

THE STYLISTICS OF RESOLUTION IN
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY* AND *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the stylistic conditions under which readers construct meaning in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. While many critics attempt to discuss style in Woolf's writing, their analyses remain largely impressionistic. Trying to capture the meaning of Woolf's prose through richly descriptive and metaphorical discourses, they fail to uncover the stylistic features through which readers' responses are shaped. But as M.A.K. Halliday suggests, "A discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text." In this thesis, through a systematic investigation of Woolf's style, I address this gap in the critical literature as I present a syntactical basis for readers' responses to *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Specifically, I examine those features through which Woolf creates rhythmic patterns in her prose: subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, appositional structures, and the repetition of particular features of language such as conjunctions, adverbial noun phrases and clauses.

Resolution is paradoxical in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in that while narrative indeterminacy and ambiguity characterize her prose, most readers move past the cumulative uncertainties in these novels to participate in the rapture and harmony her characters experience throughout these works and in their conclusions. The rhythmic patterns of recursion and accretion the above features create overwhelm the ambiguities of Woolf's novels, eliciting from readers sensations of being suspended and delayed within language, of rapture and resolution. Through these

rhythmic patterns her prose builds in such a way that Woolf's novelistic visions seem inevitable; she presents in these novels, not so much an argument with which readers must contend, but rather sensations to be experienced.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

The following notations are used to highlight those features of Virginia Woolf's prose in Passages A through to F pertinent to my analysis. All of these features appear in bold.

*Appositives are underlined. Example: He, Peter Walsh.

*Subjectless nonfinite verb phrases are italicized. Example: "*folding her son in her arm.*"

*Subjectless verbless nonfinite verb phrases are indicated by italics and an asterisk placed at the end of each clause.

Examples: "*confident**" and "*upright**."

*Other stylistic features deemed important to the formation of readers' understanding of Woolf's novels within the parameters of this study appear in bold. This includes the following: (a) repetitions of significant words or clauses, such as the conjunction "**or**" in sentence six of Passage B, and (b) adverbial and relative finite clauses which help to form the expansiveness of Woolf's prose. Example: "**for a girl of eighteen as she then was.**"

NOTE:

To avoid repetition I do not discuss each occurrence of the above syntactical features. However for consistency and to reflect accurately the representation of these features in Woolf's prose all of the above features are noted in the initial citation of each passage.

At times Woolf arranges her prose in such a way that a given word or clause will exhibit more than one of these features. For example, in the fourth sentence of Passage A the following clause is both a subjectless nonfinite verb phrase and an appositional structure, "*looking at the flowers, at the trees with the*

smoke winding off them.” The occurrence of these two syntactical features for the same clause is indicated by its two different abbreviations: underlining indicates it to be an appositional structure and italics show it also to be a subjectless nonfinite verb phrase.

INTRODUCTION

Indeterminacy and ambiguity characterize Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. In these novels, endings to passages apparently resolve earlier narrative complications, yet ellipses and narrative gaps throughout these works render their conclusions ambiguous. Inconclusiveness is cumulative in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*: repeatedly Woolf's novels move forward without providing answers to tensions and paradoxes in plot, theme, and characterization. While meaning in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* is highly ambiguous and elusive, on some level Woolf convinces readers that her novels contain tentative answers to the problems they present. Consequently most readers hover between the ambiguity of meaning in these novels and the visions of harmony with which they conclude. Herein lies the paradox: on a very obvious level, in plot and theme, Woolf denies readers resolution in that she refuses to commit to any one meaning in her fiction, and yet, through the elaborate rhythms Woolf creates in her prose, readers feel at the end of these novels (even at the end of certain passages) as if we have moved past all possible meanings to a significant conclusion or vision. Woolf imparts to her readers sensations of narrative resolution, despite evidence which suggests that our reading experiences should feel incomplete. The term resolution is used here and throughout this thesis, not to suggest that Woolf reduces the many dissonant elements of her fiction to

one unified vision, but rather to infer that in these novels Woolf effects sensations of completion.

In her essay, "Modern Fiction," Woolf praises the inconclusiveness of the Russian mind, an aesthetic sensibility she seems to embody in her own fiction:

It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a restless despair. (158)

Woolf articulates this modernist vision in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* through fragmented and enigmatic plots and indeed in the very style of her writing.¹ As in the Russian literature Woolf admires, her novels suggest an almost limitless potential for meaning and in this way never confirm any one interpretation. However Woolf does not deny the existence of meaning but she appears to work toward a form in which the multiplicity of suggestions and possibilities creates a cumulative vision or articulates a tentative resolution to her novels.

In this introduction I will first establish a basis for my hypothesis that Woolf's fiction works toward a vision that lies

¹Many critics discuss Woolf as a modernist writer. In her essay, "Gendered Doubleness and the 'Origins' of Modernist Form" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8 (1989), Marianne DeKoven outlines some features of modernist texts apparent in Woolf's prose: "decentered subjectivity, rupture of linearity in plot and temporal structure, foregrounding of pre-Oedipal, presymbolic language, stylistic indeterminacy, multiplicity, fragmentation (Woolf's 'breaking the sentence' and 'breaking the sequence')" (20). See also Bonnie Kime Scott in "The World Split Its Husk: Woolf's Double Vision of Modernist Language" *Modern Fiction Studies* Autumn 34 (1988), David Lodge's *Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (1977), and Morris Beja in *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (1971).

beyond the content of plot. Next I will outline critical responses to her work and then finally I will demonstrate how this thesis addresses the inadequacies of these analyses. Specifically, in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* Woolf evokes sensations of resolution in readers through the practice of her prose, that is, through the syntactical structures of her fictional language. While many critics attempt to discuss style in Woolf's novels, most only describe the effect her prose has upon readers. This thesis details the particular features of style which are fundamental to shaping readers' responses to Woolf's writing.

i

In "Modern Fiction" Woolf criticizes her contemporaries for the lack of spirituality in their work. Calling these writers "materialists" Woolf ascertains,

If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers [Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy] are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back on them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul.

(151)

Woolf's disapproval of James Joyce's fiction arises from similar concerns. While his fiction is distinct and spiritual according to Woolf, in reading his work she refers to "our sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than enlarged and set free" (156). She accuses his writing of being "centered in a

self which in spite of its tremors of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond" (156).² Woolf expresses her aesthetic view: the task of fiction is to convey through its representations a vision of the profound meanings of existence. Fiction should not only reflect or represent everyday reality, but it should outline the patterns that lie beneath the obvious. In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf explains her philosophy: "It is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we--I mean all human beings are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" (72). So too Thomas C. Beattie discusses Woolf's vision of the spiritual or mystical as essential to her art:

[Her] fictional worlds resist closure because they continue to reverberate in the imagination, they go on just as life goes on. But Woolf saw even further. While unity, coherence, resolution, and a completed meaning were essential to her satisfaction and to her art, she also perceived that the moments of meaning at the end of her novels must be placed in a wider context of a vital but unfathomable cosmos. (521-2)

While I agree more with Lucio Ruotolo who finds that "Virginia Woolf rests easy with ambiguities and contradictions" (95), Beattie seems correct in his observation that the visionary aspect of Woolf's writing is fundamental to an understanding her novels. In *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* the chaos of the modern world is represented, but more importantly, Woolf works toward expressing a vision.

²James Naremore in *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (1973), 75, presents a similar argument.

And though Woolf uses language as the medium through which to present her novels' visions, she seems to find words an inadequate form through which to express her ideas. She summarizes her discovery through indirection: "I have a great and astonishing sense of something there, which is 'it'--it is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory, achieved" (*A Writer's Diary* 62-3). This feeling of achievement, this sense of finding "it," is captured in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* though, as we shall see, rather than expressing directly what this is, Woolf evokes in readers its sensation through rhythmic patterns in her prose. While in their semantics words fail to encapsulate Woolf's novelistic visions, in the style of these novels she evokes feelings of resolution and completion.

Woolf's visions in these novels include an opening up of issues of gender. These issues are often located in the novels' narrative gaps and ambiguities. In both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* Woolf presents gender roles as problematic and socially constructed, but at the same time, she frequently suggests in these novels that women enjoy a sensibility that is fundamentally different from that of men. Woolf fails to close the gap in reasoning between these two divergent positions. As with other issues in these novels, such as her heroine's sexual orientation in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf only offers suggestions and possibilities. As we shall see, through the very style of her writing, readers are forced to entertain the many meanings Woolf's prose suggests, but never confirms.

i i

Many critics attempt to capture the meaning of Virginia Woolf's prose through richly descriptive and metaphorical discourses. Howard Harper describes the development of *Mrs Dalloway* as a "fugue" (130), and in *The World Without a Self*, James Naremore discusses the atmosphere of Woolf's prose. It is, he claims, "anything but comfortable and familiar" (2). Reading her fiction, he suggests, feels like being submerged within a deep pool:

Reading her, one sometimes has the impression of being immersed in a constantly moving liquid, immersed so deeply that the people and things in her books become muffled and indistinct, like blurred and ghostly shadows. (2)

Hers is a style which, as Karen Kaivola states in *All Contraries Confounded*, "emphasizes its own rhythms and diffuseness" (29). As well, many critics refer to the poetic quality of Woolf's fictional language. The emphasis critics place on her style further suggests its importance to an understanding of Woolf's fiction. Ralph Freedman discusses Woolf as "a lyrical poet in prose" (4), and similarly, John Mepham finds each textual moment in a Woolf novel to be saturated with many possible meanings: "Everything, and every word has many meanings, and Virginia Woolf's poetic prose is designed to explore and to express this fact" (*A Literary Life*, 29).³

³Many other critics discuss the "poetic" quality of Woolf's prose. See also Stella McNicol's *Virginia Woolf and the Poetry of Fiction* (1990), John Mepham in "Figures of Desire: Narration and Fiction in *To the Lighthouse*," Harvena Richter in *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (1970) and Pamela Transue's *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style* (1986).

He finds that her characters, while they often ask many questions, “they never arrive, except at a vision which lies beyond language. Her whole work is a refutation of common sense” (29). As Mepham suggests, the fact that readers move forward through a Woolf novel to narrative resolution, despite the lack of plot development and the uncertainty of meaning, appears to defy logic.

Mepham suggests that ambiguity and paradox are central to Woolf’s novels, as does Kaivola who embraces the uncertainty of her fiction. Resisting the temptation to reduce her highly ambiguous prose to specific meanings, she argues that Woolf’s narrative voice is subsumed within a powerful articulation of desire: “[She] embod[ies] a longing that often seems capable of overwhelming everything else (character, plot, narrative) in the text” (11). Kaivola recognizes that the impact of Woolf’s prose upon readers seems to exceed the confines of the words themselves. Phyllis Rose concurs with this interpretation when she suggests that “[t]here is no way fully to explain or analyze the lift of the spirit that occurs when one reads certain parts of *Mrs Dalloway*” (128).

But the attempts these critics make to elucidate our responses to Woolf’s prose remain largely descriptive and impressionistic. While Laurence observes that “style and sensibility in the work of Woolf have until now received most of the critical attention” (1), often critics employ metaphors and adjectives in discussions of her fiction which are vague and abstract and fail to fully account for the means by which Woolf’s prose elicits readers’ responses. This criticism seems to be stalled on the surface of her novels in analyses of plot, character, or theme when it is the very style of

language in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* through which Woolf evokes our deepest responses. Even the criticism which addresses directly language and style most often fails to deal with the syntactical structures of Woolf's prose. While there have been some excellent discussions of the stylistic techniques of her prose, in none of these studies are the appositional structures within her fiction discussed, nor are the patterns of repetition and accretion through which I argue Woolf leads her readers to resolution within her novels, analyzed.⁴ Though these critics often help to expand our understanding of Woolf's fiction, most fail to provide evidence for their interpretations through a systematic study of her novelistic discourse.

Many critics discuss the theme of silence in Woolf's fiction. Lucio Ruotolo in *The Interrupted Moment* presents one such analysis: "Silence in narration is, of course, verbal and unvoiced. What is left obscure, open-ended, and incomplete--Woolf's sense of what life is--is reflected then in her use of a lexicon of silence, punctuation, tense shifts, repetition, and a rhythm" (99). As well, in *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* Patricia Ondek Laurence provides a compelling and persuasive argument for the importance of this theme to Woolf's writing. She connects Woolf's exploration of silence to her feminist project to explore the depths of the unconscious. But while she promises to provide a description of the syntax of silence (99), she only refers to ruptures, pauses, ellipses and breaks in the narration. The structures of language

⁴See for example, Mitchell Leaska's *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse: A Study of Critical Method* (1970) and Makiko Minow-Pinkney in *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject: Feminine Writings in the Major Novels* (1987).

explored within this thesis, structures of recursiveness, delay and suspension may in fact be the syntactical patterns which she promises, but fails to provide in her analysis.

Many feminists also find the diffuse subject in Woolf's novels suggests the presence of Julia Kristeva's "*sujet en proces*" (22).⁵ These analyses provide an interesting perspective upon the fluidity of identity represented by many of Woolf's female characters in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. But though they may claim to find these patterns within the deeper structures of Woolf's discourse, most of these analyses remain purely thematic. Critics discuss the fluidity of self Mrs. Dalloway feels walking down the street in London, or Lily Briscoe's desire to merge with Mrs. Ramsay and to be "like waters poured into one jar" (51). Yet the supporting evidence for the claim that an overtaking of the semiotic occurs in Woolf's prose is often weak. For instance, Jean Wyatt suggests that the semiotic disrupts symbolic language in *Mrs Dalloway*: "When the rhythmic patterns become the organizing principles of a text, edging out grammatical order, words begin to strike readers as sounds rather than conveyors of meaning" (122). In this thesis I make similar claims in regard to the relative unimportance of the semantic value of words in passages in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Yet, in fact, her language does exactly the opposite to

⁵Many feminist critics examine the relation between Woolf's fictional discourse and Julia Kristeva's theories of language and subjectivity. See for example, Minow-Pinkney (1987), Jean Wyatt in "Avoiding self-definition: In defense of women's right to merge (Julia Kristeva and *Mrs Dalloway*)" *Women's Studies* 13 (1986), Naremore (1973), and Susan Stanford Friedman's "Lyric Subversion of Narrative in Women's Writing: Virginia Woolf and the Tyranny of Plot" *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology* (1989).

that which Wyatt suggests: Woolf creates the rhythmic patterns of her unique narrative voice by calling upon many different tools indigenous to Standard English, not by avoiding them. Rhythm is created in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* through highly ordered stylistic structures, not through their absence. And it is not only alliteration and repetition as Wyatt suggests which create the rhythmic play in *Mrs Dalloway*. More importantly Woolf uses syntactical features of the English language to yield rhythmic patterns of recursion and accretion in her fictional discourse. Therefore, this thesis provides a basis for understanding these responses to Woolf's fiction from within the stylistic structures of her language; my findings suggest that the claims that Woolf speaks through a discourse other than our shared symbolic language need to be modified.

But performing a quantitative study of Woolf's writing may itself be problematic in that it brings an apparent objectivity to a writer who was, as Ronald G. Walker claims, "so thoroughly subjective in her view of both the world and her art as Virginia Woolf manifestly was" (61). Indeed, in her essay "On Rereading Novels," Woolf reveals the deep subjectivity of her novelistic projects: "[T]he 'book itself' is not form which you see, but emotion which you feel" (340).

