriticism from the fields of poststructuralism, critical theory, and postcolonial studies, Tally pioneered the term in the early 1990s when he found that critical framework did not contain the necessary tools. In the most basic sense, Geocriticism looks to develop “the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature” (ix, Literary Cartographies). In the broader field, Tally also indicates that narratives are maps in their own sense in that they are “simultaneously something that maps and something to be mapped” (3). Geocriticism is a response to the multiplicity that happens when a narrative becomes a map for the storyteller to write and therefore map their readers towards particular messages and concepts.
At the same time, urban narratives like Virginia Woolf’s are also mapping a view of the city that cannot be separated from its realist counterpart. This is why Geocriticism has an interesting intersection with literary tourism, although it has much more to contribute to the field than simply following an author’s or character’s footsteps through “literary lands.”

Susan Stanford Friedman explores geopolitical writing in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, explaining that one tactic to writing geopolitically is to “begin ‘at home,’ bringing the issue of elsewhere to bear on home, locating the sometimes invisible traces of elsewhere in what is familiar.” Yet another dynamic of participating in this exercise causes the writer to consider “break[ing] down the geopolitical boundaries between home and elsewhere by locating the ways the local and the global are always already interlocking and complicitous” (110). Although critics accuse Woolf of staying too close to home by making England her prime fixation, she is able to make wider statements about the walking woman because her canvas is the London street in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and, to a lesser extent, *The Voyage Out*.

While the discipline does often look to represent and study prominent writers and the cannon along with the cities that inspired them—Dicken’s London or Joyce’s Dublin—Geocriticism can also examine unreal spaces (ix). However, there is much more to the discipline than the descriptions of the places themselves or even their literary representations: it’s also important to study “the experience of place and of displacement” and “the interrelations between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it” (x, *Literary Cartographies*). Although Modernism is not solely tied to literary geographies, the undeniable connection between several works in the canon and these geocritical concepts cannot be mistaken.
To use the earlier example of Joyce’s Dublin, Tally explains that “it is not enough for Joyce to describe in minute detail the physical features of Dublin, its landscapes, streets, alleys, and houses; to reconstruct Joyce’s particular Dublin we must discern in its unique spaces the narratives that make it a place worth taking note of in the first place” (2). In a subjective sense, Geocriticism seeks to study places of cultural interest where significant writers spent their time or intense revolutions made a stand. I emphasize this because place is connected to the figure of the flâneuse in that the setting often correlates with women’s’ relationship with public space. Space, however, is a slightly separate consideration that more generally takes a topographical approach to our relationship to the world. In Woolf’s work, London is a major consideration which must be placed alongside her interpretation of the flâneuse But more broadly, the discipline acknowledges that great writing about place does not simply depict beautiful physical features because experiencing a place has far more to do with our temporal relation to it than anything else. Woolf concludes her review meditating on the ways in which imaginary conceptions fail to match the street wanderer’s reality:

A writer’s country is a territory within his own brain; and we run the risk of disillusionment if we try to turn such phantom cities into tangible brick and mortar. We know our way there without signposts or policemen, and we can greet the passers-by without need of introduction. No city indeed is so real as this that we make for ourselves and people to our liking; and to insist that it has any counterpart in the cities of the earth is to rob it of half its charm. (35)

Woolf seems to imply that she does not approve of literary tourism because it makes too disparate of a connection to the “writer’s country,” which can only exist in the mind. When we attempt to make theses places real, they are reduced from an otherwise mythical status in the canon. Also, she emphasizes that the charm of real cities easily wears off when we have to brave the stress of crowds, law enforcement, salespeople on street corners, and the dark side of living on the street. In a more complicated sense, Woolf precisely engages with the aesthetic
conversation about the flâneur that builds its framework upon the real circumstances of privileged men. If a writer’s country is their own territory, the readers also then have their own map of the same places with slightly different impressions, depending on their interpretation.

Yet it seems that whether the city is real or imagined, women are still prevented from walking the streets with the same security as men. Still, these theoretical concepts related to the realm of Geocriticism apply to the flâneuse. Not only does geocritical thought encompass the sphere within which she moves, but it also in part explains and fills in the gaps that Woolf scholarship does not. The aesthetic relationship between geocritical thought and the flâneuse is one that makes them inseparable: when we speak of the narrowing of urban space for more cars or the aggressive design features of cities that make it difficult to stand or sit in one place, this encroaches on the mental territory of the flâneuse.

The contention most often articulated as a loss of space is something of a misnomer for issues of Psychogeography, a term coined by French theorist Guy Debord. Although developed in an entirely different interpretive community, psychogeography has its connections to Geocriticism in that it is “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.” To Debord it is a discipline which “could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviors of individuals” (qtd. in Solnit 212). The field where psychology and geography collide is purposely vague (Coverley 10), the definition itself open to interpretation because of the critical framework that made it possible to define urban experiences by this set of terminology. To put it in other terms, Psychogeography “refers to people’s shared psychological representation or ‘map’ of the natural and social world” (Stein 3). It is also “an approach that may help unravel why who one is
comes to be experienced as indistinguishable from *where one is*” (Stein 15). Don’t think of Psychogeography as a discipline, but rather a property that reveals “what we attribute to the world we subsequently take to be an *attribute* of the world” (Stein 15).

Also related to Psychogeography is Debord’s 1956 essay “Theory of the Dérive.” By itself, dérive is a conceptual serendipity. Taking a dérive is not the same as taking a walk because “[i]n a dérive one or more persons…drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.” This is significant because the definitions of the flâneur and flâneuse necessitate that their ramblings take place individually.

Although Psychogeography can be used as a critical framework for studies of the flâneur or flâneuse, the very concept of taking what amounts to a city walk with more than one person places dérive, and by extension Psychogeography, at odds with Baudelaire and Benjamin’s iterations of the solitary male wandering the city with astute indifference. It isn’t even Debord’s brief mention of “one or more persons” that makes this the case (although one might say that it does make enough of a case), but rather his emphasis “that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness” because it is then possible to attain a level of objectivity.

How can it be possible to see a city with a layer of objectivity, and why does the presence of multiple people ensure that this can be accomplished? Peter Turchi writes about Psychogeography from the perspective of the author composing a text, arguing that writers are cartographers and every story a map. Therefore it’s impossible to have “objective presentation” (73). As Turchi explains, “in every piece we write we contemplate a world” and that “[s]ome
writers use settings more familiar but make those places unmistakably their own” because they are “defining, delineating the world that is coming into being” (13-14). This isn’t an entirely new idea in the sense that we often associate great literary authors with the cities they wrote about. Literary tourism made Woolf’s iteration of London famous, a palimpsest that overlaps Dickens’, Shakespeare’s, and Chaucer’s London, which are themselves superimposed onto the place and its history. If we understand all cities to be palimpsests of literary memory and history diagrammed onto physical space, there are endless versions of one city. It would be physically impossible to create a map that delineates all the possibilities, which is why a geocritical approach to the flâneuse cannot be evaluated solely through this lens.

Several people taking a dérive is a group of readers who wish to determine the topographical spontaneity of a place through unplanned wandering, and walking is a meaning-making exercise. This perhaps wanders into different territory than the solitary walker can go. A city itself, its cartography, extends beyond the individual mind. Although a walker’s inner topography interfaces with it, one person cannot make a solitary conclusion of the place that encompasses all impressions. Yet the famous writers who wrote about this literary topography, who tried to make a connection with it, ultimately became a part of our cultural consciousness of the place. Now we, the community of readers, think of these authors each time we visit, temporally or in reality. That may well be positivistic, but it does factor into a study of the figure and ground, the flâneuse and her city.

When visiting a city full of the ghosts of literary heroes, Turchi is right. It is impossible for London itself to have an “objective presentation.” Even Benjamin describes the wandering of a flâneur as “anamnestic intoxication” where he uses his senses to acquire “felt knowledge” from the city itself. The Oxford English Dictionary defines anamnestic as “recalling to the mind;
aiding the memory or recollection” and as “a proposed equivalent for mnemonic,” which clearly delineates a relationship between the memory we perceive as inherent to places and our wandering of them. Yet an important line is the distinction between the real and the aesthetic. When discussing the authors walking the streets we know from history, it’s easy to conflate the discussion with the aesthetic figures of the flâneur and flâneuse because we want to believe the streets of fiction are the same as they are in real life. In this sense, this is where the flâneuse departs from a discussion of realism. While most authors aim for realism when writing about the cities with which they are familiar, this still does not indicate reality as we know it. Just as the figure is an amalgamation or representation, so also is the ground or topography, the figure traverses.

The flâneur is most frequently thought of as an allegorical figure wandering the pages of Victorian fiction, a symbol by which we may generalize about life. Baudelaire and Benjamin’s emphasizes that the flâneur is an artist above all. However, the discussion by some scholars as to the existence of the flâneuse makes the discussion less emblematic and more realist by clearly calling into question the reality of women in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If the discussion were entirely aesthetic, then authors could easily write their female characters wandering the streets at all hours without fear of rape and harassment. The problem may lie with the representation of the flâneur as aesthetic: when we (or shall I say they) exclude women not only from the physical but also the figurative space, they make it impossible for women to exceed categorical expectations. Instead of addressing the problem, we dismiss the possibility of trying to transcend the physical and mental topography of a space

Catherine Lanone writes in “Stereoscopic Displacement in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Street Haunting’” that Woolf revisits De Quincey and “mimics his wandering sensations, reclaiming
the London geography from a feminine viewpoint” and “write back to the great tradition of male adventure, drifting across the streets instead of across the world, with an ironic twist” (41). What is important here is both the “wandering sensations” that Woolf imitates and the London connection; while what Woolf writes is unique in its own right, our exclusion of walking women from a male paradigm is a problem. Scholarship limits itself by thinking of the flâneuse as the female answer to the flâneur. She is not a male concept transfigured into the form of a woman. The flâneuse is herself, unapologetically, in a city that often rejects her point of view. While Woolf writes within a tradition, she reclaims it. Woolf’s flâneuse is the experiencer of the moment inundated with aesthetic experience, just as much of a kaleidoscope as the male walker.

