

**The Association of Characters and Windows of
Focalization in
Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf**

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Abstract

Focalization is a narratological element, the angle, from which the events of story are oriented. Manfred Jahn has innovated the term “focalization windows”, defined as imaginary windows opened from the consciousness of the characters and the narrator of a story. Besides, thanks to “variable focalization”, in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf the windows constantly switch from one character to the other. One can call up different groups of markers, which indicate the switchings of these windows; nonetheless, the thematic focus of this article is to debate how psychological and social association of characters function in the shifts of focalization windows in the light of Jahn’s approach.

Key words: windows of focalization, shift, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1. Introduction

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach. (Virginia Woolf ([1925] 2003))

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is marked by the characterization of a variety of focal characters, via whose eyes we see events of the narration. The focalizers, the sources of consciousness, are Peter, Clarissa, Septimus, and a large number of minor characters, who open "windows of focalization", (Manfred Jahn 1996-1999), to the narrative world. Nonetheless, focalization, the angle which orients the story, shifts among these major and minor characters. In "variable focalization" (Jahn 2005), it is as if each character appears to take a turn to present a part of events from her/his consciousness, and then gives it away to another character. Nevertheless, how does the transitory job of focalizing switch from one character to the other? What does indicate the opening and closing of these windows? Different groups of markers may be called up, which indicate the switchings of the windows; one of these groups consists of psychological and social indicators. This article is an attempt at demonstrating the role of psychological and social association of characters in the switching of focalization windows in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

2. Focalization

Focalization, as originally coined by Gerard Genette's, is a feature present in all narrative genres. On the origin of the notion, Toolan (2001) has noted that focalization is Gerard Genette's term which refers to a viewpoint from which things are implicitly seen, felt, understood and assessed reflecting the cognitive, emotive, ideological, and spatiotemporal perspective of the narration. From another angle, Miller (2006) defines *center of consciousness* or *point of view* as old-fashioned

terms, called in recent narratological theory *focalization*. Based on Miller, all of these terms deal with the matter of *consciousness*. Abbott (2002), in addition, defines focalization as “the lens through which we see characters and events of the narrative” (p. 66). Alternatively, Bortolussi, and Dixon (2003) concede that “a theory of focalization should provide an account of the source of knowledge and perception within the text based on the relationship between the narrator and the characters” (pp. 166-167). To them, the way focalization appears in a text influences readers’ understanding and interpretation of that text.

Referring to Rimmon-Kenan (1983), the story is presented in the text through the mediation of some “prism”, “perspective”, “angle of vision”, verbalized by the narrator. Like Genette, she suggests the term focalization, but indicates that her reason for choosing it versus Genette’s: “(...) although it resides precisely in his treatment of it as a technical term. Genette’s treatment has the great advantage of dispelling the confusion between perspective and narration which often occurs when ‘point of view’ or similar terms are used” (p. 71). Nevertheless, the critical point in Rimmon-Kenan’s theory is that she regards the possibility of combination of focalization and narration, and this is against Genette’s theory in which focalizers and narrators can never share their jobs.

To Jahn (2007), it is one of the two major parts of narratology: “submission of narrative information to a perspectival filter”. According to Jahn, the function of focalization is to select narrative information, making an “empathetical” or “ironical” point of view from which we regard events. In Jahn’s approach, based on which I have done the analysis, there is a “Model of Vision”:

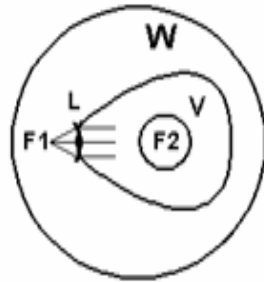


Figure 2.1: A model of vision, cited from Jahn 1999 (1. Standard model of focalization)

F1 as focus-1; *L* lens, eye; *F2* focus-2, area in focus; *V* field of vision; *W* world

According to Jahn (1996; 1999), eye is a convex lens (*L*) that collects rays by refraction, a kind of controlled distortion, in a “burning point” or focus (*F1*). He also states that focus-1 and focus-2 are alternate terms for what Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Marjet Berendsen, Ansgar Nunning, Edmiston, and others call the subject and the object of the focalization. He additionally remarks that (*V*) covers a part of “the world” (*W*) which is the story world. (Jahn, 1999, 1. Standard model of focalization).