Conversely, as M.A.K. Halliday proposes, a textual analysis whose basis is not a study of the language from which it is constructed is limited: "A discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text" (xvii). He observes that, at the deepest level of

understanding, readers respond to and construct meaning from the overall syntactic and stylistic patterns of a text: "A text is a semantic unit, not a grammatical one. But meanings are realized through wordings; and without a theory of wordings -- that is, a grammar -- there is no way of making explicit one's interpretation of the meaning of a text" (xvii). This empirical approach offers a means through which we can gather evidence to support or refute conclusions made in regard to a particular body of writing. From within this interpretive perspective we can more accurately explain the paradoxical satisfaction attendant upon completion of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. As Walker suggests,

Quantitative measurement of rhythmical norms is simply one of many analytical tools that, properly understood and applied, can enhance our knowledge of the formal means by which a novel shapes the reader's subjective experience. (61)⁶

iii

The stylistic analysis presented in this thesis is not intended to replace or invalidate other more thematic responses to her work, but rather it acts as a complement to these perspectives on Woolf's prose. And while no attempt is made to respond directly to the vast body of criticism available on Woolf's fiction, this study of the nonsemantic features of her language may lead to an understanding

⁶Ronald G. Walker in "Leaden Circles Dissolving in Air: Narrative Rhythm and Meaning in *Mrs Dalloway*" *Essays in Literature* 13 (1986), studies the larger narrative patterns in this novel (those patterns Woolf describes as her tunnels), while this thesis examines readers' responses to the syntactical structures of language within smaller textual spaces of the clause, sentence or passage in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* for which these other thematic approaches fall short. Rather than merely describing the “sleepy, hypnotic moods” (Naremore 55) of Woolf’s novels, or finding evidence within the more obvious levels of plot and character, we can demonstrate patterns of style through which Woolf’s prose elicits the interpretations Naremore and others propose.

In this thesis I examine stylistic features not investigated by other critics, and as well, those features instrumental in explaining the puzzling ability of Woolf’s fiction to evoke sensations of resolution amidst her novels’ deep ambiguity. Other novelistic features, such as the patterns of associative imagery in *Mrs Dalloway* and the symbolism of *To the Lighthouse*, may also lead readers to Woolf’s conclusions. But plot, character development, and patterns of imagery and symbolism in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* present incomplete and highly enigmatic arguments. Alone these textual features cannot account for the problematic relation between Woolf’s fragmented and ambiguous plots and the more harmonious sensations her prose elicits. The syntactical structures of Woolf’s language however do provide evidence for this phenomenon in that it is through the rhythms these stylistic features create that readers are carried past the inadequate discursive grounds for the novels’ visions to sensations of resolution. Rhythm can be defined as “an ordered recurrent alteration of strong and weak elements in the flow of sound and silence in speech.”⁷ While every utterance has rhythm (patterns of intonation in speech or movement in written text), in *Mrs Dalloway*

⁷Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1991), 1013.

and *To the Lighthouse* rhythm is designed into the texts as a crucial feature which guides readers' interpretations of the deepest meanings of Woolf's prose. In this study, I discuss as rhythmic those patterns in Woolf's writing created through the following syntactical structures: subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, appositions, embedded adverbial and relative clauses and repeating stylistic structures such as conjunctions, adjectives, and noun phrases.

Style has such a significant impact upon the reading experience because style conditions our most immediate reception of a text. The patterns of discourse through which meanings are expressed in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* fundamentally shape the way in which we will respond to Woolf's writing on semantic and thematic levels. Her prose, with its magnificent and complex rhythmic structures, works to elicit our responses at a pre-conscious or bodily level: while we must be able to attach specific semantic values to words to respond to the surface level of plot, style can influence our reading experiences without our conscious knowledge. We need not be consciously aware of the structures of language in *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse* in order that the rhythms in her prose elicit in us sensations through which we, even subconsciously, come to understand a text. As Shari Benstock suggests, women modernist writers were particularly aware that reality is both represented and created through language:

For them [Djuana Barnes, H.D., Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein], language was not transparent; it structures and mediates 'reality' (one thinks of Mrs. Ramsay, seated before

the drawing room window in *To the Lighthouse*). These women focused on the relation of language to subjectivity; they knew that language constructs external reality rather than describes or mirrors a separate, immutable, constant external. (xxvi)

In this thesis the formal patterns of language through which Woolf constructs reality in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are identified and the impact that these have upon our understanding of her fiction is coaxed to the surface.

This study makes no claim to be objective for the very act of selecting novels and passages for investigation is a highly biased process. However, through the evidence gathered in this study, some of the claims made about Woolf's writing may be tested and critics may be provided with a more secure basis from which to make claims about meaning in Woolf's fiction. For example, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf expresses a desire to find a new form through which to articulate women's experiences. She envisions the work of a future author, Mary Carmichael: "First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence" (76). And while some critics find linguistic disruptions within Woolf's own fiction, most fail to explain how these new forms of expression are manifested within the language of her novels. In fact, the results from this study would suggest that Woolf never performs either of these two acts at the level of style. Rather, Woolf masters the English language and exploits its potential to generate rhythms and to hold many different meanings within her novelistic frameworks.

Several factors governed the selection of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* as the body of work for this project. Firstly, one of the motivations behind this investigation is the desire to explore

writing by women that is informed by feminist polemics, and writing that may work to subvert traditional narrative structures. As a modernist writer, and a woman who was sympathetic to feminist views, Woolf attempts to question the social order in her fiction and to articulate experiences that were left silent within the dominant discourse.⁸ The means by which Woolf achieves these goals, if in fact she succeeds, is of interest to this study.

Secondly, in the selection of novels for study the wide range of textual experimentation within Virginia Woolf's writing was taken into consideration. *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* were chosen for this study as each is highly representative of the complex narrative structures of Woolf's prose of interest to this project. In these novels Woolf presents critiques of gender and social roles, but through the style of her writing she complicates and emphasizes the ambiguities of her analysis.

Three passages from each of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* were selected (labelled A to F). From these excerpts an analysis of the syntactical structures of Woolf's prose was conducted. An attempt was made to be representative of the development of these novels (one passage was selected from the opening, middle, and concluding sections of each novel). But more

⁸In *Three Guineas* (1938) Woolf emphatically disowns the label of feminism (184-5), and yet throughout her writing Woolf explores and critiques the cultural and material conditions under which men have dominated women. Many critics explore Woolf as a feminist writer. This thesis explores some of the issues of gender which seem central to *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* but this investigation is secondary to the analysis of style through which Woolf may express a feminist critique of social roles and identity. As Karen Kaviola in *All Contraries Confounded: The Lyrical Fiction of Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and Marguerite Duras* (1991) argues, "Woolf's writing resists assimilation to any unified polemic position" (17).

important to the selection process than was merely their chronological development of their plots were the following two considerations of theme and style.

Firstly, each of the passages are important in terms of the novels' thematic developments, but the conclusions offered within these selections are highly problematic and ambiguous, as are the conclusions of the two novels. These passages provide readers with specific examples of the paradoxical movement in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* toward narrative resolution. In Passages A, B and C from *Mrs Dalloway* the developing sense of self for the heroine is traced. But in *Mrs Dalloway*, these episodes do not hold the discursive grounds for Clarissa's maturation which is shown to transpire through these experiences in the novel. As Jean Alexander observes in *The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*, "[T]o a large extent that completeness is the work of the novel rather than the character, and is perceived more clearly by the reader than by Clarissa" (103). So too in Passages D, E, and F from *To the Lighthouse*, major thematic issues, such as the relations between the sexes and gender identities and roles, are explored. But, as in *Mrs Dalloway*, in *To the Lighthouse* Woolf's narrators act as if the uncertainties presented within these passages are solved, even though this is false. Through a study of these particular passages I was able to investigate the narrative breaks or ruptures in these novels and then further to explore how Woolf coaxes her readers into moving beyond these ambiguities to sensations of resolution and completion.

Secondly, my sense as a reader that each of these passages is stylistically elaborate and complex governed my choices. That a number of critics also respond to the opening third paragraph of *Mrs Dalloway* and to the interchange between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in Passage C, suggest that these passages may be rich resources for uncovering those features of Woolf's prose which most deeply inform our reading experiences. This impression of complexity led me to a more empirical and exacting inquiry of the patterns of style through which Woolf achieves this effect.

The approach to language taken in this thesis may best be described as functional. M.A.K. Halliday provides a particularly useful discussion on language and the ways in which readers construct meaning from it in his *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Halliday asserts, "[t]he fundamental components of meaning in language are functional components" (xiv). Attempting to account for the ways in which readers construct meaning from texts, he regards language as an interactive system of shared symbols whose purpose is communication. The structure of that system shapes our deepest responses to language: "A language is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which meanings can be realized" (xvii). Readers bring a series of assumptions about language and its forms to each text and through these they construct the meaning of a text. This type of approach to language stresses readers' experiences of a text and it is therefore extremely useful in this investigation of the means by which Woolf's prose conditions readers' understanding of her novels.

Furthermore, language is a system which operates through contrasts: it is by noticing differences in our shared system of communication that readers construct meaning. In order for language to make sense, the system must conform to the expectations of its users. When the shared assumptions we bring to language differ even slightly, wide differences in interpretation result. Therefore, as language is a highly ordered system (most sentences are the same), small differences in style are significant. In the analysis of Woolf's language which follows, small details may seem to be given a disproportionate weight. For example, Woolf's use of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases is discussed at length as a stylistic feature which creates for readers the sensations of recursion, narrative suspension and delay. But, even though this feature is not consistently present throughout all passages discussed, the argument that subjectless nonfinite verb phrases have a significant impact upon the reading experience is convincing when this stylistic feature is examined alongside the many other stylistic features Woolf uses to create recursive rhythmic movements in her prose and to lead readers to sensations of resolution.

This stylistic analysis reveals recurring patterns in Woolf's prose--the heavy and elaborate use of appositional or near appositional structures; the presence of clusters of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases which work to send readers back to the beginnings of sentences or clauses; and rhythmic patterns of accretion and repetition. The first two of these features are inherently anaphoric, that is, appositives and subjectless nonfinite

verb phrases by their very structures carry readers back into Woolf's prose. Alone these stylistic features may create in readers sensations of narrative suspension and delay which leads critics, such as Susan Stanford Friedman, to discuss the nonlinearity of a Woolf novel as these features create a perceived delay in her language.⁹

The syntactical features of style Woolf summons in these novels work to create a sense of endless possibility and uncertainty: readers return to previously encountered syntactic spaces as Woolf repeats meanings which are ambiguous, elusive and uncertain. Through elaborate rhythms of accretion and recursion in her language, though we feel as if we are working to important revelations, we actually do not move to explicit narrative conclusions.¹⁰

Therefore, it is the force of Woolf's rhythmic prose, rather than the incomplete or enigmatic developments in plot, theme, or character that leads us to her endings, that in effect, creates resolution in her fiction. Woolf constructs language in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in such a way that the elaborate movements of

⁹Minow-Pinkney (1987) also discusses this feature of Woolf's prose. She suggests that Woolf's use of present participles creates this feeling of fluidity in her prose. Addressing the opening passage in *Mrs Dalloway* (Passage A in this analysis) Minow-Pinkney asserts, "Transformed into a present participle phrase, an action composed of subject-verb becomes an adverbial or adjectival phrase, and as a result the sentence gives a sense of the simultaneity of several acts and states. Thus writing can to a certain extent go beyond its essential linearity" (57). Minow-Pinkney's analysis is a particularly good example of the criticism that a close attention to style can produce.

¹⁰This inconclusiveness of vision in Woolf's novels will be taken up in the detailed analysis of selected individual passages in each chapter. In my discussion, specific narrative gaps are located and the lack of resolution within the discursive arguments of their plots will be demonstrated.

her prose seem to exhaust the potential for meaning. But the meaning of earlier textual spaces upon which her discourse expands remains throughout this elaboration enigmatic and elusive. In Woolf's novels language continually returns readers to the beginnings of passages, sentences, and clauses. These spaces which the narrative revisits are reawakened and enhanced: meaning deepens in the novel as each new clause brings with it new implications and the possibility for ever greater signification for earlier passages. However, though at the end of many passages, and at the end of her novels, we feel as if we have moved somewhere, really ambiguous suggestions are only made more enigmatic. The expansiveness of her writing style effects within her prose a puzzling and paradoxical incompleteness.¹¹ Woolf's expansiveness only deepens the enigmatic nature of her vision yet we move to her endings with the belief that in fact we have found a greater clarification.

My analysis provides further evidence for the poetic nature of Woolf's prose. While many critics address the beauty and power of language in a Woolf novel, most discuss only patterns of alliteration, imagery and metaphor and shifts in narrative perspective. The findings of this study suggest that the poetic qualities of Woolf's prose are established not only through these literary devices, but that these are grounded within the very

¹¹Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) discusses this feature of Woolf's prose (specifically she refers to *To the Lighthouse*) in terms of a postmodernist sensibility: "Woolf . . . seems to practise what we might now call a 'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse. In her own textual practice, Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning" (9).

syntactical structures of her language. In *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* style not only reflects the thematic development of her novels, but it deeply shapes our apprehension of reality in Woolf's fiction.

CHAPTER ONE *Mrs Dalloway*

I

The vision which rests at the core of *Mrs Dalloway* is highly enigmatic. Woolf leads readers to expect illumination, but instead only offers us greater ambiguities as we progress through the novel. Suggestions and possibilities are appended or embedded within passages, inviting readers to ask questions that the text never answers. But, despite this inconclusiveness, most readers accept the celebration of unity at the novel's close, even though at the same time those social forces which seem to disrupt harmony are reaffirmed. Rather than convincing her readers through plausible developments in character or plot, Woolf coaxes us into accepting her novel's uneasy resolution through the rhythmic movements engendered by the stylistic patterns of her prose.

Woolf's sentences tend to continue with a relentless magnificence, beyond our expectations of closure, to enhance and elaborate upon moments described. Stylistic manoeuvres of augmentation and elaboration create complex narrative rhythms in which readers are both suspended within sentences and carried back to previous syntactic spaces. Her language moves her stories forward toward their endings, but, as well, suspends us within its rhythms, taking us into a world of seemingly irresolvable ambiguity and splendour. These patterns create readers' sense of resolution in that they allow Woolf's prose to build in such a way that the novelistic ending seems inevitable: captivated and aroused by the

energy of *Mrs Dalloway*, readers concede to unverified and even fantastic narrative claims.

In *Mrs Dalloway* a community of shared memories are assembled, all of which coalesce to present the heroine, Clarissa Dalloway¹². Revealing and connecting the disparate pasts of her characters, Woolf's method, her tunnelling process as she calls it, creates a composite of their shared history that finds its centre in Clarissa: "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (*A Writer's Diary* 60). *Mrs Dalloway* shifts into the first of these memory spaces in its opening page through Clarissa's association of this June morning in 1923 with her youth at Bourton. Time moves forward in the novel towards the party set at the day's end, but also backwards as the narrative records and then revisits the fictional history of its characters.

Narrative events of both the novel's past and present generate the plot and help Clarissa to gain self acceptance. In particular, the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith, the heroine's "double" throughout the novel, provides the catalyst for her final transformation.¹³ But this narrative event by itself, or as a culmination of all of the events recorded in the text, does not explain the changes within the main character, nor the harmony with which the novel ends. Rather,

¹²See Louise A. Poresky, *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels* (1981): "Even when other characters reflect, their thoughts fill in the novel's overall picture of Clarissa" (99).