Unlike the figure of the flâneur, Psychogeography is not necessarily tied to a certain time and place but is instead a “meeting point” of concepts that “is also a tale of two cities, London and Paris” (Coverley 11). This is also the origin of the flâneur, which for nearly a century did not have a female equivalent. Yet Psychogeography is not explicitly a gendered concept. Although the existence of the term does not negate the fear women feel walking their neighborhoods, psychogeography does invite a reinterpretation of city space that is far more inclusive. Yet key to understanding the deeper implications of Psychogeography is the larger school of thought to which Debord belonged. In the field of psychology, Situationism posits the theory that behavior is caused by external situations instead of a set of internal motivations. To a Situationist, we are beings influenced by stimuli outside of ourselves that reflects who we are and creates the reality we live in. This principle is actively at work in Mrs. Dalloway, directly relating to Clarissa as flâneuse.

Mrs. Dalloway, to Turchi, has a distinctly cartographic motif because of a quality of Woolf’s writing that he calls “neural shimmer” (140). In the first scene, we discover “the
workings of Clarissa’s mind” (152) and her mental map (141), which demonstrates Clarissa’s profound connection to London. Turchi’s earlier questions of cartographic objectivity factor into this analysis because narrative written with such a neural shimmer helps us understand how another person sees reality (142) as well as what they believe (146). Tally’s take on Geocriticism is that “[s]patial description and historical storytelling thus merge and then emerge as part of a broader literary geography, which in turn becomes the ground for a writer’s own literary cartography” (Tally 3). In other words, Woolf’s neural shimmer is most distinctly conveyed through a narrative that crosses and intersects with the real map of the city. The narrative is already a literary cartography, but scholars who came after Woolf and appreciated the ways in which characters in her novels (most famously Mrs. Dalloway) cross each other through the London streets on a single day convey through the maps of these paths that a cartography created in words can also be articulated in visual form, leading to more interpretations of the novel. In the psychological vein of Turchi, Catherine Lanone notes that “Woolf perceives the city as the vibrant organic tissue of experience, where surreptitious creativities add randomness to the networks of social constraints or the logic of consumerism” (281). In Lanone’s construction, instead of the writer as the one with the neural shimmer, it is the city that inherently possesses the networks, the “vibrant organic tissue” that makes it what it is. While this is of significant consideration to the flâneuse, Turchi’s neural shimmer may have more to contribute to a study of the aesthetic experience of the flâneuse. Instead of reflecting the quality onto the city itself, Turchi acknowledges the role of the viewer and artist in relation to the aesthetics of streetwalking.

Talley believes that “all literary works are somehow engaged in a project of literary cartography” and “maintains that spaces and places are themselves apprehended figuratively”
(Darici 29), as evidenced in the maps in Mrs. Dalloway. Interestingly, Coverley contends that the “visionary tradition” of Psychogeography “takes London”—and not Paris—“as its center” (19), important because Woolf is quintessentially an English writer whose works are fixated on London as a center. Even when the characters are not present in London itself, their views of life and concepts or reality directly stem from its culture. This brings up a new question about the expansion of the flâneur outside its original context: Coverley asks whether the question of “whether the flâneuse exists” should shift towards the question of “whether we can generate a new term for a person who loves to escape in a city or simply use the tools of Psychogeography, literary cartography, and Geocriticism to analyze Modernist texts” (19).

I mention this not because I plan to generate a new term for the female walker but because the connections between Geocriticism and the flâneuse are so evident in Coverley’s claim. It doesn’t matter whether the flâneuse existed during the Victorian period, and often it doesn’t even matter whether the walker is in an urban setting so long as the sensibility of the walk navigates and deals with the issues of urban walking for women. What we should spend more time and focus on is Turchi’s “neural shimmer” and the aesthetic interplay between the female walker and city life, a quality that has much to contribute to Geocriticism.
City is My Church

My grandparents live in Acworth, a town just north of Atlanta that’s among the most walkable places I’ve ever been—Population: 28,502. It is definitely not what you’d call urban. Still, much of what I think about walking I learned while tracing the paths around the lake and pointing out deer among the foliage, their knowing eyes impossible to miss even on the foggiest of days. A railroad track runs through Main Street, its red-brick buildings with heavy wooden doors old enough to be on the National Historic Registry. The town has taken full advantage of the two-hundred-year-old homes lining the street. Among the most famous is Serendipity House. It’s not as old as Mr. Lemon’s house, but it’s a five-minute walk from Robinson Street—a left and two rights takes me there. The middle-aged women who run the shop always make it their mission to ask me who I am and where I’m from before I can sample the jam and juice in the kitchen or consider purchasing a Christmas ornament from the first bedroom at the top of the stairs. Even though I come back almost every summer, they never remember me or my sister.

No matter what time of year we visit, there are always a cluster of Christmas trees in this room loaded with half-price kitsch ornaments. I almost always buy something. I’m not sure if it’s because I can’t bear to face the retired teacher who mans the register without at least acknowledging my interest in a trinket they sell. But it could also be my undying urge to say goodbye, to have a tangible piece of remembrance if I never come back.

Since my earliest visits, my parents have tried to prepare me that this time might be the last time. That’s part of the reason why walks with my sister take on a new importance the older we get.

If I move aside the sash on the front window of Serendipity, I can vaguely sight the Baptist church across the track parallel to the manicured funeral home on our side. Although I’ve
only recently encountered it, the church is an emblem, a metonymic stand-in for the past that hovers over this place. There’s an element in the air that I don’t feel when I’m in Las Vegas.

This time, we run across the road, a break in the tracks not meant for pedestrians. Clouds gather, but we ignore them and approach the oak front door, next to which stands a plaque identifying this church as a 170-year-old relic. Although frames of its simple, pointed windows remain alongside a tower that can only be described as traditional, the stained glass is broken in most of the panes, the footlong spaces boarded over with lumber. I’m almost sad to see the reds, yellows, blues, and greens faded and dingy, cracks snaking along the panes. It’s only a matter of time before they fall and shatter. Several cracks remain unshuttered, and I can’t help but wonder how thin the glass really is. And, because this place stands for me alongside walks in the city, my mind immediately jumps to a song I know well.

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When M83’s “Midnight City” debuted in 2011, it was an almost immediate success. The London 2012 Olympics used it prominently in promos for the winter games, and it didn’t take long for the song to make the Billboard Hot 100. I heard the song long before it hit the big time in a Victoria’s Secret commercial in which lingerie models strutted the catwalk in bras and underwear that vaguely evoked bird feathers.

For some reason the song stays with me: the opening evokes a hawk’s squawk strange enough to keep me coming back. A man’s voice floats above a soundtrack of electronic synthesizers, saxophones, and synchronized howling as yet unheard of, at least to me. He quietly murmurs, solemn yet celebratory, about the moments of evening he spends waiting in a car on a city street in Los Angeles watching “the mutating skyline.” As it grows dark, he realizes “the city is my church/It wraps me in the sparkling twilight” (M83).
It would be all too easy to misinterpret the line. Maybe, to the right person, the line would feel blasphemous: shouldn’t *church* be your church? The genius of “Midnight City” is the disembodiment of physical space evoked by a single word transposed into the atomic makeup of a city just as evening falls. The word “church” would usually evoke a construction, a specific place discoverable by map. Everyone’s mental image of church looks slightly different, but “Midnight City” disbands its usual atoms into a larger cartographic footprint.

I haven’t walked many of the great cities of the world. In my memory, walks in Los Angeles and Downtown Las Vegas stand out—to me, these places and their surroundings are anything but a church. In Henderson, there is a two-mile radius in which there is 102 churches. Anecdotally, it’s been claimed that Las Vegas has more churches than any city in America. And that’s odd in the sense that we’ve unintentionally inverted the concept of church to expand its borders into the unlikeliest of places. This is, in its own way, a disembodiment.

Still, every time I walk a new place “Midnight City” is always on my mind. Even when I’m not in a city. Somehow, this song and what it signifies trails me everywhere I walk. The city as a church is a metaphor that may not work for everyone. But I find in this metaphor that the city does not become a holy place, nor do I always consider it a physical refuge. The Acworth Baptist Church is not a stand-in for the city I’ve been dreaming of, but rather a metonymic connection to the belief that urban space is a mental refuge. Topology, that concept Euler so vehemently reached for when he found it was impossible to cross all seven Königsburg bridges, shows us that the relationship between time, space, and the mind is undeniable.

Perhaps “Midnight City” has more to do with the walking women of literature than I initially believed. In a sense, the flâneuse claims for herself a certain belief of city life, a hope
that every walk can be both safe and enlightening. Sometimes, you can’t have both things, but
the ideal remains.
Walking in The Voyage Out

The unequal power structure at work between the flâneur and flâneuse is readily apparent in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf’s first novel, which is often described as a conventional narrative, the precursor to her later, more experimental work. As if the early essays and short stories are simply strewn along the path towards a more scenic destination—the stream-of-consciousness narration that anthologies and internet searches declare as her single contribution to Modernism. Still, what we learn from *The Voyage Out* is that while the flâneur is far more connected to realism, the flâneuse stands for the aesthetic experience.