Based on the categorization of Jahn, there are four main patterns of focalization: “fixed focalization”, “variable focalization”, “multiple focalization”, and “collective focalization” (Jahn, 2005, N3.2.4). “Fixed focalization” presents narrative facts and events from the constant point of view of a single focalizer. “Variable focalization” is the presentation of different episodes of the story as seen through the eyes of several focalizers. “Multiple focalization” refers to a technique

of presenting the same event repeatedly, each time seen through the eyes of a different focalizer. Finally, "collective focalization" is presented through either plural narrators ('we narrative') or a group of characters ('collective reflectors'). Accordingly, *Mrs. Dalloway* is accounted as a story of "variable focalization", resulted in switching the window of focalization among all focal characters, consisted of both major and minor characters.

Focalization window in Jahn's terminology is defined as the imaginary windows, opened from focal characters' s lenses to see events, and present story. Jahn (1996) remarks, he has connected his "field-of-vision model" to James's "window metaphor".

Jahn (1996; 1999) has argued that focalization is a means of opening an imaginary 'window' onto the narrative world, (...) enabling readers to see events and existents through the perceptual screen provided by a focalizer functioning as a story-external or story-internal medium. (David Herman et al, 2005, p. 174)

This innovative term makes sense in the narration of the twentieth century, the time for the emergence of the narrative with the use of internal focalization to represent the complex perceptions, feelings, moods, desires, and thoughts of the characters. The most famous modernist authors who used internal focalization "to offer inside views of characters" are Henry James, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. The focus in the modern age is on the "individual perception", on the thoughts and challenges of the human being, on the "SELF", and on the inside of the characters rather than the external

world. Therefore, the viewpoint of the stories reflects the consciousness of the characters. Herman et al. quoting from Lucas, has called this: “modernism’s inward focalization” (Herman et al., 2005, p. 173). Jahn (2007) regards it “psychological realism” or “literary impressionism” of modern narrations. Nonetheless, Woolf is a very influential figure on the creation of this new perspective. Considering Parsons (2007), although Joyce and Richardson pioneered the new psychological realism, it is Woolf’s formulation of this focus and technique in her essays “Modern Novels”, and “Modern Fiction” that has mostly influenced modernist fictional methods. On the other hand, Woolf applies varieties of narratological and stylistic techniques to reveal the *consciousness* or the psychological layers of the minds of her characters.

3. Psychological/social associations in *Mrs. Dalloway*

As stated in Lane (2001), *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in 1925. The opening regards Clarissa Dalloway who goes shopping for her evening party. On the way, she meets several people and there are frequent flashbacks to the past and her youth. Within the same day, other characters meet each other as well and have recollections of the past. Finally, the party is held and the story comes to the end. The setting of the novel is one day in June 1923 in London; Clarissa, Peter, Septimus are the major characters. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, focalization constantly switches from one character to the other representing their flow of thoughts. Woolf dramatically uses various techniques to signal these switches, like sounds, colors, linguistic markers, and speech indicators. The way characters are socially and psychologically blended also play an important role in the opening and closing of focalization windows.

Before discussing psychological/social markers in the novel, there is a need to remark another point: as stated by Jahn (1996; 1999), Rimmon-Kenan (1983), and James Phelan (2001), I argue that a

narrator can be a focalizer, and he/she can represent the events of a story like a focal character. Nonetheless, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is a mingled vision of the characters and the narrator in a way that at times it is impossible to say where the narrator is focalizing and where a character is focalizing. It seems that the narrator and major characters are sharing many perspectives, and as a result, one cannot clearly establish where the window of a particular character opens or closes. To resolve this problem, in this paper I have tried to demonstrate a different approach: I take the narrator as the one situated in the mind of the character who is the focalizer.