¹³J. Hillis Miller in "Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *The Shaken Realist* (1970) states, "For she [Clarissa Dalloway] is, as Virginia Woolf said in the Modern Library preface, the 'double' of Septimus" (123).

as we shall see, it is through the rhythmic structure of Woolf's language, her heavy use of apposition, subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, and the overall composite syntactic structure of *Mrs Dalloway* that readers are persuaded to accept and to feel that the novel has achieved its vision of harmony at its end. For while Clarissa appears to learn nothing new in her reminiscences, the act itself of narrating her past is empowering; the process enables Clarissa to find resolution to the personal problems upon which she focuses throughout the novel. And so too for Woolf's readers: while the repetition of scenes from characters' pasts do not clearly lead to novelistic resolution (nor do the rewordings of clauses or sentences), it is the process of movement which leads us to feel that the novel's close brings completion to the work.

Thus, the plot itself in a Woolf novel holds few surprises and generates little of the suspense readers discover within her fiction. In fact, the endings of both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are contained within their opening lines. The up and down movements recorded within the third paragraph of *Mrs Dalloway* in, "What a lark! What a plunge!" holds within them the plunge into the characters' minds and pasts and, as J. Hillis Miller observes, the main novelistic gestures towards Clarissa's psychic integration and transformation and Septimus' disintegration and suicide ("Repetition," 183).¹⁴ Similarly, *To the Lighthouse* opens with Mrs. Ramsay's assurance to her son James, that "Yes, of course, if it is

¹⁴Poresky (1981) also discusses foreshadowing in *Mrs Dalloway*: "Her [Clarissa's] exhilaration here portends her mystical one that comes with the news of Septimus' death" (101). See also Deborah Guth in "What A Lark! What A Plunge!": Fiction as Self-Evasion in *Mrs Dalloway*" *Modern Language Review* 84 (1989), 18.

fine tomorrow” (1) they will journey to the lighthouse. The completion of this trip coincides with Lily Briscoe’s artistic vision and the end of the novel. But, despite this apparent structural and thematic closure, Woolf does not impose definitive conclusions upon her novels. Rather, deliberately unresolved ambiguities belie the apparent conclusiveness of both works. As Edward Bishop proposes in “Writing, Speech and Silence in *Mrs Dalloway*,” “Her endings are never conclusions, are always leaps into space rather than summations” (419). Though we move in *Mrs Dalloway*, and later in *To the Lighthouse*, to expected endings, we also encounter narrative gaps which complicate our readings. Woolf’s novels ask questions, suggestively, compellingly, poetically, and deliberately open narrative gaps which are never resolved. And, as Bishop suggests when he addresses the inexactness and ambiguity of her prose, Woolf seems to have purposely created this openness: “The task, as Woolf saw it, was not to articulate meaning, for that is ineffable, but to construct the arc of language which could take the reader there” (*Virginia Woolf*, 60). A stylistic investigation reveals complex rhythmic patterns in Woolf’s prose through which readers are guided to an understanding of the novel which resides both within and beyond its own language.

Through complex textual rewordings Woolf arouses readers’ memories of previous utterances throughout *Mrs Dalloway* and in this way readers experience the nature of Clarissa (and Peter and Septimus) remembering their fictional pasts. But, as suggested, for Woolf’s main character it is the process of narrating her past which enables her to move forward, not the content of her recollections.

So too for Woolf's readers, the events, images, and words to which we return, sometimes over long expanses of text, do not in themselves lead us to accept the novel's conclusion. Rather, like Clarissa who is healed by the process of revisiting her history, Woolf's readers are affected by the process itself of moving back into the text.

Syntactic patterns within sentences and passages work to recreate for readers thematic recursive movements which occur over much larger textual spaces. These rhythmic patterns work to emphasize the vast potential for meaning lying in unresolved narrative gaps as places of ambiguity are continually revisited and elaborated upon but seldom clarified. Finally meaning is not located within any specific thematic or symbolic text, but rather an understanding of her novel develops for readers on a deep sensate level through the movements of her language. Therefore, an interpretation of Woolf's novel, confined to considerations of plot, theme or symbolism, cannot fully account for the rapture with which *Mrs Dalloway* ends (felt by Clarissa, Peter, Sally and other characters at the party) or the elation many readers express upon finishing Woolf's novel. These approaches are inadequate to our reading experiences because Woolf presents, not so much an argument with which readers must contend, but instead, a sensation to be experienced. Though character development and thematic issues act as important guides through Woolf's fiction, meaning within *Mrs Dalloway* (and *To the Lighthouse*) seems to rest within the very deep stylistic structures of her prose.

A predominate rhythm within *Mrs Dalloway* may be described as a recursiveness. The method Woolf charts as her structural plan for *Mrs Dalloway*, her tunnelling process, then, may also serve as a metaphor for the novel's syntactic recursions. While readers return to events from characters' pasts on the level of plot so too we are taken through the syntactical structure of Woolf's prose to revisit earlier words within sentences or passages. While time in the narrative progresses forward, it is complicated by the many external analepses which take readers back to events set before the beginning of the novel. Likewise, while the reading process is linear and thus forward, language in *Mrs Dalloway* also moves readers back, not to fixed destinations, but rather to many previously encountered grammatical spaces. This recursiveness, and the other rhythmic movements in Woolf's prose, lead us to the novel's epiphanic moments. *Mrs Dalloway's* language forces readers to adopt a meditative or contemplative posture. From within these interpretive positions Woolf propels readers towards narrative endings through the sensations her prose induces.

Many other rhythmic movements work alongside this pattern of recursiveness. Language in *Mrs Dalloway* builds through accretion: the text raises questions and seems to promise answers as words and phrases are added and joined to one another. Of course, readers are not given clarity of meaning, only enigmatic suggestions. But the building of a rhythmic pattern into the novel such that the language seems to reach a climax and then dissipate, effects upon readers the sensation of an ending, despite the underlying ambiguity of these passages. Working towards a unity of vision from the

chaotic fragments of multiple subjectivities, Peter's feelings of excitement and peace close *Mrs Dalloway*: "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (213). However, his vision, like others in the novel, such as those articulated in Passages B and C, can be best understood through the syntactic workings of the language. Readers accept Peter's vision and the moments of epiphany in the novel, not because they have thematic validity, but because the rhythmic movements of Woolf's prose carry us there.

The following three passages (A, B and C) will be examined to explore the enactment of these movements toward resolution. In this first passage, at the opening of *Mrs Dalloway's* third paragraph, language not only encapsulates the forward movement of the plot, but also takes readers backwards, both thematically to events from the heroine's past, and through its style to previous utterances, often within the same sentence.

II

Passage A: Plunging Into the Past: An Interlude:

(S1)What a lark! (S2)What a plunge! (S3)For so it had always seemed to her **when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows** and plunged at Bourton into the open air.

(S4)**How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course,** the air was in the early morning; like **the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp** and yet (for a girl of

eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling: standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" -- was that it? -- "I prefer men to cauliflowers" -- was that it? (S5)He must have said it at breakfast one morning **when she had gone out on to the terrace -- Peter Walsh.** (S6)He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, **for his letters were awfully dull**; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, **when millions of things had utterly vanished** -- how strange it was! -- a few sayings like this about cabbages. (3)

Through various stylistic manoeuvres, Woolf conditions readers to focus upon the rhythmic movements of her prose, rather than to look for the frequently absent thematic climax to a scene. In one such gesture, Woolf exploits the expansive capacities of the English language. Providing readers with an abundance of language she inserts into the available syntactic spaces almost a surplus of words, while at the core of these sentences, little or nothing concrete happens. In Passage A narrative claims are infrequent, or at best tentative, as Woolf describes the air through comparisons and metaphors, such as, [S4]"like the flap of a wave, the kiss of a wave." Correspondingly, statements are modalized to make the

entire memory passage conditional: [S3]“[f]or so it had always *seemed* to her [emphasis added].” Instead of presenting definitive claims and working towards an unequivocal conclusion, Woolf builds into the opening of *Mrs Dalloway* a narrative gap, introducing into her novel ambiguity and uncertainty. (In Passage A the absence of a narrative claim constitutes the narrative gap, and the uncertainty of Clarissa’s memory, ambiguity.) Though many diverse meanings may be discovered, the narrative refuses to rest within a position of authority. Superfluous syntactic spaces hold clauses which help to build recursive rhythms, intensifying, but not explaining clearly, the textual moment. Through the narrative movements Woolf creates a sensation of suspension for her readers; both held within *Mrs Dalloway’s* passages and returned to earlier syntactic spaces, we feel dislocated, almost as if reading Woolf’s fiction induces a trance. Readers join in the passion that seems essential to this moment from Clarissa’s past; it is mostly through this sensation that we accept the conclusion to this scene and the move forward as inevitable.

To create these rhythms and induce these sensations a number of grammatical tools are at work in *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf demonstrates a predilection for continuing sentences beyond what we might expect of a less elaborate style. Rather than coming to a full stop, the author will often use a semi-colon, or less frequently a comma or parenthesis, to prolong her sentence, joining together two or more independent clauses, or merely appending a qualifying phrase to a completed thought. In his discussion of rhythm in *To the Lighthouse*, J. Hillis Miller remarks upon this distinctive trait:

“Virginia Woolf’s style is characterized by this prolonged, sustained rhythmical movement, drawing breath again just when it seems about to stop, and continuing beyond a semi-colon or even beyond a full stop or the numbering or naming of a new section” (168). This pattern seems to hold true for her earlier novel as well.

Perhaps the simplest means of elaboration Woolf employs is the use of finite adverbial clauses which expand upon and qualify the meaning of utterances. These clauses can be presented almost indefinitely, though their use is in practice quite limited by readers’ ability to hold a sentence’s opening in memory. In the above passage, Woolf uses the following five finite adverbial clauses: [S3]“when, with a little squeak of the hinges [which she could hear now,] she had burst open the French windows,” [S3]“[for a girl of eighteen] as she then was,” [S5]“when she had gone out onto the terrace,” [S6]“for his letters were awfully dull,” and [S6]“when millions of things had utterly vanished.” These clauses elaborate upon the depicted scene, Clarissa’s youth at Bourton, while they also help to build the expansiveness of Woolf’s prose. Finite relative clauses work in a similar way, modifying the noun phrases to which they are attached. Relative clauses appear less often in Passage A, here we have only one: [S3]“which she could hear now.” Thus, instead of presenting a simple declarative statement, such as, ‘Clarissa burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air,’ Woolf suspends us temporarily within this passage by inserting extra information into her work.

And though Woolf uses these clauses to elaborate upon details of this early scene, paradoxically the wealth of information renders

these details less important to the reading experience. That Clarissa opened the window and spoke to Peter that morning and now cannot recall their conversation appears to be of lesser importance than the rhythmic language through which these acts are expressed and through which the patterns of narrative suspension are established within the text. Indeed throughout this passage the play of language seems to have greater narrative import than the actual content conveyed.

Furthermore, the distinctly haunting and rhythmic language of *Mrs Dalloway*, which these stylistic features create, evokes within readers an emotive, rather than a purely intellectual, response. Meaning is put forth not only through language's referential properties, but also through its nonsemantic features, such as these embellished clauses which hold readers within passages. And these enriched clauses are by no means her only strategy of syntactic elaboration. In a sense, finite adverbial and relative clauses are the least distinctive and essential stylistic trait. Even more compelling are other stylistic techniques, such as subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, apposition, and the repetition of particular words or clauses which work together to elaborate upon, or enhance, rather than just extend, sentences. Within these different stylistic features we discover Woolf's greatest resources for building rhythm into her prose and for moving readers past ambiguities to a feeling of completion.

Woolf uses subjectless nonfinite verb phrases to create particularly intense moments of recursiveness within her prose.¹⁵ Lacking both subject and tense, these verb phrases depend upon a parent clause for their completion within a sentence. To illustrate the operation of this type of clause, we might consider the following two sentences: 1. She looked at the picture. 2. She claimed it to be original. Each sentence holds a finite verb phrase, that is each carries tense (past in each of these sentences). If one of these sentences were to lose its status as a finite clause, it could be “adopted” by the other. These two sentences would merge and could then be constructed as follows: 3. [a]She looked at the picture, [b]claiming it to be original. ‘Claiming,’ the present participle nonfinite verb phrase of clause [b] must now borrow its tense from ‘looked,’ the finite verb phrase of the parent clause [a] whose tense is past. As well, lacking a subject, clause [b] borrows ‘she’ from clause [a]. Readers construct the meaning of clause [b] by holding clause [a] in short term memory and looking back upon the first for the missing elements of the second clause. Because readers must return to a previously encountered textual space each time one appears, this type of clause is an inherently anaphoric component of the English language. Or, less frequently in Woolf’s prose, a subjectless nonfinite verb phrase may open a sentence. In this case, readers would hold the clause in memory and look forward, rather than back, to a parent clause which follows. Again, the reading has a circular rhythm in that readers are forced to return, through

¹⁵Norman Page in *Speech in the English Novel* (1973) comments upon the repetition within Woolf’s prose of “verbal structures”. More specifically we refer to the verb phrases in this passage as subjectless nonfinite verb phrases.

memory, to a previous syntactic slot. The demands these clauses place upon readers are considerable; therefore they are rarely used in nonliterary language. And, even within a more formal discourse, subjectless nonfinite clauses are still relatively uncommon. Thus, though not a constant feature of her writing, subjectless nonfinite verb phrases act as powerful rhetorical devices.

Communities of these clauses, residing in particularly fertile spaces of Woolf's prose, create rich rhythmic patterns of recursiveness in her novels. Borrowing tense from other verbs within the sentence, these clauses negate linearity and chronology. Their presence invokes within readers a sense of a simultaneity of action and feeling within the narrative. In addition, subjectless nonfinite verb phrases mitigate the concept of agency as the verbs within one or more clauses borrow their subjects from a parent clause. Language in a sense overtakes the agent of the verb as the subject recedes further and further from ensuing clauses. This lack of agency may represent in language the sensation Woolf's heroine describes of merging with the world: our awareness of Clarissa's ego becomes less apparent as we move further away from the subject of these clauses. Furthermore these properties work to evoke emotional responses from readers: we are overwhelmed, captured, and suspended within a sentence when inundated with the recursive energy of Woolf's prose when many of these clauses appear together.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, and later in *To the Lighthouse*, we encounter isolated clusters of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases. Though these appear somewhat infrequently, when present, they are

gathered together and make for particularly evocative textual spaces. In the fourth sentence of the first passage from *Mrs Dalloway*, for each of the following four clauses, readers return to the parent, “for a girl of eighteen as she then was.” The narrator describes Clarissa’s emotional state variously: [all of the following clauses appear in S4] “feeling as she did,” “standing there at the open window,” “looking at the flowers at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling,” “standing and looking,” and “Musing among the vegetables?” Embedded within the third and the fourth clauses are two more subjectless nonfinites, which again, complicate our reading as they take us back into Woolf’s sentence. The postmodifier, “with the smoke winding off them,” returns readers to the earlier part of the clause, “the trees”; the nonfinite verb phrase, “Musing among the vegetables,” is embedded within and returns us to the reporting clause, “until Peter said.” This reporting clause is, in turn, embedded itself in the fourth nonfinite, “standing and looking.” More important than just a description of Clarissa’s memory or the development of novelistic themes, such as Clarissa’s relationship with Peter or the politics of gender relations, this sentence seems to be Woolf’s attempt, through the rhythms of her prose, to create for readers a sensation of passion in her character’s experience of remembering her youth. Though the narration of events from Clarissa’s past provides important information about these characters, these details seem less important than the language through which Woolf expresses her character’s history. Woolf presents an interlude from her

character's past in which the elaborate recursive rhythms of this sentence, at least momentarily, overwhelm the plot.