In *The Voyage Out* we meet Rachel Vinrace, a naïve twenty-four-year-old with little exposure to the world. Her father is oblivious and somewhat selfish but nevertheless decides that Rachel needs to be exposed to the world. It is in this sentiment that Rachel’s figurative and literal departure from her life signals Friedman’s sense of geopolitical thought: leaving what we’re familiar with can be “a movement that can defamiliarize ‘home,’ teaching us that what we take as natural is in fact culturally produced and not inevitable” (110). After a childhood spent with elderly aunts in the countryside where she received minimal education, Rachel’s only talent is playing the piano; one of the most telling aspects of her character is that “she had scarcely walked through a poor street, and always under the escort of father, maid, or aunts” (60). This indicates the degree to which she is sheltered from city life and, by extension, reality.

When Rachel joins a group of strangers embarking on her father’s ship *Euphrosyne* with the Ambroses, bound for South America, she begins the journey towards selfhood. Rachel is ultimately held back from her realization of impressions that she tries to absorb through walking, brought on when her father releases her to Helen Ambrose’s guardianship. Although much of the novel takes place outside of London, the town of Santa Marina where the characters walk is
something of a recreation of the urban center. There are differences between the urban concerns of a typical flâneuse and the pastoral depictions of South America, yet the imprint of London on the characters’ memories makes it possible to consider the more rural walks of *The Voyage Out* through the lens of these experiences. Although several walks in this novel take place in nature, these moments are informed by the characters’ urban walking. Helen’s walks most significantly prove that geography is a mental construct.

In the first chapter of *Voyage*, Helen Ambrose walks on the London docks to the *Euphrosyne*, which is Rachel’s father’s ship and the watercraft that will take them across the ocean. It frustrates her when her husband Ridley hails a cab. Helen says, “I would rather walk” (7). We shouldn’t take this to mean that she really likes walking, although that isn’t refuted, but instead look to the next lines to inform us of its meaning:

> The fixity of her mood was broken by the action of walking. The shooting motor cars, more like spiders in the moon that terrestrial objects, the thundering drays, the jingling hansoms, and little black broughams, made her think of the world she lived in. (7)

Woolf uses the setting as Helen’s emotional terrain in the sense that “the action of walking” is intertwined with her desire to dispel her mood. However, it isn’t just the city that offsets Helen’s mood, but rather the act of walking that works within her to invite this change. Also, the “myriad impressions” that Woolf identifies in “Modern Fiction” indicates the degree to which Helen is overwhelmed, and the moment consumes her in observation.

When Helen sees motor cars, they appear alien to her because physical manifestations of the environment affect her headspace. Instead of being “terrestrial” or earthly, the ordinary drays, hansom cabs, and broughams turn her attention to something quite different: in between columns of smoke, Helen sees the hill where she lives and thinks of her children asking for her (7). Then she also
felt at this moment how little London had done to make her love it, although thirty of her forty years had been spent in a street. She knew how to read the people who were passing her …. Already, though there was sunlight in the haze, tattered old men and women were nodding off to sleep upon the seats. When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath. (7)

Unlike Rachel, Helen grew up in London and has a knowledge of the streets that goes beyond the surface. The pinnacles of smoke remind her of her children and guilt of leaving them with relatives for several months. Although the flâneur also has an emotional terrain, it is once more fixated on anonymity in a crowd and possession of experience that doesn’t intrude upon the flâneuse’s perception. The way that Helen “reads” the people passing her also indicates her identity as a flâneuse who physically relates herself to “the skeleton beneath” because she can discern it. While the male flâneuse does not have to notice the people around him, can choose to be a “man of the crowd,” Helen notices individuals—“tattered old men and women”—and this is why she can see past beauty and appearances. Her thoughts also feel inscrutable, as if all she can do is look to the stimuli around her, hoping she will finally experience the sensation of forgetting herself in the city. Even though women wish to walk by themselves, being independent in the streets is never more than a dream.

Helen doesn’t appear concerned for her safety in the opening pages of *Voyage*, but rather frustrated at social conventions that came long before her which dictate rules for her wandering. Helen’s walk indicates her knowledge of “reading” the people who pass her and, by extension, the city itself. Out of all the characters in *Voyage*, Helen is the one who knows the streets by memory the most. Richard Dalloway’s exclamations of the London street are boastful, less confident somehow because they aren’t founded in the same level of interiority as Helen’s. At the same time, Helen still cannot walk the street at night by herself; the walk that she and Mr. Ambrose take in the beginning of the novel is in the afternoon (5), and in this sense, she can’t interface with what’s liminal. The first lines of the novel even furnish the attributes of the
London street that are the most telling in the sense that the narrator warns the reader away from walking arm-in-arm, emphasizing that “eccentricity must pay the penalty” on the London street “where beauty goes unregarded” (5). As soon as the Ambroses safely cross the Embankment, Helen “gently withdrew her arm from his, allowing her mouth at the same time to relax, to tremble; then tears rolled down, and, leaning her elbows on the balustrade, she shielded her face from the curious” (5). Helen’s frustration is apparent in her tears, which she can only begin to wipe away when she allows herself to focus on walking, ignoring other people who may wish to stare and judge.

Helen cannot be a flâneur; the walk she takes with her husband has the echoes of a dérive, but even that definition fails to encompass her walking habits because none of her walks are “a spontaneous journey” that allow her to experience something new. In a sense, Helen notices the “subtle aesthetic contours of the landscape,” but her walking is purposeful and therefore does not reach for the definitions of the flâneur, flâneuse, or dérive. Since Rachel begins to see Helen as a mature confidant, Helen’s walks become a part of the way we also view Rachel. And out of all the characters of the narrative, Helen is the one that most literally embodies female desire to wander by herself. However, Rachel figuratively symbolizes the desire not only because she is the attendant walker who dérives with Clarissa, Helen, and Terrence but also because she implicates herself in conversations about walking.

Helen and Rachel dérive together, without the men and even take a walk in the evening: “‘Seeing life’ was the phrase they used for their habit of strolling through the town after dark” because Santa Marina’s prime walking hours happen by lamplight (93). It is this phrasing that indicates the aesthetic experience of the flâneuse, which is ultimately strengthened by the presence of other women who also walk. This walk is punctuated by leaving a man: before Helen
and Rachel leave the house, they invite Ridley to come along, but he refuses. At first, Helen wants to turn back, but Rachel grasps her wrist and tells her, “We’re going to see life. You promised” (93). Rachel’s strong desire to walk indicates the extent to which she hungers for aesthetic experience and sees Helen as the mentor that will enable this possibility. “The streets were full of people,” Woolf explains, but it was “men for the most part, who interchanged their views of the world as they walked, or gathered round the wine-tables at the street-corner” (94). Woolf makes sure to emphasize that it is the men who have the cultural conversations around café tables in the falling light, not women. Still, “[t]he two Englishwomen excited some friendly curiosity, but no one molested them” (94), which contrasts with Helen’s frustration in the London street that she cannot break free from her husband. This picture of Santa Marina contrasts with the one of London at the beginning of the novel. Unlike the workday constriction of Helen and Ridley’s walk in the first pages of *The Voyage Out*, this walk is arguably more aesthetic because it is more relaxed. Quite literally, Helen and Rachel do “see life” on their walk: when they arrive at the hotel, the women look in the windows which “reveal a different section of the life of the hotel” (95). What is most interesting here is that while they walk in the lane, Helen and Rachel “see life” from the outside looking inward, which indicates the serendipitous nature of walking versus the inward domestic space that they gaze upon.

While they both walk within the same terrain of this small South American town, Rachel is a country walker, and Helen is an urban walker. While their sensibilities distinguish them among their immediate social circle, these considerations are stripped away when they walk the town. Instead of facing fear and danger, the two can explore the neighborhood without a particular purpose in mind. In this way, Rachel does experience dérive, but she never quite becomes a flâneuse.
Rachel’s view of Helen as a walking mentor is somewhat challenged when Mr. Flushing invites them on an excursion. While Rachel wishes to go, Helen does not; Rachel accuses her of being “half alive” simply because she doesn’t want to go through the difficulty of staying outdoors (256). “At that moment it appeared to Rachel that she had always seen the same faults in Helen, from the very first night on board the *Euphrosyne*, in spite of her beauty, in spite of her magnanimity and love,” she thinks of Helen’s bluntness (256). Yet Rachel greatly cares for what Helen has shown her in these walks; although not directly articulated, Rachel loves Helen as a mother figure and friend because she has never had someone take such an interest in her. Indeed, instead of fighting with Helen, Rachel “fell into a profound silence as they walked on” (256), indicating that Rachel wishes for their walking relationship to continue. Helen looks to Rachel crushing leaves as they walk and admits to being enamored with her (257). While female friendship is a more peripheral concern to the concerns of the flâneuse, what can be extracted from this moment is that the flâneuse most distinctly relies upon momentary aesthetic experiences. It doesn’t matter so much whether she is walking with another woman because this only enables a greater degree of security and the possibility to see the terrain more objectively. Although aesthetic experience is not necessarily regulated by objective feeling, the objective terrain is often a technique to reveal the subjective spaces of vision.

The novel also reveals the ways in which women are deemed unable to become Baudelaire’s kaleidoscope of experience and thoroughly resists it. Richard Dalloway explains to Rachel that

“When I think of the age we live in, with its opportunities and possibilities, the mass of things to be done and enjoyed—why haven’t we ten lives instead of one? But about yourself?”

“You see, I’m a woman,” said Rachel.
“I know—I know,” said Richard, throwing his head back, and drawing his fingers across his eyes. “How strange to be a woman! A young and beautiful woman,” he continued sententiously, “has the whole world at her feet.” (70).

When Richard speaks of the opportunities of the age, he’s unknowingly referring to men’s choices and possibilities. Rachel immediately registers this and attempts to remind him that she doesn’t have access to the same opportunities. Yet Richard dismisses her, and in this dismissal we can understand the flâneur’s sense that the world is open. What Rachel sees immediately is her relation to the world: she is limited because she has no experience walking the city by herself. Richard treats the limits of her life as self-imposed instead of acknowledging the oddity of Rachel’s inexperience. The male characters of the novel use her uncertainty to mirror their superiority with their own knowledge of London and walking to such a degree that they conflate the two into understanding life itself.