As a consequence of such approach, the vision/observation/perception of the character who has taken the turn for focalizing will be the same as the narrator. This will be possible since the narrator is positioned in the mind of that character and views all events, people, and so forth through her/his lens. It is as if the narrator is a transitory source of consciousness, situated in each of these characters' minds. Accordingly, the narrator is to be both a reporter and the focalizer who joins each of these characters to express her/his perspectives. Each time, two windows are mingled, that of a narrator and that of a character. As a result, whatever is presented can be seen from the same position or from the same angle. This may be close to what Miller (1982) remarks: in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the narrator dwells within characters' minds, first within Clarissa's mind, then within Septimus' mind, next within Rezia's mind, then Peter's, then back to Rezia, etc. In this paper, to make the names of the windows shorter, I call each *merging window of a character plus that of the narrator* only by the name of the attributed character. Back to the debate of psychological/social associations, I have represented psychological/social markers, which indicate macro switches, shifts

from one major character to the other main character, in the way below:

Table 3.1: The psychological/social indicators in macro switches

Macro Switches	Page Number
Clarissa to Septimus	25
Septimus to Clarissa	33
Clarissa to Peter and Peter to Clarissa	45-54
Peter to Septimus	75
Peter to Septimus	93
Clarissa to Septimus	108
Septimus to Clarissa	117
Clarissa to Peter and Peter to Clarissa	185-215

As the Table demonstrates, psychological/social indicators between Clarissa, Septimus, and Peter cause macro switches for 6 times, and make 2 sets of macro opening/closing windows between Peter-Clarissa from pages 45-54, and pages 185-215. Besides, there are a large number of micro shifts among minor characters and from major to minor characters, notified by psychological/social associations through the whole novel.

Focusing on the whole novel, my impression of *Mrs. Dalloway* is that all psychological/social indicators which make switches of focalization windows, can be classified in the Table below:

Table 3.2: Psychological/social indicators

The psychological and social relationship among characters: switches of F2s to F1s
1. Psychological correlations of F1s
2. Family relationships of F1s
3. Friendships among F1s
4. Job associations among F1s

Characters in the novel are correlated; the association can be because of family relationships like Septimus and Rezia or Clarissa and Richard, or owing to their common working place such as Richard Dalloway and Lady Bruton, or because of their friendship such as Sally and Peter, etc. In fact, characters may be socially related like Richard Dalloway and Lady Bruton, who are connected together via their political position in the court. Moreover, characters may be psychologically associated such as the closeness between Peter and Clarissa as two old lovers. These associations make characters think about each other, remember their shared memories, and make flashbacks to the events of the past. As a result, a great many times the new F1 is associated with the former F1 in that a character becomes the major F2 of a F1. Many a time, this F2 turns out to be the F1 of the subsequent window.

3.2.1 Psychological correlations of F1s

The most noticeable psychological relationship is depicted between Peter and Clarissa as two old lovers, being highlighted in the final section of the novel, also at pages 45-54 to shift turns from Clarissa to Peter and vice versa making a harmonic set of opening/closing of windows. Whenever Clarissa's window opens, her thoughts change their direction towards Peter; whatever topic is focused as F2 vanishes and she focuses on Peter and things related to him. He is the main focus-2 in Clarissa's

windows in the party. Likewise, when Peter's windows open, presenting views towards different things turns to thoughts regarding Clarissa, the major F2 in Peter's windows. For example, approaching page 196, there are a few paragraphs, from Clarissa's window. Her turn commences with a direct speech: "It is angelic--it is delicious of you to have come!" she said" (p.196). Then, her mind is occupied with thoughts towards people of the party:

Clarissa's window: "It is angelic--it is delicious of you to have come!" she said. She loved Lords; she loved youth, and Nancy, dressed at enormous expense by the greatest artists in Paris, stood there looking as if her body had merely put forth, of its own accord, (...). (p.196)

Before long, thoughts considering Miss. Parry are stopped, and Clarissa changes her focus to Peter: "Where had Peter got to?" (p.197). This sentence is the beginning point for a new chain of associative thoughts about Peter:

Clarissa's window: For Miss Helena Parry was not dead: Miss Parry was alive. She was past eighty. She ascended staircases slowly with a stick. She was placed in a chair (Richard had seen to it). (...) Where had Peter got to? (...) -- but here was Peter. (p.197)