These recursive rhythms take Passage A to its culmination. Though information is revealed about Woolf's heroine's past, this in itself does not fully account for the definite climax and denouement of this early memory passage. Woolf deliberately makes Passage A ambiguous: Clarissa has difficulty remembering Peter's words and remains confused about the accuracy of her memory, despite her assertion that [S6]"it was his sayings one remembered." As well, Clarissa's insistence that [S5]"[h]e *must have* said it at breakfast one morning [emphasis added]," works only to cast further doubt over when they spoke and what Peter said to her that morning. And, as suggested, the modalized verb phrase in the third sentence, "seemed," casts doubt over the accuracy of the entire remembrance. Indeed, the longest and most syntactically elaborate sentence of Passage A, sentence four, presents few narrative events, but rather, recreates Clarissa's feeling of intense passion for her youth. Through the rhythms of the novel, Woolf elicits from readers a participation in Clarissa's act of remembering her past, the process of which seems to have greater import than the facts accrued through this exercise.

Our experience of Woolf's prose reflects Clarissa's vision of herself as intimately connected with others and her environment, here and throughout *Mrs Dalloway*. She refuses to define people: "She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or that" (8). Her sense of identity as indeterminate nourishes, enriches, and renews her, and is reflected in the rich novelistic

discourse which immerses readers within a world where boundaries across time and between people are constantly being collapsed into the subjective present.¹⁶ The narrator locates Clarissa's identity within these interstices, between people, objects and time:

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; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (9-10)

While Woolf's major character is presented as deeply connected with her past and her world, the language of *Mrs Dalloway* is similarly "laid out like a mist" throughout the novel, that is, the sense of the self as a decentered subject presented throughout the novel readers experience in response to the deep stylistic structures of Woolf's novelistic discourse.

Here and elsewhere in Woolf's writing, it is not one stylistic feature working in isolation that creates the unique texture of her prose, but rather, many different elements which together produce her distinct narrative voice. Alongside subjectless nonfinite clauses, Woolf confounds the linear progression of *Mrs Dalloway*

¹⁶Using Kristeva's theories of the semiotic, Wyatt (1986) discusses the sense of self in flux articulated by many twentieth-century female authors: "The female characters don't rush in to define what is inchoate and amorphous in themselves, but welcome the chaos of a diffuse self for its promise of change and celebrate the possibilities for renewal in the experience of merging" (115). Wyatt suggests later that Woolf's prose works to "precipitate a takeover by the semiotic in the reader [Kristeva's words]" (122). Wyatt's thesis has an interesting connection to my discussion of Woolf's style in that the stylistic properties examined here may provide evidence in her language for these abstract and hypothetical theories.

through her use of apposition. Unlike the qualifying embedded finite clauses discussed earlier, which specify and in a sense narrow meaning, apposition works to enhance meaning.¹⁷ In *A Communicative Grammar of English*, Leech and Svartvik provide the strictest definition of this stylistic feature: “Two or more noun phrases which occur next to each other and refer to the same person or thing are said to be in *apposition*” (204). To illustrate we might consider the noun phrase, “That old grim housemaid, Ellen Aitkins” (37), in which the proper noun, “Ellen Aitkins,” rewords the head noun phrase, “That grim old housemaid.” Woolf’s readers do not move through *Mrs Dalloway* only to accumulate more information; rather we are compelled, through this stylistic feature, and through others in her prose, to rework given textual information.

Woolf uses apposition in her writing to intensify our experience of initial grammatical constructs and to disturb our complacent understanding of words. A simple example of apposition occurs in sentence six of this passage wherein the noun phrase “June or July” acts as postmodifier to the noun phrase “one of these days.” We are carried back through this appositive to revisit the first noun phrase. Peter’s importance to Clarissa’s life in the narrative suggests that she should remember accurately details of their interactions and his life. However, the ambiguity of this character’s memory in sentence six suggests that the contents of Clarissa’s recollections are not very important. Though the addition of more information within a sentence may imply that we will move to a greater clarity of meaning, Woolf uses apposition to further enhance

¹⁷M.A.K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985), 252.

the ambiguities of her prose. Even within this straightforward example of apposition, the noun phrase to which we return, “one of these days,” is itself indefinite and emphasizes the vagueness of this scene, as if it is the process of articulation rather than the details which have significance.

And furthermore, apposition in Virginia Woolf’s writing extends far beyond this basic definition to include not only noun phrases, but many different grammatical items. As Halliday explains,

Groups and phrases can be linked paratactically by apposition and by coordination. As with paratactic clauses the former are elaborating in function, the latter extending. Instances of the enhancing type are less common, since the meanings are too specific to be readily expressed as a relationship between units smaller than clauses, but they do occur. (252)

Thus, it is not only noun phrases as above, but a range of constituents which may be assembled appositionally. Woolf, mastering this opportunity, summons noun, adjectival and verbal phrases, even entire clauses, to act as appositives in *Mrs Dalloway* to build the rhythmic structure of her prose and to deepen the ambiguity which surrounds her narrative claims.

Through her stylistic elaboration Woolf defers narrative closure as offered within a traditional domestic novel.¹⁸ But, while traditional closure is not offered in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf effects a certain completion within these repetitions. Again, we have no

¹⁸As Elizabeth Abel in “Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs Dalloway*” *Voyage In and Fictions of Female Development* (1983) proposes, “Woolf disliked plot but she invoked narrative patterns in her work if only to disrupt them or to reveal their insignificance” (243).

discursive grounds within the plot to reach resolution in Passage A or in the end of *Mrs Dalloway*, only rhythmic narrative movements in the style of the writing itself which may allow for this sensation. The presentation, revisiting and momentary retiring of ambiguous and increasingly obscure syntactical items which are often only reawakened again later in the text, underlines the uncertainty of Woolf's prose. But readers come to feel through these elaborations and reiterations that the narrative energy of Woolf's work has been exhausted and that no more need be said.

A range of syntactic elements adds to and deepens the recursive textual movements created through her use of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases. In sentence four, the fourth subjectless nonfinite verb phrase, "standing and looking," is in apposition to the first, second, and third respectively, "feeling as she did standing there at the open window," "standing there . . . ," and "looking at the flowers" Furthermore, this argument can be extended if each of these subjectless nonfinite clauses are considered to be in apposition to each other. Woolf describes, through these clauses, Clarissa's sensory experience of her memory; each verb phrase reworks the same syntactic space of the first clause, "feeling as she did." Instead of moving us forward and introducing different ideas by the use of conjunctions, such as, 'feeling as she did, *and* looking, *and* . . . , [emphasis added]' these phrases all reword Clarissa's state during this particular morning at Bourton.¹⁹ Woolf

¹⁹Woolf does use repeating conjunctions in Passage B of *Mrs Dalloway* and Passage E of *To the Lighthouse*, along with appositives, to take readers to the climax of those scenes. Characteristically, however, her use of connectives complicates the forward movement of the narrative. Meaning in these passages builds, but we only arrive at

augments the textual moment through her generous use of language to restate and to amplify a clause or a phrase. Through apposition the circular rhythms in *Mrs Dalloway* are intensified; we do not have addition or restriction as we might through a relative clause, but rather an endless return. At the textual level, memories of a shared past between these characters are replayed, and the thematic issues raised within the novel--Clarissa's rejection of Peter's domination, her struggle with the compromises she has made during her life, her sexuality--reappear with a greater intensity as they carry with them their history recorded earlier in the text. On the level of syntax, readers are carried through the language to earlier moments within sentences or within passages which build and intensify through repetition. As readers' memories of textual episodes are reawakened, and syntactic spaces are revisited, we move with Woolf's character almost as in a meditation. The referential properties of words almost become redundant as readers are moved to a level of interpretation that is not purely intellectual.

Apposition continues throughout Passage A to create and embellish the recursive rhythms of Woolf's prose. In the fifth sentence, the proper noun, "Peter Walsh," acts as an appositive to the initial noun phrase of the sentence, "[h]e." In this instance, Woolf's appositive spans the entire sentence, taking readers from the final, back to the sentence initial, position. The repetition of this referent to Peter Walsh sends us back into the sentence, to its very beginning as if to start it over again. And again, at the

enigmatic conclusions. Readers are sent back within sentences to the questions articulated at their beginnings.

beginning of the fourth sentence, the quality of the air in the early morning is described: "How fresh, how calm." These two adjectival phrases suggest different qualities, but as we move forward in the sentence appositions build and these meanings seem to merge together. The third adjectival phrase, "stiller than this of course," works as an appositive to, a rewording of, "how calm." Then, the simile which describes the air "like the flap of a wave" is followed by the appositive, "the kiss of a wave." More than the parallel structure of these metaphorical phrases and the repetition of words therein, both of which help to create the rhythms of this passage, these phrases, through their construction as appositives, move readers back into the sentence blurring distinctions between meanings.

Woolf presents a contemplative posture through her style. The qualities initially introduced, fresh and calm, become less clearly defined as the elaborate rewordings fill the potential semantic spaces between these appositives. The meaning of the previous item is embellished by the apposition which follows: "Chill and sharp." This next adjectival phrase acts as an appositive to "how fresh," taking readers further back into the sentence, here over three intermediating adjectival phrases. Then, Woolf presents the last adjectival phrase of this sentence which describes for readers the experience of the air in the early morning as "solemn." "Solemn" seems to be a rewording of "stiller than this of course" which, acting itself as an appositive, has already made a claim upon readers' memories.

Woolf's heavy use of apposition in *Mrs Dalloway*, along with her use of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, gives readers the sense of being sustained within her sentences as we seem to be constantly moving back and forward across varying expanses of text. These appositives have the effect upon readers of moving us away from our expectations of a clear understanding in her narrative to a place of greater uncertainty. Paradoxically, though we revisit textual spaces and gain an enriched sense of each lexical item or clause, apposition in *Mrs Dalloway* serves mainly to emphasize the ambiguity of Woolf's prose. Increasingly abstract phrases reopen earlier enigmatic textual spaces, offering readers further avenues of interpretation while taking us away from any one specific reading. There are thus at least two competing rhythms created through Woolf's use of appositional structures. This feature works to open up Woolf's text to new meanings as each new appositional word or phrase brings with it into the passage the many connotations and implications which surround the history of its utterance both within the realm of the novel and beyond its confines. As well, there is a contracting of meaning as many different reiterations and elaborations seem to coalesce into one.

In Passage A, the intense passion of Clarissa's youth is roused through language which often works back upon itself. Through the formal rhythms of its language, readers are taken to the climax and dissipation of this early scene. Thematically, however, this first passage lacks a clear destination. Clarissa's memory, which opens the novel, is presented as an interlude, disrupted only by her recollection of Peter's inane question, "Musing among the

vegetables?" (3). In Passage B, too, many of the same anaphoric patterns of Passage A, reappear. However, Passage B is not only an interlude from Clarissa's past, but a moment imbued with great meaning for Woolf's character. Thematically this next passage seems to build more clearly to a climax, and in this sense, language here would appear to move more resolutely towards a goal. But the destination this forward movement suggests is never reached or articulated. Instead, readers leap across ambiguities which the author refuses to resolve into Clarissa's renewal and regeneration. Plot development is essentially absent: questions are articulated in the narrative, but resolution is denied. The culmination of this passage in Clarissa's rejuvenation does not ensue from theme, but rather, from the play of language which propels readers back into the text's history and forward toward greater abstruseness. We may participate in the pleasure of the textual moment and be led with Clarissa through this celebration to a feeling of momentary renewal. However, we reach this destination, not essentially through logical arguments or thematic developments, but rather through the deep structures of Woolf's prose.

Throughout the novel, when Clarissa undergoes self-examination or reflection, she retreats to a private space. Insulted by her exclusion from Lady Bruton's luncheon, Clarissa senses the fragility of the persona she presents to the world. Feeling herself "suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless" (33), Clarissa examines her failure within her marriage and her love for women and thereby regains a feeling of inner peace and harmony. In Passage B, Clarissa has a vision which, while it brings her toward an integration of the

disparate elements of her personality, is never explained clearly in the novel. Frequently the surface narrative evokes questions for which it fails to proffer corresponding explanations. Readers finish this passage with a feeling of its profound import to the narrative, but our understanding and accepting of Clarissa's renewal occurs mainly through the discourse of style.

III

Passage B: Clarissa's Lack:

(S1)She could see what she lacked. (S2)It was not beauty; it was not mind. (S3)It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. (S4)For *that* she could dimly perceive. (S5)She resented it, had a scruple **picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who invariably is wise);** yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape some folly. (S6)And whether it was pity, **or** their beauty, **or** that she was older, **or** some accident -- like a faint scent, **or** a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men

felt. (S7)Only for a moment; but it was enough. (S8)It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, **and** rushed to the farthest verge **and** there quivered **and** felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! (S9)Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (S10)But the close withdrew; the hard softened. (S11)It was over -- the moment.

(34-5)

The first sentence of Passage B advertises Clarissa's awareness of a deep lack in her personality. Readers are thus led to expect that the text will reveal specifically what constitutes this fault within *Mrs Dalloway's* main character. The next two sentences sustain the promise that an explanation will come to fruition. But, instead of satisfying our expectations, the narrative propels readers across the questions of the third, to a new topic in the fourth sentence. Operating as if the mystery were resolved within this gap, the narrative proceeds to explore Clarissa's love for women. Rather than define this lack, or later Clarissa's vision, Woolf denies readers answers. Again, as in Passage A, she presents only frugal information at the core of her sentences, surrounding and embedding ambiguous statements within a wonderful surplus of language. The

narrative never does arrive at specific explanations, but instead becomes more and more suggestive, leaving readers to determine meaning through expansive syntactic slots which hold a wealth of adjectival, verbal and noun phrases.

In the opening of Passage B, the narrator expounds upon the heroine's deficiency through apposition. Again, Woolf calls upon appositives to embellish the meanings of previous grammatical items and to develop a recursive rhythm. The second sentence takes readers back to the first, frustrating our expectations of an immediate resolution, but continuing to offer the possibility that an answer will follow. The first of many appositives is introduced. "It was not mind," the second independent clause restates and develops the first, "[i]t was not beauty." But we get significantly no closer to an explanation, for instead of describing Clarissa's lack, the narrator discusses what it is not. Our subject is addressed directly in the third sentence which opens upon a splendid description of what Clarissa judges to be her failure to her husband. Significantly, even when Clarissa's lack constitutes the main topic of sentence three, Woolf emphasizes the ambiguity of her exposition through her choice of the indefinite nominal head "something." Twice this word is used to describe Clarissa's fault. Again Woolf arouses readers' expectations that this supposed fundamental failure of Clarissa's will be explained. But instead of satisfying this expectation, the narrative delves into beautifully crafted noun phrases whose appositional structure leads readers back into the sentence. "Something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman or of women together" is paratactic to

“something central which permeated.” The second highly postmodified noun phrase rewords and deepens the meaning of the first, increasing its sexual suggestiveness, but the subject of the sentence remains steadfastly elusive. Passage B supports our findings in Passage A: Woolf’s style of elaboration and expansion paradoxically heightens and sustains the ambiguities within this novel. Indeed Woolf seems deliberately to maintain uncertainties in *Mrs Dalloway*. The narrative refuses to rest at any one position but insists upon many meanings. We find that the more that is said, the more we seem to drift away from one interpretation into a complex myriad of possibilities, none of which are either dismissed nor supported as ultimately true. Meaning in the passage therefore remains tentative and unresolved.