Woolf’s interest in spaces draws her work together in ways that all culminate in the aesthetic experience of the flâneuse. Snaith and Whitworth write that Woolf was interested in the politics of national, civic, private, and even textual spaces; however, London was at the center of this fascination because “her novels act as an encyclopedia of the city’s streets and landmarks” (1). Woolf also presents “representations of urban perambulations [which] highlight not only the ephemerality of time, but also space” (1). Although space is not my main consideration, its relationship to Woolf’s work is well-traced across scholarship, and flânerie was both a literal and metaphorical presence in Woolf’s work (Snaith and Whitworth 1). The scholarship of Bowlby, Wolff, and Parsons, among others, is a testament to its existence, and contemporary analyses from scholars like Larsson continue to explicate Woolf and her characters as flâneuses.

Although Voyage is not much of a model of urban walking, the characters can’t stop talking about walking itself, whether as exercise or meditation. These remembered moments of walking often take place in London, and that city as a place dominates the novel to such a degree
that it inevitably influences the South American setting in an unusual geocritical twist. What critics also tend to be interested in about this novel is the brief appearance of the Dalloways from Woolf’s famous novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Voyage*, Clarissa and Richard are precursors to themselves as they are presented in the 1925 novel; Clarissa is essentially British, a tea-loving and talkative wife of a politician who enjoys Rachel’s company, always soliciting her to play her piano in front of people instead of holing up in her room pretending to be seasick. They even have a moment together while taking a lap around the boat: “I am lonely,” Rachel says. “I want—” She stops herself, as if unsure of what she really wants; Clarissa “was able to understand without words” (56), implying that they either share the same hope, or, more likely, that Clarissa sublimated what she wanted as a young person and must teach Rachel to do the same. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa is clearly articulated as a flâneuse, and perhaps Rachel’s nameless desire has to do with the frustration that she is unable to take in the same form of experience.

In an earlier conversation, Rachel tells Clarissa that she is not interested in marrying (56), which provides background for the turmoil she experiences when she and Terrence walk. Interestingly, this conversation traces several hallmarks of the flâneuse, indeed proving that Woolf’s work is populated by women who wish to walk by themselves but spend their lives unfulfilled in their desire:

> “I can quite imagine you walking alone,” said Clarissa; “and thinking—in a little world of your own. But how you will enjoy it—some day!”
> “I shall enjoy walking with a man—is that what you mean?” said Rachel, regarding Mrs. Dalloway with her large enquiring eyes.
> “I wasn’t thinking of a man particularly,” said Clarissa. “But you will” (55-6).

Emphasized here is the fact that walking alone can be one of the best growth opportunities a person can have. Clarissa notes that although Rachel has not walked alone “in a little world” of her own, she should not assume that the only way she can take a walk is with a man. Rachel
conflates “walking out” with courtship when she asks Clarissa about enjoying a walk with a man; this marks not only societal pressure on her young mind, but also the inability to realize that her walk with Clarissa is as close to the very thing they speak of as she will ever be.

Clarissa is a walking woman in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but this version of herself is not depicted in *The Voyage Out*. Instead, Clarissa’s proclivity for walking is implied, a subtler presence before Richard’s obnoxious, large admission that he also loves walking London just a few pages later. He explains to Rachel that “I find nature very stimulating to myself” because “[m]y best ideas have come to me out of doors” (59). He also confidently admits that “the most momentous conversations of my life took place while perambulating the great court at Trinity” (59). Clarissa is the one who suggests walking alone, but Rachel naturally assumes that the only way she can enjoy walking is with a man, which is at odds with Clarissa’s “little world” of the private mind which further draws the relationship between mental, private, and public space. It is a world Rachel may never experience with a man like Terrence who is, quite literally, at her side.

Helen also reflects this fear in the first scene of *Voyage*. Although Rachel admits that she walks by herself in the country (55), this somehow does not enter her understanding of herself as a female walker nor does country walking appear to be valuable when mentioned to the urban walkers of *Voyage*. Because of her sheltered environment, Rachel is unable to create a “little world” for herself and is therefore unable to imagine enjoying this activity. Presumably, Clarissa tells Rachel of her vision that she will one day walk by herself, fulfilling her desire, because Rachel asks so many questions that are rarely taken seriously by other characters.

After Clarissa tells Rachel that she will one day walk with a husband, Rachel gazes at Richard (56). It does not take long for Richard to notice Rachel’s inexperience and begin what initially appears to be a friendship, one whose inappropriate undercurrents are immediately
apparent. Clarissa leaves them alone together, and it could be assumed that she’s not aware of Richard’s conduct. He tells Rachel of “perambulating the great court at Trinity” (59), thereby starting their correspondence, which is defined by Richard’s male experiences, which overwhelm and triumph over Rachel’s female inexperience. Woolf describes their “attempt at communication” as “a failure” (62) even as Rachel attempts to understand his meanings, which perambulate around her limited understanding, circling her in meaning she cannot grasp. While Rachel’s conversation with Clarissa indicates female desire to walk alone, Richard’s view of walking does not leave room for a female perspective. Casting himself as a sort of Thoreau, Richard tells Rachel that he enjoys nature and that “[his] best ideas have come to [him] out of doors” when he walks, rides, or takes his yacht (59). Richard takes these modes of transportation for granted, not only because of his class but also because he is a man, an identity that grants him given access to the street.

Rachel is intrigued because “she had scarcely walked through a poor street,” and always accompanied by an escort (60). Unfamiliar with London, she asks,

Under the streets, in the sewers, in the wires, in the telephones, there is something alive; is that what you mean? In things like dustcarts and men mending roads? You feel that all the time when you walk about London, and when you turn on a tap and the water comes? (62)

While Richard, deep in thought about his own politics, tries to describe modern life as “based upon cooperative effort” (62), Rachel misunderstands him, believing that he must mean that the city is somehow alive, vivid in a way that her home in the country is not. It’s important that Rachel asks him as a question, signaling her uncertainty because it demonstrates her own lack of confidence that she will ever have these experiences. Questions are her main rhetorical mode of understanding others, as she has limited material of life to draw from. Rachel’s concrete references to pedestrian items like “sewers,” “wires,” and “dustcarts” indicate that she seeks an
aesthetic experience, but this is unreachable through Richard’s perspective because he only understands the city as a flâneur. Like Woolf’s reference to gig lamps, Rachel tries to use these concrete items as a way to move beyond her limited experience. Although he answers in the affirmative, Richard doesn’t seem to agree with her simply because he reverts to his explanation of society as cooperative. It’s a dismissal that Rachel is accustomed to. Before the Dalloways disembark for another island, Richard kisses Rachel. We’re made to understand that she’s never been kissed before and has no idea what it means.

The realization that follows their exchange signals walking as a significant motif in the novel as tied to female restriction within both interior and exterior space, again drawing the relationship between the female walker and the geography she walks through. When Rachel confesses the secret, Helen only replies, “I thought he was that kind of man” (74) and even admits to being jealous of her (76), evidently ignoring Rachel’s anger and frustration with the nonconsensual situation distressing enough that she had nightmares. Even though Helen believes that Rachel “had made herself incredibly ridiculous,” (76) this is not the attitude of the narrative. The conversation signifies Rachel’s initiation into sexuality, imposed on her while she’s spent her life entirely unaware that the women who line the streets of Piccadilly are prostitutes or that men look upon society women in a sexually-charged way even as they are supposed to reign themselves in to be modest and avoid tempting men (76).

“So that’s why I can’t walk alone!”
By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, her turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever—her life that was the only chance she had—a thousand words and actions became plain to her. (77)

Although Rachel acknowledges from the beginning that she has never been allowed to walk by herself, she realizes for the first time that her restriction from walking by herself is limiting. Instead of depicting life as an avenue or country lane wide with possibility, Woolf reveals Rachel
as “hedged-in” by the impossible walls of male behavior. It’s not because she has never walked alone that Rachel does not become a flâneuse, but rather because she did not realize the significance of her guardians’ habits to never leave her alone. A flâneuse is always aware of her own lack of security in the streets; although she traverses them like a man, this acuteness makes a unique aesthetic field of experience. The geocritical angle of Rachel’s frustration is apparent; to understand why she can’t walk alone, her mind conjures a concrete image to stand in for her frustration, the budding beginning of a rage we never see because she loses her desire to live. To understand Rachel, it’s often necessary to examine her perspective on setting. In the same sense that Rachel looks to the ground when she is ashamed of Arthur and Susan’s embrace, so she also retreats into a concrete image to understand a frustration that lacks language.

Rachel’s walk with Terrence Hewett also has much to contribute to an understanding of the flâneuse and aestheticism. After breaking from the group of picnickers the two stumble upon Arthur and Susan embracing. It is a natural assumption that the couple is now engaged. Both Rachel and Terrence are troubled by the sight.

When it became painful to look any longer, the great size of the view seeming to enlarge her eyes beyond their natural limit, she looked at the ground; it pleased her to scrutinize this inch of the soil of South America so minutely that she noticed every grain of earth and made it into a world where she was endowed with the supreme power. The sun was behind them and two long shadows suddenly lay upon the ground in front of them, one waving because it was made by a skirt, the other stationary, because thrown by a pair of legs in trousers. (135)

The narrative’s report that it is “painful” to look at Arthur and Susan proves Rachel’s distress, and once she can no longer look the first earthly item she encounters is the South American soil. Rachel notices “every grain of earth,” and this action of gazing at the ground demonstrates her shame at viewing others’ physical pleasure. The moment when Rachel looks to the ground and envisions a world where she has power points to the idea that Woolf’s female walkers wish to walk by themselves, but never find the opportunity. Hewet explains that they “may take it for
granted that they’re engaged” (134). It is not the act that troubles Rachel, but rather what their embrace symbolizes. While Terrance’s shadow is fixed and confident, Rachel’s skirt wavers, signifying both her inner turbulence and inability to enjoy a walk that casts a shadow over Rachel’s thoughts. This moment demonstrates Rachel as trapped next to the figure of a man, unable to be freed even from the dress that restricts her. I emphasize this to point to the relationship between the figure of the flâneuse and the geocritical space she traverses; while Hewett takes the sight for granted without interacting with it, Rachel’s mental topology is compromised by this vision.