Afterwards, pointing to Peter, "but here was Peter" (p.197) and addressing him to talk with Aunt Helena, "Come and talk to Aunt Helena about Burma," said Clarissa" (p.197) shift the window to Peter: "And yet he had not had a word with her all the evening!" (p.197). This sentence is a piece of the flow of consciousness of Peter, absorbed in thoughts to Clarissa. Peter would like to talk to her:

Peter's window: Clarissa had asked her. It was tiring; it was noisy; but Clarissa had asked her. So she had come. It was a pity that they lived in London--

Richard and Clarissa. If only for Clarissa's health it would have been better to live in the country. But Clarissa had always been fond of society. (p.197)

Beyond Peter-Clarissa association, another highlighted association can be seen in the relationship of Smiths and the way a window switches from Rezia to Septimus and vice versa.

Taking into account Smiths as further examples, many a time, a window of Septimus shifts to his wife, and vice versa. The following passage is a window of Septimus:

Septimus' window: And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, **Septimus thought**, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified **him**. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is **I** who am blocking the way, **he thought**. **Was he** not being looked at and pointed at; **was he** not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (p. 18)

Here a window opens to the consciousness of Septimus observing the motor car; this is Septimus, thinking and regarding the world hopelessly. "It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?" (p. 18) Next, the narrator quit the window of Septimus and transits to his wife Rezia. In other words, after Septimus, this is Rezia's turn to open a window of focalization. Rezia's association as focus-1 can be considered in two ways: first, she is related to Septimus because of being her wife; second looking at the same motor car (a F2 of Septimus' mind), she takes the turn of focalizing:

In this article, all the effects on the extracts taken from *Mrs. Dalloway*, either highlighted or underlined words are mine.

Rezia's window: "Let us go on, Septimus," said his wife, a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl. But Lucrezia herself could not help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds. Was it the Queen in there—the Queen going shopping? The chauffeur, who had been opening something, turning something, shutting something, got on to the box. (p. 18)

At the very beginning, a direct speech of Rezia is presented introducing her as Septimus' wife; before long, Rezia's window is opened while she is thinking about Queen's departure for shopping:

Rezia's window: "Come on," said Lucrezia. But her husband, for they had been married four, five years now, jumped, started, and said, "All right!" angrily, as if she had interrupted him. People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were "people" now, because Septimus had said, "I will kill myself"; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help, help! she wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help! Only last autumn she and Septimus had stood on the Embankment wrapped in the same cloak and, Septimus reading a paper instead of talking, she had snatched it from him and laughed in the old man's face who saw them! But failure one conceals. She must take him away into some park."Now we will cross," she said. She had a right to his arm, though it was without feeling. (pp. 18-19)

The underlined/bold words of mine show that Rezia's window keeps open in all these lines. The topics, the concern of Rezia, which make her F2s are her affections towards Septimus. Rezia portrays how she is struggling to improve her relationship with his husband, and how she is worried about Septimus' thought of committing suicide. "Septimus had said, "I will kill myself"; an awful thing to say" (p.18). There are many similar backwards and forwards between the windows of Smiths

displaying their stream of consciousness and narrating what matters in their marital relationship from their own lenses.

Consequently, Richard- Elizabeth and Richard-Clarissa associations can also be categorized in this group.

3.2.2 Family relationships of F1s

There are cases in which the switch of F2 to F1 is thanks to family relationships. This overlaps with the previous category since family relationships are additionally psychological. The associations of Rezia-Septimus, Richard- Elizabeth, Richard-Clarissa are the most frequent instances. An example can be the subsequent window switching from Richard Dalloway to Elizabeth:

Richard's window: "(...) and he had thought to himself, Who is that lovely girl? And suddenly he realized that it was his Elizabeth, and he had not recognized her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock! (p. 214)"

The affections between Elizabeth and her father make them psychologically associated, simultaneously their father-daughter relationship make them socially connected. Richard, the F1 of the foregoing passage is viewing the beauty of Elizabeth from his fatherly lens. Elizabeth, the F2 of this window turns out to be the F1 of the next window:

Elizabeth's window: "Elizabeth had felt him looking at her as she talked to Willie Titcomb. So she went to him (...) (p. 214)".