Woolf continues to align grammatical constituents appositionally throughout this passage. In sentence eight, the noun phrase, “a sudden revelation,” whose referent is left unclear throughout the entire passage, is only made more obscure through its appositive, “a tinge like a blush which one tried to check.” So too in this sentence, “some pressure of rapture” serves as an appositive to “some astonishing significance.” “Some,” repeated here twice, acts as an emphatic indefinite determiner; this word holds within it the elusiveness which seems to characterize this passage and the novel as a whole. Though appositives may work to clarify preceding lexical items, Woolf uses them to deepen and to intensify the ambiguity of her prose. As readers revisit previous syntactic spaces, the possibilities raised therein “sound on and on” in the ensuing textual spaces, resisting the limitations of definitions. At

the end of this passage, the narrative approaches the core of this experience through the following three noun phrases. The last two, which are ordered as appositives, reword and emphasize the first: [S9]“an illumination,” “a match burning in a crocus,” and “an inner meaning almost expressed.” But, as Jeremy Tambling in “Repression in Mrs Dalloway’s London” proposes, “What could permeate, and thus overturn the opposition man/woman . . . is undefined by Mrs Dalloway’s meditation” (152). While the first clause in sentence nine articulates most clearly the essence of Clarissa’s experience, her failure and her vision are finally left obscure.

The appositional structures which send readers back over previously encountered syntactic spaces help to build the novel’s recursive rhythms and guide readers through sensation to the passage’s conclusion. But Woolf also generates in Passage B other rhythmic patterns. She summons stylistic features to generate a movement not only back into the text, but also forward to Clarissa’s vision. Though the destination to which this movement is directed is enigmatic, perhaps even illusory, this rhythmic pattern accords it deep significance in the passage. Language builds with intensity, seeming to quicken and to culminate, given the imagery and diction, in a crescendo, a moment of orgasmic intensity. Repeating conjunctions and noun phrases build, creating for readers the perception that the prose is propelling us towards a moment of great meaning and illumination. But the ambiguity of the passage remains intact to its end. Passage B finishes without an explanation of Clarissa’s “sudden revelation” in the eighth sentence: “[S11]It was over -- the moment.” However, despite the uncertainty of this

narrative event, readers are able to participate in Clarissa's renewal through the deep sensations Woolf's rhythmic prose creates. Overwhelmed by the movements of her language we accept as fact that something of great import transpires in this passage, though a close reading reveals that the details or an explanation of this event are absent from the text.

As in Woolf's use of appositives, repeating conjunctions in this passage work to arouse our expectations that the passage's ambiguity will be resolved. The repetition of "or" in sentence six illustrates the text's gesture of arousing, and then frustrating, our expectations of conclusiveness: "[And whether it was] pity, *or* their beauty, *or* that she was older, *or* some accident -- like a faint scent, *or* a violin [emphasis added]." The narrator offers numerous possibilities as to what quality women possess which draws Clarissa to them. Readers have the sense that we are being taken forwards, close to an answer, though in fact we return at the end of the sentence to the enigma articulated at its beginning. Repeating conjunctions take us further into the sentence, building and extending meaning and rhythm, but at the sentence's end we return to its opening clause with a number of choices but no definite answer. Furthermore, Woolf repeats "or" in this sentence to force readers to keep open all of these possibilities as this conjunction implies that one of two or more alternatives will be chosen. As we move forward we anticipate some gesture which will help us to select from among these options, but of course, Woolf never gives us such direction.

Woolf gathers together different clausal items, noun phrases in sentence six, verbals in eight. These items, all ordered in immediate succession to one another, also help to give readers the impression that the passage is moving rapidly forward to a goal. In sentence eight, five conjunctions build to the climax of the scene: “one yielded to its expansion *and* rushed to the furthest verge *and* there quivered *and* felt the world come closer . . . split its thin skin *and* gushed *and* poured [emphasis added].” However, we only reach “an inner meaning *almost* expressed [emphasis added].”

Furthermore, while Passage B presumes to discuss Clarissa’s sexual and emotional failure within her marriage, her “lack”, the latter parts of the sentences open upon an intense and passionate description of her love for other women. However, Woolf again does not commit her narrative to any one interpretive position but instead offers only a complication of Clarissa’s sexuality. The elaborate syntactic rhythms and puzzling images of this passage build towards and articulate a highly enigmatic vision of Clarissa’s sexual orientation that is rife with lesbian overtones. But, while Clarissa’s passion for women is given voice, the key sexual images of Passage B are androgynous: “a match burning in a crocus” appears at the apex of this passage and is followed by “the hard softened” on its denouement. These images could refer to either the female or male sexual organs and thus they work to complicate an interpretation of this passage as unambiguously lesbian. The narrator refuses to take an authoritative stance in *Mrs Dalloway*, but rather leaves readers with conflicting images through which we must construct meaning for ourselves. Readers are carried across

unresolved paradoxes and ambiguities through the rhythms of the prose to the passage's cessation; in sentence eleven we are told that the moment has passed. We participate in Clarissa's renewal and rejuvenation in the opening up of the possibilities for the character's sexual identity and orientation through our experience of these textual movements, but we get no clear answer in regard to the basis for her transformation in this scene.

Passage C, Clarissa's Final Epiphany, remains as enigmatic as Passage B. In the last section of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa experiences an emotional crisis through which she learns to accept her private compromises and then join in a public celebration of harmony with other characters at the party. Yet, even at the climax of Passage C in which much of Clarissa's apparent growth transpires, narrative meaning is unclear. Readers are returned to the ambiguity of the passage's first words after Clarissa learns of Septimus' suicide. It is as if we have moved nowhere, though the text compels us to feel, with Clarissa, renewed. For even if we argue that the change in Clarissa is ironic, as Emily Jensen suggests in her essay "Clarissa Dalloway's Respectable Suicide," the movements of Woolf's prose still guide us to feel that change along with Clarissa and the sense of rapture which captivates Peter and other characters at the party.

In addition, Passage C, occurring near the close of *Mrs Dalloway*, makes complete the connection between Clarissa and Septimus. Apprehending details of his suicide the novel does not make realistically available to her, Clarissa's understanding of Septimus' act works within the novel on an intuitive or symbolic, rather than an intellectual or realistic level. As in Passages A and B

where the conclusion to each scene occurs through the rhythms of the prose, rather than through thematic developments, Woolf leaves ineffable the means through which Clarissa achieves her transformation. Readers follow Clarissa's development through the rhythms of the prose which force us to participate in and lead us to accept the novel's conclusion.

IV

Passage C: Clarissa's Final Epiphany:

(S1)She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. (S2)But he had flung it away. (S3)They went on living **(she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming)**. (S4)They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. (S5)A thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. (S6)This he had preserved. (S7)Death was defiance. (S8)Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. (S9)There was an embrace in death. (202)

Clarissa's final epiphany, adding to the ambiguities articulated throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, is at its core enigmatic. As in her use of finite adverbial and relative clauses to extend Passages A and B, the use of parenthesis in Passage C modifies the straightforward progression of the text. From the first through to the fourth sentence, Clarissa reflects upon and summarizes her day. Woolf suspends readers within these reflections; parentheses are used to hold Clarissa's most immediate feelings and observations in the text and to delay our linear progression through this passage. Rather than presenting incidental information in these textual spaces as we might expect, Woolf deflects into parentheses three clauses which could all function as the sentence's main constituent. The status usually accorded to parenthetical information is disturbed in *Mrs Dalloway*. This seems to be even more true in the next sentence, for the parenthetical information of sentence four, "all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally", summarizes the entire novel and again seems to contain information that is as important as the other parts of the sentence. Here information is presented on a nonhierarchical manner: readers are encouraged to adopt a contemplative posture as we move from clause to clause without direct authorial comment. We meditate upon these textual spaces, rather than only progressing along a linear narrative which develops and leads to a conclusion readers anticipate from authorial direction. Though the use of parenthesis is not a major feature of *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf employs this, along with the other stylistic traits found here and in earlier passages, to confound our reading

and to create in readers the sensations of suspension and meditation.

Sentences five and six present a shift from the uneasiness and regret which earlier in the novel traps Clarissa to the acceptance of her life she displays when she repeats for the final time the line from Shakespeare's *Othello*, "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy" (202). Her transformation is complete by the next page:

Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank. (203)

Clarissa's reflections upon Septimus' death intervene between her despair and her renewal but these do not adequately justify her maturation. Again, through apposition, Woolf deepens the ambiguities of the text, rather than choosing to clarify the meaning of her sentences. Readers return to the initial enigma of sentence five expressed in "a thing there was that mattered," with the following heavily postmodified noun phrase, "a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter." These highly suggestive phrases hold within them the entire history of the novel's utterances. We may speculate that "a thing" in *Mrs Dalloway* refers to life, to the integrity of not compromising one's values to Sir William Bradshaw's goddess of "divine proportion" (109), but this novel suggests rather than insists upon these meanings.

Readers move to the next sentence as if the ambiguity of the earlier phrases has been rendered clear: [S6]“*This* he had preserved [emphasis added].” As in Passage B, Woolf arouses questions which she refuses to answer. The general noun, [S5]“thing,” and the demonstrative determiner, [S6]“this,” both lack clear referents in the text, and are so general that they fail to help clarify the meaning of the passage but rather work within this context to further confuse interpretations. In *Cohesion in English* Halliday and Hasan locate “thing” within a class of general nouns. They explain that “the use of general nouns as cohesive agents depends on their occurring in the context of reference -- having the same referent as the item which they presuppose, this being signalled by the accompaniment of a reference item” (277). Rather than “the thing” which would presuppose a specific textual item, Woolf describes it as “a thing” that mattered. Lacking a clear reference item this noun fails as a cohesive operator. Likewise, “this” could refer to an infinite set of possible antecedents. The very promiscuity of these words in the English language renders them unable to effectively tie a text together without well disguised help such as the continuous presence of the presupposed item in the passage. Able to refer to an infinite set of items and concepts they do not specify meaning at all here. As in Passage B where conjunctions are employed to keep open many possible interpretations, in Passage C Woolf uses words which fail to narrow the meaning of the text.

Woolf provides other instances of apposition in Passage C. In sentence four, “they,” repeated after the parenthetical material, takes readers back to the initial noun phrase of the sentence.

Sentence eight could be viewed as an appositive to the former sentence as it enhances and elaborates upon its topic, death: [S7]“Death was defiance.” And, within sentence eight itself, four clauses are assembled appositionally: “people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which mystically evaded them,” “closeness drew apart,” “rapture faded,” and “one was alone.” Therefore, while readers travel back to sentence seven through the appositional structure of sentence eight, the internal arrangement of the latter creates yet another rhythm in which this topic is revisited and meaning is restated and enhanced. The separate meanings of these paratactic clauses tend to become less distinct as we move through this sentence. As in readers’ experience of the appositional phrases of Passage B, whose individual meanings seems to merge together, this pattern works to further obscure our understanding of these highly ambiguous clauses. Therefore, if we follow the growth Woolf presents in her female character in the final section of *Mrs Dalloway*, it seems that we must do so through some other means than through Woolf’s theme or plot.

V

In the final section of *Mrs Dalloway* most readers join in the feeling of rapture and harmony that seems to embrace Woolf’s characters at the party. Peter encapsulates this feeling, closing the novel: “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” (213). That others partake

of Clarissa's renewal, despite the assertion of patriarchal structures at the novel's end which elsewhere the narrative seems to resist, emphasizes the unrealistic nature of character and plot development in *Mrs Dalloway*. The once rebellious Sally Seton is now Lady Rosseter, married to an industrial magnate and mother to five boys. Elizabeth Dalloway is explicitly connected to Clarissa's husband at the end of the novel, suggesting that the power structures of their society are unchanged: "And suddenly he realized that it was *his* Elizabeth [emphasis added]" (210). The many tensions and ambiguities with which readers are confronted are not only due to unresolved thematic issues, to the uneasy resolution between the worlds of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, but also grounded in the very writing of the novel. Though in Passage C we are near the close of *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf continues to withhold explicit answers to the questions her novel raises. However, through the recursive and rhythmic language of *Mrs Dalloway* through which these ambiguities are emphasized, Woolf paradoxically carries readers to her novel's ending.

The rhythms of Woolf's prose works to draw our attention to the language itself as readers are taken back into the text, through subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, appositives, and other stylistic features, and are carried forwards, further and further towards the end, but also only towards greater ambiguities. Conclusions are never drawn in any of these passages. The narrative gaps which Woolf presents and then refuses to close in *Mrs Dalloway* demand that we work towards our own conclusions. But, even more so, the prose tempers our frustration in never reaching a place of certainty

by suggesting that the search holds within it the answers which Woolf and her readers, seek.

In her next novel, *To the Lighthouse*, the formal symbol of the work (the lighthouse) and the tight symmetrical structure of the work suggest that the plot may hold more discursive grounds for its apparent resolution than is true for *Mrs Dalloway*. However, as Woolf herself claims, the symbolism and meaning of this later novel are highly suggestive and open to many different interpretations. Rather than presenting a novel of definitive and conclusive meaning, readers are also moved to the conclusion of *To the Lighthouse* mainly through the patterns of its prose.

CHAPTER TWO *To the Lighthouse*

I

In her next novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf employs many of the same grammatical features prevalent in *Mrs Dalloway*. Stylistic patterns of recursiveness, apposition, and accretion heighten the ambiguities contained within this later novel. Not surprisingly, some readers find the final ending proffered in *To the Lighthouse* wanting. As Joan Lidoff claims, "In spite of Woolf's assertion of resolution [in *To the Lighthouse*], there is an unreckoned violence in the process that is not entirely accounted for; that violence surfaces elsewhere in Woolf as well" (54). But as in *Mrs Dalloway*, the elaborate rhythmic movements of language overwhelm the many thematic uncertainties in *To the Lighthouse* and persuade most readers to feel a sense of completion, despite the uneasy resolution it enacts.

At times, *To the Lighthouse* suspends or delays readers within passages; we find ourselves sent back to earlier moments of ambiguity, or thrust forward to explanations that never transpire in the novel. Furthermore, Woolf raises questions in *To the Lighthouse* for which she never offers readers adequate answers. And, while characters tend to approach the level of symbolism in *To the Lighthouse* as they advance the discursive arguments of the novel, Woolf refuses to allow any one meaning be firmly attached to them. Readers may be led to construct particular interpretations, but Woolf's novel continually forces us to retreat from these positions

of interpretive certainty into the multiplicity of meanings her work suggests in its abstract and metaphorical language. Indeed, even the seemingly facile polarization of the male and female in "The Window", which appears to be embedded deeply within the characterization of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and the language of the novel's opening section, is made problematic by symbols which do not conform to any one interpretive position.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf disrupts the tradition of the domestic novel by the early death of her heroine, Mrs. Ramsay, and the predominance of Lily Briscoe, the unmarried female artist at its end. But she never offers clear answers to the problematics of gender roles this novel poses as one of its fundamental questions. Woolf marks her resistance to social norms within the narrative gaps in *To the Lighthouse* and in the ambiguities and uncertainties of her prose. Thematically we move to the apparent closure of Woolf's novel through the structural completion of its plot, but the unresolved tensions articulated throughout *To the Lighthouse* belie this harmonious ending. However the rhythmic patterns of Woolf's prose guide readers to find meaning in the very uncertainties that deny us answers on another level. Her language takes readers across so much narrative ground that we feel as if, by its close, all possible meanings have been exhausted; we finally accept her ending, despite the many ambiguities in the work, because of its stylistic manoeuvres.