Also part of Rachel’s mental stress is Hewett’s fixation on London and the way in which its metonymic value becomes a placeholder for happiness. Hewett often reflects on their future as a perpetual dérive: “The thought of England was delightful, for together they would see the old things freshly …. He wished very often to be back again in the thick of life, doing things with Rachel” (292). Hewett’s sentiment that he wants to be “in the thick of life” signifies a close relationship to Helen and Rachel’s “seeing life.” While for Rachel “seeing life” is walking the narrow lanes of Santa Marina, Hewett only sees that possibility when he is in London. To him, “London, London’s the place” (293). Hewett also reflects upon the places he has walked and his desire to bring Rachel to them: in Kingsway, the Strand, and Waterloo Bridge, “I always like the quiet after the uproar. You hear your own footsteps suddenly quite loud” (293). However, Rachel does not have an expectation or purpose in mind when she thinks of walking London with Hewett. In a more vague sense, “Rachel, too, had been thinking of the English country: the flat land rolling away to the sea, and woods and the long straight roads” (293). Yet Rachel’s thoughts revolve around the countryside, a geography that is more familiar to her. She also does not have as high of expectations for their walks as a couple: “It isn’t as if we were expecting a great
deal—only to walk about and look at things,” says Rachel (293). While Hewett thinks of himself as a flâneur showing his wife the places he loves, Rachel wishes simply to traverse the landscape with no expectations. I do not include this to create a dichotomy between the flâneur and the flâneuse in the form of Terrence and Rachel, but rather to demonstrate the extent to which London is more than just a passing consideration to these characters, who see their dérives in South America as an extension of their British imagination.

While the word “voyage” connotes a journey by sea, its place in the title of The Voyage Out has application to my study of the aesthetics of Woolf’s flâneuse because she is so entrenched in London culture. Helen, Hewett, Richard, and Clarissa all remember their walks through London and use them to relate to the landscape. Because Rachel does not have these experiences, she focuses more on the expression of the landscape as it exists rather than as it compares to London. Whether in presence or absence, the flâneuse’s experience begins in London.
First Disappointment

On June 18, 1920, The New York Times reviewed The Voyage Out, noting that the novel “gives promise” in its opening chapters, but “[l]ater, the reader is disappointed.” “[T]he most hopeful thing about it” is that the book is Woolf’s first novel because the story is “extremely tedious.” The writer’s complaint is that Voyage shows Woolf’s promise as an author, but only one thing stands out: Woolf knows London. While the review does not attribute a reason for this, I understand this to mean that Woolf spent so much time sketching London in all her writings that it was only natural to include its topography in the sense that most everything she wrote can be temporally related through her evolving interpretations of the London street.

When I read Rachel in The Voyage Out, it’s hard not to think of her as an amalgamation of all the women I know, including a version of myself if I had been a sheltered Englishwoman in the years surrounding World War I. Rachel and I are the same age. She dies just as her life is turning into something new. We’re both introverted and find solace in the arts. I’d like to think I’m more self-aware than she is, that my path isn’t so determined.

Woolf understood twenty-four as a pivot point in a woman’s life. Not only is it the year before the quarter-life crisis that many women experience, but it’s also a pause button we wish to press for a while to stop the flood of disappointment. Just like the moment when Rachel gazes down at the South American soil in shame and solemnity in witnessing the transaction of Arthur and Susan’s engagement, Rachel notes a shadow on the ceiling just when she gives up living: “[b]ut the shadow and the woman seemed to be eternally fixed above her” (343).

We don’t expect a twenty-four-year-old woman to act like she is still a child. And maybe we blame her—she’s too introverted and has difficulty understanding concepts that other characters view as simple facts. We want her to resist the men who transgress her space, who
make her voyage to discovery more arduous. And we wish that she would take a walk through the city without anyone else accompanying her. But that is not the fulfilling twenty-first-century ending we get to have.

Rachel has her first disappointment when Helen explains that the women who walk the streets of Piccadilly are prostitutes and that men conflate women who walk alone with sexual commerce. “So that’s why I can’t walk alone!” she exclaims (77). There’s no doubting her surprise—it’s genuine. But I don’t want to laugh at the twenty-four-year-old woman who has no idea that prostitutes exist because that misses the point. I’m sad for the lack of choice Rachel has. She can’t walk the street as an autonomous figure.

Rebecca Solnit was seventeen when men regularly propositioned her in the streets of Paris. At nineteen, a man followed Solnit through the Fisherman’s Wharf neighborhood of San Francisco threatening her with “vile sexual proposals” and murder when she refused him (240-1). She writes of her disappointment in similar terms:

It was the most devastating discovery of my life that I had no real rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness out-of-doors, that the world was full of strangers who seemed to hate me and wish to harm me for no reason other than my gender, that sex so readily became violence, and that hardly anyone else considered it a public issue rather than a private problem (241).

And that’s the problem that Rachel grasps but cannot put into words: *sex so readily becomes violence*. That is why she has gruesome nightmares that take away her consent after Richard kisses her. While it might be tempting to separate the issues of impending sexuality and women’s lack of privilege to walk the streets, they are one and the same because Helen and Rachel discuss walking in the same moments that Rachel admits to kissing Richard.

I can’t say I’ve had one specific realization that I couldn’t walk the streets like a man; that’s always been a part of me. I find it impossible to root out that fear. Maybe that’s because I need to do more of my own walking. I need to discover what it is that draws me to urban life.
Street Haunting and the Walking Essays

For Woolf, the divide between fiction and nonfiction can be a thin line. Just as in her fiction, Woolf creates characters and employs the same spiraling prose as in her fiction. Her nonfiction is just as impressionistic; in Woolf’s infrequently-quoted *The London Scene*, a group of essays commissioned for *Good Housekeeping* in 1931, she writes about the city for an armchair traveler. Woolf writes about the same docks that Helen walks in the opening pages of *The Voyage Out* in her essay “The Docks of London.” Initially, the ships are an “it” viewed by an outside of observer, but Woolf quickly shifts the perspective to the ships themselves, personifying them as they pass the observer:

[The ships] take their way majestically through a crowd of tramp steamers, and colliers and barges heaped with coal and swaying red sailed boats … Drawn from some irresistible current, they come from the storms and calms of the sea, its silence and loneliness to their allotted ancourage. (7-8)

Just like the street wanderers of her fiction, Woolf’s ships wander through a crowd. A metaphorical connection could be made that this demonstrates the way a flâneuse moves through a crowd. Like the Euphrosyne, she must navigate the world as a gendered object. Although several of the essays place the observer on the street, this piece has a narrative presence that glides instead of walks through the waterways of London. This moment indicates something about the docks themselves, about the way that perspective can make the docks appear differently from a ship and from the streets. It also indicates the extent to which Geocriticism is a vital lens to viewing her oeuvre. Woolf considers the environment in this essay as a palimpsest of memory:

“Can it be possible that there is earth, that there once were fields and crops beneath this desolation and disorder?” she asks. “Now pleasure has gone and labour has come; and it stands derelict like some beauty in her midnight finery looking out over mud flats and candle works, while malodorous mounds of earth, upon which trucks are perpetually tipping fresh heaps, have entirely consumed the fields where, a hundred years ago, lovers wandered and picked violets” (8).
Woolf piles rich description to both personify labor and depict the past as a nostalgic place, a pastoral field of imagination that is already bygone. This technique is similar to the one that Woolf identifies in “Literary Geography.” The narrator conflates time and space to demonstrate that a part of wandering, a part of experiencing the city is acknowledging and engaging this space as cultural memory, much in the sense that we do when we partake in literary tourism. This places Helen’s walk in context as such; this moment on the docks in The London Scene gives an impression of Woolf’s own vision of the docks as a walker and traveler.

In The Voyage Out, Woolf named Mr. Vinrace’s boat with careful intention: Euphrosyne refers not only to a daughter of Zeus from Greek mythology, but also a fifth-century saint who is promised in marriage when she swears to dedicate herself to God. To remain celibate, Euphrosyne dresses as a man and join a monastery to escape from a life she doesn’t want (Harleman 365). While there are no literal comparisons between Euphrosyne and Rachel, the parallels do speak to the sublimated idea that Rachel is sheltered because of male behavior and misogynistic societal expectations. Also, the tension underlying the novel, Rachel’s journey towards selfhood, is tied up in geography.

I discussed cities and ships as shes and hers, a gendered space of desire, scholars have said, that is hostile to women. According to Michael Sherringham, André Breton’s Pont Neuf is a detailed ‘interpretation’ of the topography of central Paris according to which the geographical and architectural layout of the Île de la Cité, and the bend of the Seine where it is situated, [which] are seen to make up the body of a recumbent woman whose vagina is located in the place Dauphine (89).

Although Paris and London developed very differently from one another, it is as Coverley emphasized: Psychogeography is a tale of these two cities (11). And, as he argues, London is the center of its development (19). This isn’t the first metaphor to make a connection between the city and the body, but not in such an overtly sexual sense (Solnit 311). Yet it’s important to
remember this because a sexualized and sexist reinterpretation as Paris as a “recumbent woman” who is presumably obedient to male desire matters just as much as it matters that men gender ships and cities. Although Geocriticism is the field and the flâneuse is the figure walking across, degendering the environment may provide a fairer interpretation of the figures. While it is assumed that the flâneur and the flâneuse are not simply the same gender-swapped figures, we should not then also think of the ground they walk over as gendered as well. We must remember that they walked the same streets.