3.2.3 Friendships among F1s

Many friends in the novel are associated together, like Sally and Clarissa, Sally and Peter, Clarissa and Peter, Clarissa and Hugh, in addition to many others:

Peter's window: "But where is Clarissa?" said Peter. He was sitting on the sofa with Sally. (After all these years he really could not call her "Lady Rosseter.") "Where's the woman gone to?" he asked. "Where's Clarissa?" (p. 206).

The passage above is first a further example to show how Clarissa and Peter are psychologically close to each other. Clarissa comes in the drawing room to see Peter, and simultaneously Peter is thinking about her searching to find her. Moreover, it demonstrates the friendship between Peter and Sally. Sally's name, mentioned in the last sentence of Clarissa's window, functions like a preparation for her subsequent window; then, she is referred to for the second time. This time she turns out to be focus-2 in Peter's mind. The F1 of the new window becomes the F2 of the previous window. Indeed, the current F1 makes the following F1, his/her focus-2. This strategy to connect windows of friends is also marked at the ending pages of the novel at the party, in which all characters of the story except Septimus who has already committed suicide are present and meet each other. Meeting each other reminds them of the events of the time past and involve them in the process of turn-taking/giving of focalization.

3.2.4 Job associations among F1s

The windows of Lady Bruton and Richard whose job in the court make them socially connected exemplify this type. A good example is Lady Bruton's window, opened from page 114 keeping open to page 124 (excluding few interruptions of Hugh).

Lady Bruton's window: Lady Bruton preferred Richard Dalloway of course. He was made of much finer material. But she wouldn't let them run down her poor dear Hugh. She could never forget his kindness--he had been really remarkably kind--she forgot precisely upon what occasion. But he had been--remarkably kind. Anyhow, the difference between one man and

another does not amount to much. She had never seen the sense of cutting people up, as Clarissa Dalloway did-(....) (p. 115)

This is a macro window of a minor character, which mostly focuses on Richard, the man who to her is “made of much finer material” (p.115). Frequent pointing to Richard in Bruton’s window makes Richard the F1 of the latter window, a long window covering part of page 124 to page 130:

Richard’s window: It was a great age in which to have lived. Indeed, his own life was a miracle; let him make no mistake about it; here he was, in the prime of life, walking to his house in Westminster to tell Clarissa that he loved her. Happiness is this he thought.

It is this, he said, as he entered Dean's Yard. Big Ben was beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. Lunch parties waste the entire afternoon, he thought, approaching his door. (p.130)

The passage above is the ending part of the window of Richard Dalloway, who is close to his house, and focuses on Clarissa representing his affections to her. Clarissa, the current F2 turns out to be the next F1 owing to both her psychological and marital relationship with Richard:

Clarissa’s window: (...) but the door handle slipped round and in came Richard! What a surprise! In came Richard, holding out flowers. (pp. 130-131)

Beyond what I noted earlier, one should notice that categories above overlap. For example, Peter and Clarissa are two close friends; simultaneously two old lovers, or the association of Richard- Clarissa can be classified in category 1, 2, and 3.

4.Conclusions

The switches of F2 to F1 and vice versa can be justified owing to the fact that the novel is rooted in stream of consciousness and the

characters are portraying their consciousness regarding the recollections of the shared events of the past and their relationships when they were young. Shared memories pictured in frequent flashbacks attach characters psychologically. This is the way that indeed stream of consciousness works in the novel. *Mrs. Dalloway* is the novel of shifts. Reading it, one may notice a variety of shifts in terms of time, character, scenes, discourse, topic, consciousness, focalization, and the like. Specifically in regard to focalization, the transitory job of focalizing could switch from one character to the other via a number of associations, which can be categorized in terms of psychological correlations of F1s, family relations of F1s, friendships among F1s, and job associations among F1s. These transitions connect minds of the characters together and increase the unification in the narration. Characters and their relationships in terms of switches of F2 to F1 make an inner association with other aspects of the narration; as a result, a unified piece of fiction emerges making a well-organized narrative. Additionally, creating characters, socially and psychologically associated to each other lies in the art of Woolf's characterization; the way major and minor characters appear in the plot to open their windows is rooted in these associations.

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