In both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* the social construction of identity is examined and challenged. This critique is expressed in *Mrs Dalloway* in part through the differences presented

between her public and private self and the limitations imposed upon Woolf's character by her gender. But, in *To the Lighthouse*, this is taken up more explicitly through a discursive argument in the plot and is actually reflected in the syntax of Passage D from "The Window". Exploring alternative roles for women in society, Woolf creates in Lily Briscoe a character who circumvents traditional cultural norms. Later, through her artistic capability Lily effects a certain closure to the novel by representing the journey to the lighthouse in her painting. But this closure is an illusion, for Lily's painting captures only a momentary vision and harmony, which itself is problematic. Having just drawn the final line through the center of her canvas, the moment has already moved on as Lily indicates: "It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (209). It seems that while the major female characters in these two novels, Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe embody different possibilities for women, the diverse roles which these characters represent in Woolf's fiction are highly controversial. Clarissa Dalloway foregoes passion for a marriage in which she can retain her autonomy; the sacrifices Mrs. Ramsay offers to her family lead to her premature death; and though Woolf writes Lily Briscoe's character outside the traditional sphere of the domestic novel, even Briscoe does not escape the problematics of gender roles. Though Lily resists playing the roles expected of her as a woman in her society, and does effect a change in her relation with Mr. Ramsay that brings the plot to an apparent closure, she remains an outsider and a lonely spinster.

As a character who might offer a positive alternative to women's traditional roles, Lily fails, as do the other female characters in these two novels. But, perhaps rather than providing alternative role models, Woolf's fiction works to extend and develop the range of possible narrative endings in the domestic novel through the creation of a language of openness and ambiguity. In this way, the dubious roles each of these characters embody furthers that which seems to be at the core of Woolf's prose, the attempt to allow language to take on many meanings and interpretations as the author avoids being fixed within one particular perspective.

In the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, "The Window," gender differences are foregrounded through Woolf's presentation of masculine and feminine roles as exaggerated and separate. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay act out stereotyped parts in a drama between "symbols of marriage, husband and wife" (71). In Passage D, these roles are played out, not only in a dialogue of character, but also in a dialogue of style. Woolf reserves much of the syntactic richness of her prose in Passage D for her heroine. Long digressions filled with elaborate and poetic descriptions surround Mrs. Ramsay and interrupt the narrator's terse descriptions of Mr. Ramsay. Indeed, even throughout much of the narrative space allotted to Mr. Ramsay, he harkens back to his wife with his constant demands for reassurance and returns readers to images of the nurturing mother and compassionate wife.

But, as suggested for *Mrs Dalloway*, readers are persuaded to accept novelistic completion in *To the Lighthouse* through the sensations her language creates, rather than through its conclusive

argument. Even as readers are encouraged to separate Woolf's characters by sex, her narrative leads us away from these dichotomies into a more complex argument in which her own characterization is shown to be incomplete and inaccurate. Resisting the apparent facile polarities as represented by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in "The Window" Woolf imbues her language and imagery with ambiguities as she complicates the opening to her novel.

The following passage displays many of the same stylistic traits as those discovered within *Mrs Dalloway*. Clusters of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases momentarily delay the forward movement of reading; appositives enhance and deepen readers' experiences of preceding phrases; and rhythms build as Woolf fills textual spaces with a plethora of words. In this scene, Mr. Ramsay interrupts his wife who, quietly knitting and reading "The Fisherman and His Wife" to their son James, succumbs to his oppressive and manipulative demands for attention. Needing to retain his belief in his dominant position within his family and society, but acting more like her child than husband, Mr. Ramsay demands total adoration from his wife. This exchange imparts to him strength enough to face the world, but Mrs. Ramsay is left exhausted and drained, bereft of energy and wholeness. Woolf inscribes this stereotyped drama between the sexes into the very writing of this passage to critique traditional sexual roles. But, even as readers detect this pattern, Woolf's imagery and style complicate our reading and open the narrative up to more complex interpretations. In this way, Woolf prepares readers for the uncertainties of the latter sections of *To*

the Lighthouse through which she continues to present a highly enigmatic narrative.

II

Passage D: “Symbols of Marriage, Husband and Wife”:

(S1)Mrs. Ramsay, **who had been sitting loosely, *folding her son in her arm***, braced herself, and, ***half turning***, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air **a rain of energy, a column of spray**, ***looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating*** (quietly though she sat, ***taking up her stocking again***), and into **this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life**, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. (S2)He wanted sympathy. (S3)He was a failure, he said. (S4)Mrs. Ramsay flashed her needles. (S5)Mr. Ramsay repeated, ***never taking his eyes from her face***, that he was a failure. (S6)She blew the words back at him. (S7)“Charles Tansley” . . . she said. (S8)But he must have more than that. (S9)It was sympathy he wanted, **to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life--the drawing-room: behind**

the drawing-room the kitchen: above the kitchen the bedrooms: and beyond them the nurseries: they must be furnished, they must be filled with life.

(S10)Charles Tansley thought him the greatest metaphysician of the time, she said. (S11)But he must have more than that. (S12)He must have sympathy. (S13)He must be assured that he too lived in the heart of life; was needed; not here only, but all over the world.

(S14)*Flashing her needles, confident*, upright**, she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them aglow; bade him take his ease there, go in and out, enjoy himself. (S15)She laughed, she knitted. (S16)*Standing between her knees, very stiff*, James felt all her strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy. (S17)He was a failure, he repeated. (S18)Well, look then, feel then. (S19)*Flashing her needles, glancing round about her, out of the window*, into the room*, at James himself**, she assured him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by her laugh, her poise, her competence (as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child), that it was real; the house was full; the garden blowing. (S20)If he put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high, not for a second should he find himself without her. (S21)*So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know*

herself by; all was so lavished and spent; and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which **the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man**, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy.

(S22) ***Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied***, he said, at last, ***looking at her with humble gratitude, restored, renewed***, that he would take a turn; he would watch the children play cricket. (S23) He went.

(S24) Immediately, **Mrs. Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself**, so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm's fairy story, while there throbbed through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation. (37-8)

Throughout *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf subverts the traditional male quest story and derides men's need to assert their power over others. The importance of Mr. Ramsay's academic work is undermined as he postures comically over his struggle to move beyond the letter Q. Mrs. Ramsay acts the role of the perfect wife, easing her husband's feelings of inadequacy with her warmth, kindness and praise. But, in addition to the drama enacted between

the couple on a discursive level within the plot, the rhythms and syntactic structure of Woolf's prose seem to work to enhance the stereotypes here of the masculine and feminine. The male is presented as oppressive and egocentric while the female is emotional and nurturing. As Naremore suggests, "The narrator is interested not in a report of the scene's action, but in its rhythm, in the light healing pulse of Mrs. Ramsay's sympathy contrasted to Mr. Ramsay's harsh, repeated demands for more" (132). Through the expansive and recursive rhythms of the prose which surround and refer to her, readers are drawn continually back to the image of Mrs. Ramsay with her son James, beset by Mr. Ramsay.

But while we are led through this passage to differentiate the male and female as oppressor and victim, Woolf introduces a sexual imagery which frustrates our attempt to rest comfortably with this clear and simple interpretation. Both the stylistic structure and the discursive argument of Passage D force readers to question socially constructed identities, but no definitive stance within the narrative is allowed for or taken. Through the dialogue between the sexes enacted early in the novel, Woolf criticizes the male quest story and leaves open the possibility for another ending to complete this traditional narrative. Woolf disrupts the genre of the domestic novel in *To the Lighthouse*, but she does not provide an alternative conclusion in her own work. While in "The Window" gender roles are critiqued, Woolf's novel both presents and questions its own argument. Through this ambiguity Woolf allows many interpretations of her novel to be simultaneously possible. And it is

through this openness in which meanings are neither confirmed nor dismissed, that the novel's greatest meaning resides.

Woolf's expansive style in *To the Lighthouse*, as in *Mrs Dalloway*, is marked by numerous finite adverbial and relative clauses which expand upon and qualify earlier textual claims. The following examples only begin to suggest the richness of language Woolf achieves in Passage D. The first sentence is extended by finite adverbial clauses through which Woolf inserts more and more information into her narrative: "as if all her energies were being fused into force," "quietly though she sat taking up her stocking again." The relative clause contained within the opening sentence serves a similar function, extending the utterance: "who had been sitting loosely." Woolf qualifies further and further her presentation of Mrs. Ramsay, creating for readers an increasingly detailed image of her character, while at the same time, she draws us into the expansiveness of her prose. So too the three independent finite clauses which together make up the twenty-first sentence of Passage D work to extend that sentence. If considerations of semantics were the only guides to Woolf's writing, then sentence twenty-one travels far past its first likely place of termination. But these seem to not be the only criteria for her prose as the desire to be expansive governs the choices she makes here as well. The final sentence of this passage is similarly extended through the use of the following two elaborate finite adverbial clauses: "so that she had only strength enough to move her finger in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion across the page of Grimm's fairy story," and "while there throbbled through her like a pulse in a spring . . ."

the rapture of successful creation.” Embedded within this last adverbial is the relative clause, “which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat.”

Throughout Passage D Woolf adds more information through dependent and independent finite adverbial and relative clauses which extend and expand upon utterances. However, Woolf’s creative voice is not only extensive and expansive, but as suggested, it is also highly rhythmic. Readers are constantly asked to recall earlier words, phrases and sentences whose meanings must be reinterpreted or embellished as Woolf renews or reopens textual spaces which had appeared to be closed or abandoned. Additionally, language in *To the Lighthouse* builds through accretion: readers seem to move rapidly forward to answers promised in the text. But often the conclusions implied by the narrative are nonexistent and we arrive at the end of elaborately rhythmic passages only at ambiguous statements or figures of speech. Through these acts of style Woolf corrupts the linear progression of *To the Lighthouse*. Instead of progressing forwards through the narrative we are returned to previous utterances which Woolf restarts again and again. And while at times we seem to be moving rapidly to answers, the ambiguity of Woolf’s text only takes us back to the questions articulated earlier within the novel.

Woolf gathers together groups of subjectless nonfinite clauses to create particularly striking rhythmic movements in her novel. And while Mitchell Leaska suggests that the use of verbals [subjectless nonfinite verb phrases] produces a language which is less structured and therefore more difficult to follow (132), these

clauses do much more than merely present a complex syntactic structure. Woolf uses this stylistic feature in Passage D, and throughout *To the Lighthouse*, to momentarily suspend readers within her text and to create recursive narrative rhythms. Here this feature works to refer readers back again and again to Mrs. Ramsay. In its opening sentence, Woolf summons five subjectless nonfinite clauses to serve this goal: “folding her son in her arm,” “half turning,” “looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force,” “burning and illuminating,” and “taking up her stocking again.” Through this syntactic device Woolf slows our progression through her text. We focus attention upon the sentence’s opening as we must return in our reading, on some level, to the initial parent clause and its subject, “Mrs. Ramsay,” to complete these clauses. The agent in this sentence is that of the mother to whom the passage frequently returns. Woolf embellishes her description of Mrs. Ramsay; she surrounds this character with a surplus of words which all reflect back upon the sentence’s initial place of departure. In contrast, Mr. Ramsay enters the text at the sentence’s end, sterile and barren, demanding reassurance and sustenance from the fecund female. Mr. Ramsay’s demands for sympathy truncate the rhythmic and metaphorical descriptions of his wife knitting and reading to her son which predominate and create in this sentence its elaborate movements.

In sentences two to eight inclusively, Mrs. Ramsay attempts to circumvent her husband’s demands that she expose herself to his insecurities and take on the role of quieting his doubts and supporting him. However, in sentence nine, Mr. Ramsay’s need

supersedes her hesitation. But even though Mr. Ramsay holds the stage at this point in the dialogue, the rich rhythmic prose through which Mrs. Ramsay's healing power in sentence nine is described portrays her energy, not his. Elaborate clauses in the latter part of sentence nine act as responses to the needs and demands Mr. Ramsay expressed at the sentence's beginning. She responds to her husband's demands with a strength and healing power that he seems incapable of providing for himself.

In sentence nine, Woolf again draws attention to Mr. Ramsay's need for sympathy through the use of a cleft sentence which begins, "It was sympathy he wanted." This sentence construction selects and emphasizes the object of Mr. Ramsay's need, inflecting the sentence for stress on *sympathy*. After this emphatic, definitive beginning, the sentence proceeds to evoke for readers the healing pulse of Mrs. Ramsay's kindness to her husband by choosing to describe her power through a language that is cumulative and suggestive, rather than emphatic and definitive. Readers advance upon a phrase or clause, and then recede as we encounter a much shorter passage, and then advance upon a longer phrase again. This rhythmic pattern, and the simultaneous recursive rhythms evoked through apposition, subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, and the reiterations of Mr. Ramsay's demands upon his wife, continually present Mrs. Ramsay to readers as an endless source of sympathy, compassion and understanding.

The recursive and rhythmic energy of the prose supports the apparent discursive argument of this passage. The narrative elicits our condemnation for the demanding male and our sympathy and pity

for the generous and selfless female. To convey the elaborate rhythms of sentence nine in which readers are returned again and again to Mr. Ramsay's demands upon his wife articulated at the opening of the sentence, we might suggest the following representation, which diagrams the rising and falling rhythms of its language:

- [1](a)to be assured of his genius first of all
- (b)and then
- (c)to be taken within the circle of life,
- (d)warmed and soothed,
- (e)to have
- (f)his senses restored to him,
- (g)his barrenness made fertile,
- (h)all the rooms of the house made full of life
- (i)behind the drawing-room the kitchen,
- (j)above the kitchen the bedrooms,
- (k)and beyond them the nurseries.

This elaborate clause above (1) is a subjectless nonfinite verb phrase which expands upon and enriches the meaning of the opening clause to the sentence ("It was sympathy he wanted") and takes readers back to its parent subject, "he." The first six phrases, a to f, move back and forth between long phrases in which Mr. Ramsay's demands upon his wife are given shape, and then, to a momentary reprieve in the language in which short phrases temporarily alleviate readers from this character's needs. These shorter phrases, b and e, function on a grammatical level to connect the separate longer phrases of a, c, and d in which Mr. Ramsay's needs are emphasized. Longer phrases in this structure act almost as Mrs. Ramsay's responses to Mr. Ramsay. Through the appositional structure of phrases f to k Woolf builds into her language recursions.