Baudelaire and Benjamin, among a slew of male writers who determined that the Artist of Modern Life could not be a woman made sure to gender the flâneur as a male unconcerned with female interests or, in fact, the faces in the crowd themselves. If we take the flâneur as an allegorical or aesthetic figure as Baudelaire and Benjamin do, then the flâneur is free to perambulate all over the female body, the body of the city, with a sense of possession, unconcerned with the worrying gender dynamics this creates.

Elkin questions male possession over the city by contrasting Hemingway’s “possession” of the city with her own sense of “belonging” when she wanders the city (56) because “there is a sense of the city you can’t plot on a map or a phone” (83). Quite simply, a fundamental part of redefining the flâneuse as separate from the flâneur is dissociating her from possession or at least acknowledging that she does not enact a male gaze onto the city the way that men do in their gendering of the city. That’s why the name Euphrosyne is a fundamental detail. Although subtle, Woolf’s naming of the ship after a woman who had to dress in male clothing to escape her life recalls George Sand, who wore men’s clothes to better navigate Paris. Presumably, Sand did so in order to belong simply because her female clothes would make her a potential victim of possession. This is where there is a clear divide between the field and the subject, the distinction
between geocritical thought as a whole and where the flâneuse stands within it. While the flâneur conflates a vision of himself as a male walker walking male terrain, a female walker simply wishes to belong to an androgynous city, often possessing an androgynous mind while doing so. Sand is an ideal symbol of this metaphorical idea because her clothing made her androgynous to match her mind, which would also correspond to the setting. This is an element that scholars notice in Woolf’s writing: in *A Room of One’s Own* she is famous for declaring that the androgynous mind is the strongest:

> When I saw the couples get into the taxicab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate … But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? … The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating (96-7).

The versions of *Room of One’s Own* that often get anthologized don’t often include this segment, as if it is a controversial opinion to suggest that people have androgynous minds that don’t have to be stamped, stereotyped, and contained by gender roles. Woolf suggests that her realization of androgynous minds took place in the London street, where it would appear she got most of her ideas. Even her association with a couple getting out of a taxicab ties this to her participation as a flâneuse. This moment disproves and works against those scholars who refute the existence of a flâneuse; because Woolf has spontaneous realizations while walking the city, seemingly without purpose, it would seem to suggest that she definitely walked the city by herself. “Street Haunting” gives us reason to believe that. But beyond this consideration, the best mind is one that incorporates facets that we commonly associate with different genders and making them part of the thinking process. If women have a male sensibility and men have a female sensibility shadowing their gendered existence, everyone can achieve an androgynous mind and use it to engage with reality. Also, this androgynous mind transcends the gendered roles assigned to us in
the streets based on what we wear or how we present ourselves. While flâneurs try to possess experience and mark it as male territory, an androgynous thinker can transcend her categories to redefine a concept that defines her as a female person required to interface with society in a particular way, treading over female ground gendered by men. On the other hand, Woolf does acknowledge in her framework of the androgynous mind that in a woman the female perspective may slightly dominate, as does the male point-of-view to men. This would enable a space to understand that while both the flâneur and the flâneuse arguably possess androgynous mental traits, they are also dictated by society to navigate the world differently, to such a degree that aesthetic experience may look different to the figures themselves. We see this in “Street Haunting.”

In this most famous of walking essays, the narrator begins in a drawing room, walks into public space, and then returns to the privacy in which she started. Woolf’s characters often do so and, like the narrator of “Street Haunting,” they often have an excuse to leave the house, indicating the desire to dérive without purpose to take in aesthetic experience. The connection between space and the flâneuse in “Street Haunting” is evident because the narrator reclaims her right to streetwalk “not a prostitute but a London adventurer, a peripatetic writer roaming the streets, and daring to do so in the winter twilight rather than in the bright spring sun” (Lanone 42). It’s important that the narrator of “Street Haunting” wanders in the twilight because it is a liminal space. The wider field of Geocriticism runs in this theoretical thread; although it is more concerned with spaces than with the figure navigating the spaces, Woolf ultimately enables a connection between the two by creating a strong aesthetic experience communicated through the flâneuse.
Woolf draws upon this liminal space, writing that “[t]he hour should be the evening and the season winter, for in winter the champagne brightness of the air and the sociability of the streets are grateful.” Early in the essay, Woolf establishes the narrator’s desire to obtain a pencil, but more specifically spends time elucidating the strangeness of the hour as correlated to her desire to walk. She connects the “champagne brightness” of a liminal time of day with the sociability of space, which is important because it is that feeling in the air that makes this walk possible. Woolf goes on to explain that the evening lamplight makes us “no longer quite ourselves” because when we traverse the streets in the late afternoon “we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one’s own room.” The contrast of light and darkness is also important here, indicating that the attributes of space, such as lamplight, change our interaction with public and private places. To an Englishwoman whose early evening is veritably sequestered between the two conventional events of teatime and dinner, it is a radical act to walk the streets with what some may consider to be a dubious purpose.

Indeed, women are always expected to have a purpose when they wander into the world. The “Street Haunting” narrator fabricates the excuse to buy a pencil to ironically jab at the fact that society places such arbitrary requirements on women; therefore, it’s significant that she walks during the liminal space of the day. As a liminal figure herself, the narrator seeks to subvert what’s expected.

In “Kew Gardens” we see a succession of male and female walking pairs in the aforementioned gardens. From the first line, Woolf depicts an aesthetic experience by evoking intricate details of the gardens before turning towards the couples: “[t]he figures of these men and women straggled past the flower-bed with a curiously irregular movement not unlike that of
the white and blue butterflies who crossed the turf in zig-zag flights from bed to bed.” By first describing their movement as comparable to the butterflies oscillating above the flowers, Woolf draws our attention to the walkers as the centerpiece of this brief essay. Although the rhythm of the pairs walking is less important than the walking itself, what Woolf emphasizes is that “[t]he man kept this distance in front of the woman purposely, though perhaps unconsciously, for he wished to go on with his thoughts.” This man is an ideation of the flâneur who attempts to unburden himself from his female walking partner by affixing his thoughts to nature. In dialogue the man admits to thinking of another woman who at one time he wished to marry. The woman responds that she accepts it because “[d]oesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees?” And indeed the essay does depict more pairs and even a group of four people walking the garden, fading in and out between the trees as the women keep pace with the men who always seem to be calling them away to propriety.

One woman “looked through the pattern of falling words at the flowers standing cool, firm, and upright in the earth” and “[sees] them as a sleeper waking from a heavy sleep sees a brass candlestick reflecting the light in an unfamiliar way.” She listens to the flow of conversation, pausing the rhythm of her walk to meditate over nature, so struck by its unfamiliarity that she loses herself in the moment. Interestingly, the “ponderous woman” calls herself away from aesthetic experience by recommending that she and her partner have tea.

Although there are many critical strains in “Kew Gardens” ripe for interpretation, the essay is of particular interest to the study of the flâneuse as we see her in other works like “Street Haunting,” more obviously thought of as a walking essay, because we see her in such direct relation to men. While Woolf identifies the first walking man as pacing in front of his female walking partner as a flâneuse who wants to be alone with his thoughts, women do not also have
the opportunity to walk in front of their partners. While they tend to pay closer attention to the aesthetic experience of nature, woman are, for the most part, called away from wandering to sit at tea or continue walking towards the edge of the garden. “Kew Gardens” may be primarily about walking in nature, but Woolf’s depiction of male and female relationships functions to enlighten my study of both Mrs. Dalloway and The Voyage Out, two novels also interested in the relationship between gender and walking.
Ensemble Cast of Walkers

Woolf assigns Clarissa an “intense, embodied relationship to [the city’s] atmosphere” (Elkin 83) and “neural shimmer” in the way she views the streets (Turchi 141). Clarissa’s first action is to “buy the flowers herself” (3). “What a lark! What a plunge!” she thinks of the city, a sense of optimism pervading her actions (3). The novel begins in the middle of an aesthetic experience; without introduction, we are ushered into post-war London with the strike of Big Ben. “I love walking London,” she says to Hugh Whitbread, who asks her where she is headed. “Really it’s better than walking in the country” (5). Immediately we understand that Clarissa walks for the sake of walking; much like the aesthetic movement that championed art for art’s sake, Clarissa walks with the purpose of buying flowers for her party. While she could have asked a maid to buy the flowers for her, Clarissa chooses to immerse herself in the London street. It’s important that we note her purpose because it aligns her with the flâneuse of “Street Haunting” who must make a pencil her excuse for leaving the house.

In the early pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*, “she had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day” (8). Although Clarissa looks to the city as a repository of memory, a place that holds the past and present, she doesn’t attempt to possess the experience. Instead, her day in the city leaves her feeling like she is “out to sea.” Instead of suggesting a modicum of control, Woolf indicates that Clarissa both enjoys and fears the way that the city displaces her sense of self in aesthetic experience. By relating the middle of the street to the sea, Woolf uses impressions of cars driving past to demonstrate the overwhelming nature of wandering a city. For a moment, Clarissa is wrapped up in the sound of cars driving by, a sound of such constancy that it feels like the ocean. These sounds may not be particularly beautiful like
the ocean, but they tell us something about the extent of experience. Clarissa thinks of herself that “[s]he knew nothing …and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (8). It is important that Clarissa feels out to sea because these feelings use a fluid sense of identity as a referant. Instead of believing in her knowledge of the street, Clarissa surrenders herself to its “absorbing” stimuli, admitting that she doesn’t impute a sense of self into what she sees. Clarissa attributes the fact that she is in this moment aware of time, but when she walks it doesn’t matter if she is Mrs. Dalloway because experience is fleeting.

Of course, the second half of the sentence indicates the single day—a Wednesday in June 1923. Woolf further postulates this lack of control:

Did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home…part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their special branches as she had seen in trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself (9).

In continuance with water imagery, a symbol often associated with women, Woolf metaphorically connects Clarissa’s feeling that she isn’t control to her own assimilation with the city that she feels is vivid and alive. In a scientific sense, she alludes to the fact that human atoms dissolve into the earth after death and form themselves as other aspects of nature, even trees. It also suggests a degree of mental androgyny connected to the feeling of being unmoored and out of control, out to sea. Woolf suggests sameness between Septimus and Clarissa, a sense of telegraphed experience that makes even their associations overlap as if they are already a part of one another not because they have died, but because both of them consider death as a way out. Later on, Richard tells Clarissa that he has been invited to Lady Bruton’s lunch without her. “Take me with you,” she thinks, “as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage” (46).
At the same time, Clarissa thinks of the life she could have lived with Peter. This moment evokes Rachel and Clarissa’s conversation in *Voyage*. While Rachel tells her that she is lonely and wants something that she can’t explain, Clarissa immediately understands. Although we as readers of both *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs. Dalloway* can postulate that this desire could be Peter, the great love of her life, it would appear instead that Clarissa’s “want” as wordlessly articulated to Rachel is much greater, corresponding to a lack of control she feels in the London street. While Clarissa clearly enjoys walking, the true state of her androgynous mind is still elusive. Instead, she is overwhelmed with imagery as powerful as the ocean, an emotional topography that wends its way through the novel and directly corresponds to the reveal at the party that Septimus killed himself, triggering Clarissa’s strange, wordless feeling that they are inextricably connected. In her correspondence, Woolf admits that she initially wished to make Clarissa the one to die. Although this does not end up in the novel, something remains of their mutual connection to death as if it could not be divorced from the DNA of the novel.

Lehan explains that for Woolf impressions are “a way out of the omniscient consciousness of naturalism. Impressions thus become a way of seeing the city. The city became a personal, often isolated experience, with each inhabitant caught in his or her own subjectivity” (129). Instead of depicting every feature of the London street, Woolf makes the setting explicit through impressions and spiraling prose that wind toward the conclusion. Often the conclusions of individual characters are not compatible with one another. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, similarity in thought signals not only a similar state of being but also a view of the London street sympathetic with other observers. As Baudelaire’s definition of the flâneur mentions the writer as kaleidoscope receptive to impressions, *Mrs. Dalloway* itself is also a kaleidoscope, shifting the tenants of reality through the medium of a single day. The fact that oceanic, virulent prose is
punctuated by the ringing of Big Ben and other clocks indicates that although the city street is
temporal, other people’s perspectives are often unreachable when we are in our own gulfs of
experience. Although *Mrs. Dalloway* refutes the flâneur as solely a male figure, the narrative
presence reveals that Baudelaire’s ideas of the shifting uncertainty of reality are not wrong. A
city street may be the aptest location from which to ask these very questions.

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf transports the reader to another point of view by small
details as simple as the swish of a curtain or sound of a car backfiring to indicate one
geographical landscape that the characters walk. Because specific details are heard by several of
the characters, even considered and discussed at intervals, Woolf makes it almost impossible to
imagine they are walking separate Londons. Again, it is not the geographical terrain that makes
the walk different for the ensemble cast of walkers that walk this novel, but rather their
emotional impressions of the same stimuli. Interestingly, Woolf portrays Peter as a kaleidoscope,
a mirror of experience that counteracts and works within Clarissa’s aesthetic experience as a
walker. He thinks to himself as he walks out of Regent’s Park holding his hat that “[t]he
compensation of growing old…was simply this; that the passions remain as strong as ever, but
one has gained—at last!—the power which adds the supreme flavor to existence,— the power of
taking hold of experience, of turning it round, slowly, in the light” (77). Although Woolf
maintains a narrative voice particular to both her oeuvre and *Mrs. Dalloway*, she demonstrates
Peter’s experience as more fixed and less unmoored than Clarissa’s. Although he admits to
having the strong feelings he did as a young person, Peter’s middle age allows him to slow down
and examine experience as something that can catch the light. As a flâneur of London, he
confidently walks through Regent’s Park. In this moment, experience can also be associated with
the feminine, returning us to Woolf’s idea in *A Room of One’s Own* that women have always
been mirrors to reflect the male ego. At this moment, Peter is the textbook definition of the flâneur because he views experience as something to be parsed, as if through the lens of a kaleidoscope. It’s not so much that Peter dismisses female experience in thinking of turning over experience, but rather that until this moment he does not acknowledge his place as a flâneur. However, Clarissa’s walks are the ones with the richest set of interpretations.

As she walks Bond Street, Clarissa reflects on her life and realizes that she often behaves a certain way to make people like her. Clarissa regrets that she did not make different choices in her life and compares herself with the “slow and stately” Lady Bexborough who has power and property, coming to the conclusion that “this body she wore … this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all” (10). While these words may seem to suggest that Clarissa forgets her physical body while she walks, it is simply a symbol of her gendered self as she appears in the world. Clarissa thinks of herself “invisible, unseen; unknown” without a husband or children but “only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (10). The body Clarissa wishes to forget is the symbol of her married life and the way she is perceived in society. While she wants to disappear and simply be known as Clarissa, she is aware of being Mrs. Dalloway even as she enjoys her walk on Bond Street. While on the inside she thinks of herself as Clarissa, even her fellow walkers do not see her as an individual person. Rather, she is a symbol of what she wishes she wasn’t; therefore, she cannot forget herself.

An interesting parallel can also be made between Clarissa’s daughter Elizabeth and Rachel. Although Elizabeth is younger than Rachel, who is presumably dead by the time this narrative begins, Woolf operates in the realm of the nostalgic and pastoral as Elizabeth waits for an omnibus on Victoria Street:
People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made her life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country, but they would compare her to lilies and she had to go to parties, and London was so dreary compared with being alone in the country with her father and the dogs (131).

The natural depiction of trees, lilies, and running water evoke a land much like the one where Rachel grew up, and Woolf’s reference to these images as ones that others use to ground a comparison with Elizabeth indicates the way that polite society exoticizes young women and naturalizes their suffering into womanhood. Like Rachel, Elizabeth is likely also discouraged from walking alone, and leaving the house in the middle of the day before the culminating party is an act of rebellion. Although she takes a walk through the city, Elizabeth’s walk is nostalgic in the sense that she would rather be with her father in the country instead of going to Clarissa’s party. Also, like Helen, Elizabeth notices the busses and cars around her—“garish caravans, glistening with red and yellow varnish” (131)—and even uses this space as a moment of reflection. Elizabeth thinks, “Every man fell in love with her, and she was really awfully bored. For it was beginning Her mother could see that—the compliments were beginning” (132).

Elizabeth’s emotional landscape is also conveyed through her acute sense of scenery on the London street and her comparison of its features to other times in her life.

Just like Rachel, who realizes that the reason she can’t walk alone is directly connected to her place as a sexual object to a male flâneur who possesses experience, Elizabeth also seems indifferent to men and even frustrated by their advances. The thought sets her off: “Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody” (132). The adverb “suddenly” is not set off by a comma, as if indicating that even the placement of the word in the sentence is a surprise. Elizabeth surprises herself by boarding the omnibus even though this was her errand in the first place; the mention that she does so “in front of everybody,” an anonymous crowd that presumably does not know her, demonstrates how
permeable Elizabeth believes herself to be. She has grown up in polite society’s gaze. Just as the country is a place of innocence and freedom, so also is the city a place of showmanship for Elizabeth, who isn’t prepared to be consumed by the male gaze. Although Elizabeth is not the narrator, Woolf’s use of free indirect discourse indicates that she identifies herself as an “impetuous creature” and “a pirate” because “she was delighted to be free” (132). Now that Elizabeth sheds her identity as a flâneuse to board the omnibus, she is a pirate of the seas, gaining power by taking her place on the top of the bus “like the figurehead of a ship” (132). Just as a ship is often gendered female, Elizabeth takes the helm in her place as a woman. When she emerges from the omnibus, she will continue owning her gender and identity, but at the end of the day, Elizabeth is put back in the same place, ironically, by the same father who tried to seduce Rachel.

“There’s Elizabeth,” Richard thinks to himself when he sees Elizabeth across the room. “Who is that lovely girl?” “Suddenly” he finds out that “it was his Elizabeth and he had not recognized her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock!” In this moment, Elizabeth “had felt him looking at her,” so she moves to be next to him. As soon as she makes it to him, Richard explains the moment to her nearly verbatim (189). Although Richard does not appear to intentionally notice his daughter in a sexualized way, he still mistakes her for a woman he doesn’t know that also happens to be beautiful to his subjective eye, his male gaze that blazes into her from across the room. This is the exact moment she wanted to escape. In the earlier image, Elizabeth wished to be in the country with her father and her dogs. When she is with her father at her mother Clarissa’s parties, the dynamic between her and her father changes in uncomfortable ways. This would not be as significant if it were not for Clarissa and Peter’s near-parallel moment in the final scene, which goes even further to indicate significance in the act of walking.
Clarissa’s telegraphic connection between Peter functions similarly, as “[t]hey had always this queer power of communicating without words” (59). Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the closing lines, the moment when the party will soon be over and everything stops in-scene. Sally and Lady Rosseter leave Peter, making their excuses that they will say goodnight to Richard, still standing with his daughter:

“I will come,” said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was (190).