These rhythms seem to work to support and enrich the themes of "The Window" by differentiating Mrs. Ramsay from her husband on a deep sensate level for readers. While these short conjunctive phrases, when juxtaposed against longer more evocative statements, work to produce a simple back and forth rhythm in her prose which is easy to read and not particularly intense, the appositional structure of phrases f to k create within the language a rhythm which builds in intensity as Mr. Ramsay's demands are piled, metaphorically, one on top of the other without interruption. Then, the final two independent clauses of the sentence, "(2)they must be furnished with life, (3)they must be filled with life," act in apposition to each other and to the last three locative phrases, (i, j, and k above) and the nonfinite clause (h) which is embedded within this appositional structure (1), which itself in apposition to the series of phrases (a), (c), (d), (f) and (g). All of these clauses take readers back to Mr. Ramsay's need for sympathy while Mrs. Ramsay's healing powers, her warmth and her love, fill out the rhythms of this sentence through apposition and elaboration. The effects of her benevolence towards her husband expand here from its initial form of offering him reassurance and supporting his ego, to metaphorically filling the rooms of the house with life and love. Arranged appositionally, the final two clauses (2 and 3 above) take readers back to previously encountered textual spaces, but as well, over (1), the long subjectless nonfinite clause in which much of the stylistic richness of the sentence resides, that is where the most rhythmic parts of the sentence appear. The building and cumulating rhythms displayed in this sentence further emphasize Mr. Ramsay's

need for sympathy and the object of that need which the sentence's opening articulates and stresses.

While the subjectless nonfinite verb phrase of sentence nine (1) refers readers to Mr. Ramsay as the parent subject, other clauses of this type which open sentences and ask readers to look forward in the text for their missing subject, refer either to Mrs. Ramsay or to her son. In sentences fourteen and nineteen, "Flashing her needles," points to Mrs. Ramsay; the opening clause of the sixteenth sentence, "Standing between her knees," leads readers forwards to its subject, James. The subjectless verbless nonfinite clauses of sentence fourteen, "confident" and "upright" further suspend readers within this sentence. In this particular instance readers must hold three clauses in mind as we wait for the appearance of our subject, "she," and the parent verb phrase "created" to complete their meanings. So too the subjectless nonfinite clause which follows the opening phrase (above) in sentence nineteen, "glancing round about her," and then the three subjectless verbless nonfinite clauses which follow, "(1)out of the window, (2)into the room, (3)at James himself," delay our progression through the sentence as they demand we hold each in memory until the appearance of their subject and/or verb can complete the meaning of each clause. That these clauses are often used to describe the actions of children or women supports our suggestion that Woolf reserves much of the syntactic richness of Passage D for the feminine; that is, Woolf gives voice to those whom we might expect to be marginal within a traditional narrative about a famous male philosopher. However, it is not that these clauses are in any way inherently feminine, but

rather that Woolf arranges these syntactical items within a particular context of narrative events and stylistic features, such as apposition, to create a recursive and rhythmic narrative voice which surrounds and presents the feminine experience of the world in this passage.

It is not until the end of the passage, in sentence twenty-two, that subjectless nonfinite verb phrases are again used to describe Mr. Ramsay. These clauses for whom Mr. Ramsay acts as subject are as follows: "Filled with her words like a child who drops off satisfied," "looking at her with humble gratitude," "restored," and "renewed." But, even though here Mr. Ramsay acts as the parent subject to which readers are returned, these clauses all still emphasize Mrs. Ramsay's soothing and healing actions upon her husband. Mr. Ramsay is "restored" and "renewed" within the narrative. However, he experiences this change, not through his own actions or merit, but rather through the praises and reassurances bestowed upon him by his wife. Indeed, it seems that by her very presence she imparts to her husband the calmness and confidence that he lacks as much of the narrative event expressed in Passage D is composed of an unspoken dialogue between the married couple.

As elsewhere in her novels, in Passage D Woolf gathers together clusters of subjectless nonfinite clauses which act as a rich resource for building recursions and rhythms into her language. Here these structures tend to be associated with descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay as Woolf uses the stylistic properties of her prose to support her characterization of husband and wife, and thereby to deliver a critique of gender roles and relations. In Passage D Woolf

governs our judgements of her characters through the discursive arguments of the plot and the tendency for the language in which each is presented to adhere to a certain pattern. Sympathy is elicited for Mrs. Ramsay whom the author presents through a rich and elaborate prose. Conversely, Mr. Ramsay tends to be allocated to more sparse and less rhythmically elaborate textual spaces. In this particular passage, the author uses language to deliver an implicit condemnation of Mr. Ramsay.

Additionally, as we have already seen, Woolf uses appositional structures to generate rhythms, uncertainties and recursions in her prose. These stylistic devices are used to elaborate upon and to deepen readers' understanding of preceding lexical items. And again, rather than working to clarify meaning as we might expect, in *Mrs Dalloway* appositives work to reinforce earlier narrative ambiguities. In Passage D of *To the Lighthouse* Woolf exploits appositions in an even more emphatically patterned way, assigning them to the service of gender issues. Most commonly appearing as noun phrases in the post modifying position, appositives are here used to affirm the contrast between Mr. Ramsay's egotism and Mrs. Ramsay's abundant love and fertility. The appositives which refer to each partner guide readers to condemn Mr. Ramsay and to praise his wife. Mrs. Ramsay is described as pouring into the air [S1]"(1)a rain of energy, (2)a column of spray [1 and 2 are appositives in this clause and the one which follows]." Similarly she is described as [S1]"(1)this delicious fecundity, (2)this fountain and spray of life." And even the physical descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay, after all her energy has been spent on her efforts to support and soothe her

husband, emphasize her beauty. The narrator depicts Mrs. Ramsay's exhaustion as the petals of a flower closing in upon one another: she seemed [the following clauses all appear in S24] "to fold herself together," "one petal closed in another," and "the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself." These three appositional noun phrases work to reword and deepen the metaphorical descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay and to further entrench her place within the narrative.

Similarly, Mr. Ramsay is described according to several repeating images whose appositional structure emphasizes his place within the text. In sentence sixteen he is referred to as "the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male." The appositional second noun phrase of this sentence rewords and embellishes the meaning of the first. Later, in the twenty first sentence of Passage D, three appositions are aligned to further heighten and emphasize the description of Mr. Ramsay as selfish and brutish: "the beak of brass," "the arid scimitar of his father," and "the egotistical man." The poetic device of alliteration works alongside these descriptions to present Mr. Ramsay as an insufferable and egotistical man. The hard consonant *b* repeats in the descriptions of him throughout this passage, suggesting Mr. Ramsay to be odious and hateful: "*beak of brass,*" and "*barren and bare* [emphasis added]."

But even as we detect this syntactic design, through which Mr. Ramsay is presented as egocentric and sterile in comparison to his loving and nurturing wife, its definitive meaning recedes and withdraws into the confusion of the imagery that constitutes the appositives themselves. As Minow-Pinkney explains, the sexual imagery of this passage is highly confused:

Different aspects of the male sexual act are split apart and attributed to characters of the opposite sex. Ramsay retains only its physically penetrative side, that aspect which, when isolated, can be seen as brute violence forcing its way into the delicate membranes of the female. The more 'positive' side of the male sexuality, the ejaculation of fertilizing seed deep within the female is projected onto Mrs. Ramsay. (90)

Woolf makes problematic the separation of masculine and feminine inscribed so deeply within the syntax of Passage D. The imagery through which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are presented is so blatantly inaccurate that the characterizations of each are effectively undermined or at the very least called into question. Woolf exaggerates the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, portraying their differences by withholding language for one, and creating a surplus of rhythmic language for the other. But even as we start to formulate an interpretation of *To the Lighthouse* in regard to the gender issues at the fore of "The Window," the author implies that her own presentation is perhaps not to be trusted. It is not only that we must read Woolf's characters with the appropriate humour and irony in which her presentations are imbued, but also that the very style of her novel complicates and competes with her apparent intent to critique the egocentric male and to venerate the selfless female.

Initially Woolf may appear to make of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay icons of their gender in a forthright feminist critique of sex roles and women's oppression within patriarchy. However, her narrative is finally more complex. Through Passage D Woolf questions stereotyped gender identities and the rigid roles within which her

society seemed to expect people to live. And while in *To the Lighthouse* Woolf's critique of patriarchy is important, the ambiguity which the confused sexual imagery of "The Window" introduces into the work perhaps is even more fundamental to our reading of her novel. That is, while the portraits Woolf creates and inscribes into the language of Passage D of the masculine and feminine genders offer a social critique which the text seems to support, these characterizations recede from their positions within the narrative as valid through the very language and imagery which allows for our initial judgement. It is the very extreme exaggerations of good and evil in Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay and the displacing of sexual imagery which leads readers to question the character portraits Woolf provides. And while this passage is presented through James, the son devoted to his mother, elsewhere in "The Window" similar comic and disparaging portrayals of Mr. Ramsay contrast with depictions of his wife. Here I refer to, for example, the comic portrayals of Mr. Ramsay as he strides across the lawn yelling, "Stormed at with shot and shell" (17) and "Someone had blundered" (18), and his exaggeration of his difficulties which the narrator describes in free indirect discourse through a language which mimics that of the Bible: "He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered" (31). Mrs. Ramsay is shown repeatedly denying reality so as not to upset her husband as when she hides the bill for the greenhouse (60). Though of course we are also led to question the motivations behind Mrs. Ramsay's actions, superficially at least she is shown to be self-sacrificing.

Therefore, it seems that in this first section of *To the Lighthouse*, while Woolf critiques gender roles, she also moves away from a definitive stance by leading readers to question her own portrayal of the sexes. As soon as readers attach specific and definitive meanings to Woolf's prose, drawing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay into the realm of the symbolic as we seem to be led to do, at least in Passage D, the novel's language and imagery return these characters to the "wedge-shaped core of darkness," (62) that unknowable place which Mrs. Ramsay suggests to be the essential aspect of each individual. Astutely, Lily Briscoe finds her explanation of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as the archetypal husband and wife too simple: "Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches" (72).

"The Window" presents a critique of gender, but Woolf's act of undermining her own symbolic and syntactic patterns introduces a deep ambiguity into the narrative. Following this ambiguous opening then, in the next section of *To the Lighthouse*, "Time Passes," Woolf faces the absence of authority. She explores the potential for meaning given the loss of traditional values which the patriarchal structures she critiques, such as marriage and the family, embody and support. Indeed, nothingness, emptiness, and silence repeat as the major themes throughout this section of *To the Lighthouse* as "a downpouring of immense darkness" (125) begins. Emptying the summer house of its human presence, Woolf reflects through her prose its passage against the ravages of nature over ten years time. Passage E, occurring near the center of "Time Passes," articulates

nothingness, but as well, through the rhythms of this utterance, meaning.

III

Passage E: The Form is All:

(S1)So **loveliness** reigned and **stillness**, and **together** made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted; solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen*. (S2)**Loveliness** and **stillness** clasped hands in the bedroom, **and** among the shrouded jugs **and** sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, **and** the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, **rubbing**, **snuffling**, **iterating** and **reiterating** their questions-- "Will you fade? Will you perish?"--scarcely disturbed **the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity**, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain. (S3)Nothing it seemed **could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence** which, week after week, in the empty room, wove into itself **the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout**, and folded them round the house in silence.

(S4)Once only a board sprang on the landing; once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro. (S5)Then again peace descended; and the shadow wavered; light bent to its own image in adoration on the bedroom wall; and Mrs. McNab, *tearing the veil of silence with hands that stood in the washtub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle*, came **as directed** to open all windows, and dust the bedrooms. (129-30)

In "Time Passes," language seems to slow readers' progression through the text, or conversely, language builds and seems to move Woolf's readers rapidly to conclusions and answers that the text does not provide. Indeed, the movements of language seem to be "all" in Passage E as metaphorical descriptions of nothingness fill these pages and the rhythms of Woolf's prose carry readers through an apparent search for meaning. Syntactic structures which seem to be characteristic of Woolf's prose in earlier passages from *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* reappear, sending readers back into the text, slowing and delaying our movement through the text. Or we are taken over the same syntactic spaces again and again as Woolf embellishes and enhances the ambiguous meanings of abstract figures of speech. But, though ambiguity and uncertainty seem to occupy most of the narrative space in Passage E, Woolf's readers

move beyond “Time Passes” to its ending and to her final conclusion in “The Lighthouse.” Again, our complicity with this movement towards closure seems to occur through the sensations Woolf’s prose evokes in readers, rather than in the novel’s developments in character or theme.

In Passage E readers linger over and revisit words and phrases upon which Woolf elaborates in ensuing clauses and sentences. Already, “stillness,” the fifth word of our first sentence, carries readers back to “loveliness,” the second. “Together” takes us back to the opening of the first sentence in these two previous lexical items, completing their syntactic partnership as a compound subjects. “Loveliness” repeats twice more, later in sentence one and also in two. Each time it appears readers’ memories of its earlier appearance in the text are renewed. Language seems to slow down here in Passage E as we must return to earlier spaces in the narrative to complete meaning within the text: when we encounter the second verb we must travel back in the sentence to recover the subject to which it refers and in this way Woolf postpones the completion of the meaning of these phrases.

As with many of the sentences in *Mrs Dalloway*, little information is established or confirmed within this passage; it is as if concentric circles of ambiguous words arrange themselves around a core of enigmatic language. Meanings are elusive as Woolf describes and personifies nonmaterial concepts. The appositives, [both appear in S1] “a form from which life had parted,” and “solitary like a pool at evening,” enhance readers’ understanding of the following noun phrase which appears earlier in the first

sentence, “the shape of loveliness itself.” But Woolf never outlines this shape or form, and the appositives which emphasize and revisit the first noun phrase really only underline its semantic ambiguity. Therefore, though these noun phrases elaborate upon the first, they do not clarify our understanding of Woolf’s text. Instead, Woolf uses these appositives to emphasize the ambiguity of the initial construct while the rhythm back into the passage works to slow or delay readers’ progression through the novel.

The recursive narrative rhythms created through the appositions and repetitions within this first sentence are further augmented by four subjectless nonfinite verb phrases which appear here. The parent clause of “solitary like a pool at evening” in this sentence is followed by a series of subjectless nonfinite clauses all of which depend upon the earlier clause to complete their meanings: [all appear in S1] “far distant,” “seen from a train window,” “vanishing so quickly that the pool pale in the evening is scarcely robbed of its solitude,” and “though once seen.” [“Far distant” the first clause in this group is a subjectless and verbless nonfinite verb phrase, and thus it refers readers back to both elements of its parent clause.] The recursive movement of language which Woolf establishes early on in this passage is developed and advanced through this rich cluster of subjectless nonfinite verb phrases. These rhythmic movements continue to build and to transform throughout the remainder of this passage; with the opening of the second sentence, “[l]oveliness and stillness,” we are taken back to the very opening of the first sentence and the beginning of Passage E

Furthermore, Woolf orders words and phrases in her sentences, one upon the other, building the rhythmic structure of her prose through accretion. As in the elaborate ambiguities and rhythms found in *Mrs Dalloway*, in Passage E of *To the Lighthouse* these rhythms are dominant and elaborate. Narrative movements here tend to overwhelm the ambiguities of Woolf's prose, becoming the meaning of the work as they open her novel up to more and more interpretations. Accretion is elaborate, baroque, and extravagant in this passage. And while intricate variations of this syntactic structure all produce slightly different rhythms within Woolf's language, they all build towards and convey only deeper and deeper ambiguities. Again, Woolf's prose frustrates readers' expectations of conclusions or answers. The gathering and building rhythms in these sentences suggest that language is moving towards an important end. But, as readers discover within the first sentence of Passage E, the form is all: there are no definitive answers or revelations to be discovered within this language. Instead, through her prose Woolf provides the "shape of loveliness itself." But readers do not find an explanation of this ambiguous figure of speech. Instead we can only apprehend or feel this form in the extravagant rhythms of her prose and in Woolf's cumulative and suggestive language.