Unlike Richard, Peter never has the opportunity to state what he thinks when he sees Clarissa, a woman he will always recognize. While Richard surprises himself in gazing at his daughter as a grown woman, Peter’s view of Clarissa has not changed. He has always loved her; the questions he asks himself indicates that this “extraordinary excitement” has never changed for him. The final words pin Clarissa to a time, but not a place. We see her, but it’s unclear—is she speaking to friends? Or gazing back at Peter? Her gaze is not examined or acknowledged as Elizabeth’s was when she noticed her father looking at her. The party ends with a lack of resolution.

Their conversations often involve this wordless communication, which works in synthesis with the sea imagery that Woolf uses to moor her characters not only to time, but also to the London street. After Elizabeth and Miss Kilman leave the house, Clarissa meditates on love, but when the clock after Big Ben strikes, “all sorts of little things came flooding and lapping and dancing in on the wake of that solemn stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea” (125). Although we are not returned to the street just yet, a shift in perspective is about to take place, as it often does in Mrs. Dalloway: some subtle slant of the light or sensory feeling will gently move us to the next place. Along with it comes the sea imagery: once we return from Elizabeth and Miss Kilman, Peter decides he will go to the party. He decides that “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 waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping” (157). Although clearly depicted as a masculine figure, Peter calls the soul “she” and associates her with the sea. This suggests a temporality between the characters who also associate with this form of imagery in the sense that they are all walkers. It also returns us to the early pages of the novel when Mrs. Dalloway feels she is set out to sea when she is in the London street. It is almost as though by gendering the soul, Peter owns an androgynous state of being contemporary with Clarissa’s, which may be why they are so connected to one another. However, this relationship between them cannot be fully realized in part because Clarissa is a flâneuse with a different set of experiences than the flâneur Peter, who set off to India at a young age and possesses experience as only a flâneur can.

The connection between walking and impressionism makes this moment even more packed with meaning. Snaith and Whitworth explain that Woolf’s novels navigate global space and “are full of journeys and voyages: Rachel Vinrace to South America … and Peter Walsh to India” (2). They explain that Woolf uses space to relational purpose by using “geographical interrelations” that compare like elements from disparate parts of the world; in the case of The Voyage Out, the Thames and the Amazon (2). Temporally, Peter and Clarissa have always been connected; her memories of youth demonstrate their likeness through rich aesthetic description of the places they knew each other as young people. Yet their lives departed from one another when Clarissa chose to marry Richard and embark on a different voyage for her life. Although
she is much more of a fragment in *Voyage*, that wordless wanting Clarissa articulates to Rachel reverberates through *Mrs. Dalloway*. 
The Metonymic City

Lehan presents an implied question of what it can mean for a city to present itself metonymically in fiction. He explains that the metonymy comes from authors’ frequent association of crowds with cities; this may say something about the way we wish to see cities presented in fiction. There is more to presenting a city metonymically than making us believe in the presence of people. If readers don’t feel like fully-populated places when the characters navigate them, they struggle to believe in them as real spaces, much less imagine them as an amalgam of life.

Earlier, I defined Psychogeography and Debord’s relation to his concept, his belief that “[t]he sudden change in ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the contour of the ground)” (qtd. in Solnit 212). While the flâneur may be at odds with the concept of dérive, there is a reason to believe that Psychogeography is an umbrella concept that can contain both along with the flâneuse. Geocriticism is an even larger umbrella that contains all of these and explains the ultimate relationship between Situationism and this larger field of ideas. Most of these concepts rely on the belief that urban walking should be as serendipitous as possible, that the terrain itself holds something magical that temporally attracts us to a particular stroll. Although this mode of thinking contradicts Debord, Turchi’s “neural shimmer” accounts for this feeling. It may not be true, but we at least feel something when wandering in the footsteps of our beloved authors. However, as I explain, this does not mean that the terrain is gendered in the same way that the flâneur and the flâneuse are. To study these figures, we must take for granted the belief that the terrain is the same for both of them, but the perception and aesthetic experience is
different for the flâneuse. It’s not a field of possession that attracts her, but rather the belonging in a public place. Although she cannot be anonymous in the same way that a flâneur can, she also tries to lose herself in the crowd, to accept the city as a place teeming with people. A place perpetuating an inscribed reality onto consciousness that feels like character, a character that we then cast into fiction, into culture, and even into our own travels. This might feel like magical thinking, but it nearly permeates the field.

Woolf originally intended Clarissa to die at the end of the novel, not Septimus. Just as Mrs. Dalloway has an alternate ending, Larsson writes that there are also two potential endings to The Voyage Out: either “the love story in the Amazon jungle with Rachel and Terrence deciding to get married” or “a tragedy, with Rachel dying and Terrence crying out her name in despair” (34). The novel does not end neatly, and life continues; the couple will not walk in London, “[b]ut London is still there, and other couples will walk there, time and again” (Larsson 34). What is most significant is the geocritical imagery to convey the voyage that Rachel takes toward death, the voyage that she and Terrence will never take toward their native England.

Rachel spends the novel navigating the multiple interpretations of London; it stands in metonymically for Rachel just as it does the reader because she is not familiar with the city. While in body she is in South America, in spirit other characters transfer her to London, encouraging her to take on its value systems and perspectives of the female body. This is what she so vehemently resists: the bitter hope that she could be her own person that is so grossly squashed by Richard’s male person and Terrence’s ambition to marry her, a reluctant plan to begin with. Richard’s kiss, the conversation with Helen about the reason why she can’t walk around Piccadilly by herself, these are all moments that foreshadow her death, uniting the themes of The Voyage Out with Mrs. Dalloway.
Clarissa’s journey is quite a different one from Rachel’s. While Rachel dies a young woman never to know the joys of walking that Clarissa projected for her, Mrs. Dalloway lives on in middle age, their experiences of walking vastly different because Clarissa has lived to be old enough to release herself to aesthetic experience, to embrace being a flâneuse even if it is a fleeting role, the only role she can take on alone, in the street, away from people who know her by the determined moniker of Mrs. Dalloway.

Scholars have noted the celebratory tone in the novel. Although Mrs. Dalloway closes with a suggested lack of resolution, Clarissa’s hopefulness in city walking is unmistakable. To Peter, who walks through Regent’s Park remembering his childhood, “women live much more in the past than we do” because “[t]hey attach themselves to places” (54). But he’s wrong: both the flâneur and the flâneuse cleave to places as sites of memory. This is partially why Mrs. Dalloway succeeds: every walker overlaps because they take in at least one element of stimuli as another character, often the only way that Woolf transfers the point of view to the next character. All places are sites of impressions, and this is why the novel ends with Peter’s famous For there she was. Because, in spite of it all, despite the places of memory she carries with her always, Clarissa lives with the life she made for herself. Unlike Peter, who still dwells on what can never be in a place they both long ago left behind.

Still, the walking essays like “Street Haunting,” “Kew Gardens,” and “Literary Geography” stick with us because their themes so closely align with such a geocritical approach to Woolf’s work. Scholars have long noted Woolf’s intimate relationship to space, and it’s arguable that nearly every essay, review, and novel participates in an exchange between space and the women who lived and walked London. And while women’s relationship to the streets has always been fraught, Woolf shows us that aesthetic experience transports the flâneuse, elevating
her. While the Victorians placed strict rules on the flâneuse, Woolf frees her from many of the constraints she faced during that period. Instead of writing about the lonely streetwalker, Woolf’s walking women have their own metonymic stand-ins for the city, their very own understanding of what makes a walk enlightening. It doesn’t matter whether another person is with her but we do question whether the flâneuse’s walk would be more illuminating without male presence.

Woolf illuminates the discussion, inviting us in. While life and fiction may not be “a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged,” Woolf shows us that linear experience may be overrated. After all, true perambulation is best without plans or a means to an end. The walking essays, the novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Voyage Out*, and reviews like “Literary Geography” celebrate that unapologetically, bringing together the disparate threads of Geocriticism, literary geography, and Psychogeography into the flâneuse. Because of Woolf we celebrate her.
Appendix

1. Page 34: Elkin acknowledges the flâneuse and rests upon the premise throughout, relying on a framework that admits an existence of walking women outside of literature taking different forms from their nineteenth-century predecessors:

surely there have always been plenty of women in cities, and plenty of women writing about cities, chronicling their lives, telling stories, taking pictures, making films, engaging with the city in any way they can … The joy of walking a city belongs to men and women alike. To suggest that there couldn’t be a female version of the flâneur is to limit the ways women have interacted with the city. We can talk about social mores and restrictions, but we cannot rule out the fact that women were there; we must try to understand what walking in the city meant to them. Perhaps the answer is not to attempt to make a woman fit a masculine concept, but to redefine the concept itself. (11)

2. Page 44: The narrator’s interest to walk and engage with other “anonymous trampers” and be in solitude different than sitting alone in a drawing room has close connection to Debord’s ideas of dérive in “Theory of the Dérive” in the sense that both time and the number of walkers factor into the ways in which a walk can err on the side of subjective. He emphasizes that while it is possible to take a dérive by oneself, it is often better to walk with two or three others for the purpose of “cross-checking” others impressions so as to arrive at an objective idea. Woolf’s flâneuse may not be as concerned with objectivity, but Debord makes a similar statement about the ideal time to wander, explaining that a dérive should take up the space of the day “between two periods of sleep.” While “[t]he starting and ending times have no necessary relation to the solar day, [it] should be noted that the last hours of the night are generally unsuitable for dérives.” Woolf’s flâneuse does not walk in the midnight dimness, but rather makes a point to wander when darkness only just begins to emerge.

3. Page 47: In Walking Virginia Woolf’s London, Elizabeth Larsson identifies the first moments of The Voyage Out as evidence that Helen wants to walk by herself, and “one might argue that all of Woolf’s novels are about a female dream of walking alone and independently through the city” even while her work is filled with depictions of men and women walking together (17). Larsson seems to indicate that the Ambroses’ walk can be examined from a geocritical perspective because it depicts terrain in both a topographical and mental space (18).
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