Three types of accretion in Passage E can be traced, all of which are variations on this same rhythm. In the first, conjunctions link noun phrases, adding them together: [S2]"loveliness *and* stillness clasped hands in the bedroom *and* among the shrouded jugs *and* sheeted chairs . . . even the prying of the wind *and* the soft

nose of clammy sea airs [emphasis added].” Secondly, many different lexical items are linked through commas, as with the following noun phrases which build and add in meaning: [S2]“the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity,” and [S3]“the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout.” Verb phrases are similarly linked and build one upon the other in this passage: [S2]“rubbing, snuffling, iterating and reiterating,” and [S3]“could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence.” These phrases approach apposition in their arrangement, a stylistic feature which seems by now to be highly characteristic of Woolf's prose. So too the prepositional phrases of the fourth sentence present meanings which seem to accumulate and build in the passage as they are separated in the text only through the grammatical tool of the comma: “with a roar, with a rapture, as after centuries of quiescence.” Again, the arrangement of these phrases approaches an appositional structure as we seem to be trespassing very similar semantic grounds for each; their meanings come closer and closer together and become less and less distinct as more phrases are added to these groups. And finally, the independent finite clauses of the fourth and fifth sentences in Passage E build the rhythms of this passage through accretion, as do the smaller lexical items. These larger clausal items not only add to each other, but they are placed in an appositional structure through which their meanings are enhanced and deepened, until we hardly know which it is that actually happened: [S4]“(a)Once only a board sprang on the landing; (b)once in the middle of the night . . . a rock rends itself from the

mountain and hurtles crashing in the valley, (c)one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro,” and in the fifth sentence, “(d)Then again peace descended; (e)and the shadow wavered; (f)light bent to its own image in adoration on the bedroom wall.” Woolf’s appositional arrangement in the fourth sentence of this passage is particularly striking (clauses a, b, and c). Mrs. Ramsay’s shawl swaying in the empty room is given the same narratological weight as is the movement of a board on the house and the falling of a rock which has been stationary for thousands of years. In this way, Woolf forces readers to address the insignificance of human life, or conversely perhaps to celebrate our significance in the universe. Woolf resists adopting a position of authority within her novel as the narrative leaves open, at the very least, these two possible and opposite perspectives. Human life either fades into comparative insignificance against the backdrop provided of the larger cosmos, or we are raised to a higher level through these juxtapositions in which individual acts are shown to be a part of a greater order. The narrative does not offer any resolution to these opposing readings. Instead, Woolf embellishes the rhythms of her prose to merge meanings which remain in the text steadfastly ambiguous and uncertain. Overwhelmed by the movements in language and the wealth of possible meanings Woolf insists upon keeping open in the text, readers are conditioned to accept the ambiguous and tentative ending upon which the novel concludes.

Woolf empties the Ramsay summer house of its human occupants and marginalizes the lives of the characters built and developed over the first section of the novel. This act of removing a

human presence from the text continues to the very end of Passage E. The agentless passive “as directed” which appears in its final sentence continues on a syntactic level to empty the house of people or to at least deny the intentions of those who order Mrs. McNab to rescue the house from its imminent demise. Furthermore, while in “Time Passes” Woolf presents a world devoid of all social norms, save the cleaning lady who prepares us for the apparent conclusiveness of *To the Lighthouse*, even the rescue she enacts must be regarded as somewhat ambiguous. The subjectless nonfinite verb phrases of the fifth and final sentence in Passage E, “tearing the veil of silence with hands that stood in the washtub,” and “grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle,” slow readers down, delaying our completion of the passage. Readers must return to the parent subject “Mrs. McNab” to finish the meaning of these clauses. Therefore, even as Woolf retreats from the enigmatic theme of nothingness in this passage, the rhythms of language which work to assert and to emphasize the deep ambiguity of meaning in her prose persist, carrying readers back into the text. And, as well, Woolf’s choice of highly unusual phrases with which to articulate this rescue makes the value of Mrs. McNab’s act questionable and ambiguous. It seems that even some of the most straightforward events in Woolf’s novel become infected with the ambiguity of her prose as here the certainty of the restoration of the house is undermined.

In the final section of the novel, “The Lighthouse,” the plot apparently moves to its final closure and resolution. At last, the family completes the journey to the lighthouse initiated in the

opening words of the novel, and Lily Briscoe finishes the painting which has been in progress throughout Woolf's work. However, Passage F, situated near the close of the novel, also articulates at its core a highly ambiguous vision. Woolf frustrates her readers' expectations of answers as her prose resists our attempts to attach any one particular meaning to it. At the moment when readers are closest to gaining an understanding of the meaning to which the entire novel seems to work, Woolf's prose remains obtuse. Language in Passage F enhances and enriches, but never elucidates or explains, the enigma of the vision it expresses.

IV

Passage F: Completions?:

(S1) **A curious notion came to her that he did after all hear the things she could not say.** (S2) He was an inscrutable old man, with the yellow stain on his beard, and his poetry, and his puzzles, *sailing serenely through a world which satisfied all his wants*, so that she thought he had only to put down his hand where he lay on the lawn to fish up anything he wanted. (S3) She looked at her picture. (S4) That would have been his answer, presumably-- how "you" and "I" and "she" pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. (S5) Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa; yet even so, even of a

picture like that it was true. (S6)One might say, even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, **but of what it attempted, that it “remained forever,”** she was going to say, or **for the words spoken sounded even to herself, too boastful, to hint, wordlessly;** when, *looking at the picture*, she was surprised to find that she did not see it.

(S7)Her eyes were full of a hot liquid (she did not think of tears at first) which, *without disturbing the firmness of her lips*, made the air thick, rolled down her cheeks.

(S8)She had perfect control of herself--Oh Yes!--in every other way. (S9)Was she crying then for Mrs. Ramsay, *without being aware of any unhappiness?* (S10)She addressed old Mr.

Carmichael again. (S11)What was it then? (S12)What did it mean? (S13)Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? (S14)Was there no safety? (S15)No learning by heart the ways of the world? (S16)No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? (S17)Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?--startling, unexpected, unknown?

(S18)For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough

Mrs. Ramsay would return. (S19)“Mrs. Ramsay!” she said aloud, “Mrs. Ramsay!” (S20)**The tears ran down her face.** (179-80)

Passage F seems to be pivotal to the conclusion of *To the Lighthouse*. The epiphany Lily experiences here enables her to complete her painting, an act upon which the close of the novel seems to depend. In her interior monologue, Lily attempts to transform her troubled relationship with the deceased Mrs. Ramsay from one of pain and denial into a creative act of personal healing. But while Lily does change within this passage, it is hardly through an act of healing. Passage F articulates a highly problematic and ambiguous personal victory for the artist. Woolf leaves essential issues within this passage unresolved, but, nevertheless, she moves the novel to its apparent closure.

Three major narrative issues seem to surround Lily’s struggle to move beyond Mrs. Ramsay’s death: her “desire” for Mrs. Ramsay, her difficulty in accepting Mrs. Ramsay’s death, and her feeling that she can somehow make Mrs. Ramsay return. This last feeling is articulated in sentence eighteen of Passage F when Lily suggests that “if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return.” Lily remains in denial over the death of Mrs. Ramsay, completely unable to let her go. She insists upon believing that on some level she can bring Mrs. Ramsay back: “And now slowly the pain of the want, the bitter anger . . . lessened; and of their anguish left, as antidote, a relief that was balm in itself, and also, but more mysteriously, a sense of some one there, of Mrs. Ramsay” (181).

But while the novel does not provide the discursive grounds with which to claim that the hurt and confusion Lily articulates is ever resolved, or that she learns to accept Mrs. Ramsay's death, through the manoeuvres of language in this passage, its syntax, Woolf's novel moves to its formal completion and guides readers through these movements to accept this tentative closure. In fact, after the apparent epiphany which Lily experiences in Passage F, she is able to accept Mr. Ramsay as a part of her aesthetic vision and complete her painting. Lily includes him in her work, discovering in the brown spot on her canvas the boat in which the Ramsays travel to the lighthouse (182). She artistically renders their arrival at their destination, bringing the novel to its end as her painting encloses and includes the family's journey. But, at the center of this passage, as readers move to the epiphany through which Lily expresses her grief over Mrs. Ramsay's death and then has her vision, we find only ambiguities. Though most readers accept Lily's vision and the sense of harmony upon which the novel closes, the language through which this apparent closure is articulated at the novel's end is ambiguous: "With a sudden intensity, *as if* she saw clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished [emphasis added]" (209).

As in many of the other passages examined from Woolf's fiction, the epiphany held within Passage F articulates a highly enigmatic vision. This enigma seems to rest at the core of *To the Lighthouse*. Lily faces her own mortality as she begins to express her grief for Mrs. Ramsay in the following three appositives of sentence four: "(a)how 'you' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish;

(b)nothing stays; all changes; (c)but not words, not paint”.

Asserting the brevity of our lives and the permanence of art, Lily finds purpose within her painting and renews her search for her aesthetic vision which is to be realized through this passage. But, instead of describing the contents of the vision through which this process may occur, Lily only asks more questions in sentences eleven through seventeen. The questions posed arouse readers’ expectations that answers will follow these appositives:

[S11]“What was it then? [S12]What did it mean?” But, instead of fulfilling that expectation, a group of sentences follow in which more questions are posed and reviewed. As well, in sentences eleven and twelve, “it” acts as a proform whose antecedent is highly elusive and unclear. Woolf never gives us an answer here, but again, she leaves her text open to many interpretations. “It” could hold whole surges of preceding words in this passage, or equally possible, none of them. It could encapsulate the entire novelistic utterance to this point, or rather direct us outside the text to some other meanings. So too the next sentence is composed of obtuse and ambiguous figures of speech: [S13]“Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp?” Working through Lily in the elliptical statements of sentence thirteen, the narrative seems to ask profound questions. However, Woolf renders the meanings of these queries highly ambiguous. And while we are following this character along a path of existential questioning, we may be led to feel as if we are approaching an important revelation in the novel. However, this disclosure does not happen. Although Woolf’s character, and therefore her readers, do not find answers,

the rhythms of language lead us to feel as if we have reached a form of resolution and coax us into accepting Lily's vision.²⁰

The next three sentences continue to circle around, through elliptical questions and modalized statements, the core of Lily's vision. Lily asks herself, and Mr. Carmichael with whom she seems to share an understanding though they do not speak directly here, what are the limits to life and to our existence: [S14]"(a)Was there no safety? [S15](b)No learning by heart the ways of the world? [S16](c)No guide, no shelter, (d)but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?" These questions all travel the same terrain as Lily deliberates on the most profound problems regarding human existence. The clauses in these sentences, a, b, and c are appositions. This is a structure we have seen Woolf often employs to create rhythms in her prose and to take readers back over again and again the same narrative ground. As we found in earlier passages, this feature tends to produce the effect of merging different meanings together. But equally ambiguous to the questions posed within the narrative is the means through which the epiphany in this section is reached. Indeed, Passage F seems to move in sentence sixteen to the start of its climax as "all was miracle." Then, in the next sentence, we move as if answers to the questions raised in the narrative have been delivered: [S17]"Could it be, even

²⁰The recursive rhythms created in this passage are similar to those created in the other passages of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* through appositional structures and subjectless nonfinite verb phrases (or subjectless verbless nonfinite clauses). At this point in my thesis I address more the gap in Lily's reasoning which seems to be both at the core of this passage and at the core of the resolution this novel enacts. Therefore all instances of apposition are not addressed but are highlighted in the syntactical representation of these features in Passage F.

for elderly people, that *this* was life?--startling, unexpected, unknown? [emphasis added]" As elsewhere, Woolf chooses a construction which renders her language enigmatic. "This" ambiguously points both back to the leap of sentence sixteen and forward to its own appositives as articulated at the end of this sentence in "startling, unexpected, unknown." And, even more so in the next sentence we find ourselves past the vision as Lily feels empowered to demand the return of Mrs. Ramsay and the answers to the deepest questions regarding human life: "why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable." "It" repeats again, as in sentences eleven and twelve, as a highly ambiguous proform in which Woolf seems to be holding the answers of this passage. Its completely unclear antecedent reveals the enigma at the core of this passage. But perhaps it is through this stylistic manoeuvre that Woolf is able to make readers feel as if we have answers to the questions of her narrative, though in fact we do not. The use of this very general but vague term holds open the space through which the narrative can move forward; the language of the passage acts as if the antecedent to "it" were clear.

Sentence eighteen ends in the appositives through which Lily expresses her love for Mrs. Ramsay and makes an impassioned request that she return. In the rhythms of language created through these four ambiguous figures of speech, readers move from highly enigmatic statements to Lily's refusal to accept the death of Mrs. Ramsay: "(a)beauty would roll itself up; (b)the space would fill; (c)those empty flourishes would form into shape; (d)if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return." Readers are taken through

these clauses to the conclusion of this scene; Lily expresses her desire for Mrs. Ramsay and then she completes her painting. In the process of articulating Lily Briscoe's confused feelings for Mrs. Ramsay and her deep grief for her death, the narrative leads readers to its completion. Again, the ending the novel offers is only a sensation of completion accomplished through style, rather than a resolution to the discursive issues of the work.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the linguistic conditions under which readers construct meaning in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Many stylistic features appear again and again in Woolf's prose: apposition, subjectless nonfinite verb phrases, patterns of accretion, and the expansive rhythms of her language. These grammatical tools seem to create in Woolf's readers overwhelming feelings of being suspended within her prose and being delayed from finishing particular passages or sentences. We move back again and again in her novels to earlier textual spaces whose meanings, once apparently abandoned, are restarted and elaborated upon, or enhanced while not clearly explained. But despite the ambiguous and enigmatic resolutions to thematic issues throughout both novels and in their endings, the stylistic patterns of Woolf's prose coax most readers into accepting the harmony and apparent completion of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

In addition to the study of the conditions under which readers construct meaning from Woolf's prose, these features also help to explain the conditions of the performance itself, that is the writer's experience of creation. Through these stylistic patterns of ambiguity and uncertainty it seems that Woolf enacts a style of writing in which she is able to work through meanings, deferring, delaying, and suspending many possibilities within a matrix of language, not to evade, but to summon and then retire these various

conjectures, so as to be never trapped or captured again in a single, infallible proposition.

Writing for Woolf seems to have been a way in which she was able to explore a multiplicity of meanings, to make connections between many different ideas, but to never be forced into one perspective. She never insists upon any one meaning, but guides readers ever further through her fiction to greater signification.

In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf articulates the personal meaning the performance of writing had for her. Woolf explains,

It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together.

(72)

Woolf moves towards this wholeness of vision in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway* through the cumulating rhythms of these novels, through the creation of a language which is highly suggestive, enigmatic, and incomplete. It is in this way, through the ability of Woolf's language to hold many meanings, to express again and again a wide variety of different possibilities but to never be tied down, that her novels express the author's vision of inclusion and multiplicity and draw readers to their close.

Through Woolf's performance, readers are taken with her to the "rapture" her novels evoke. That is, Woolf's writing, in its rhythms, elicits our deepest responses as it creates in us feelings of fullness and resolution that are physical, bodily sensations, not

purely intellectual responses at a conscious level. For Woolf, as she describes above, this state seems to be evoked through the writing itself. Though our responses to *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* work on a cognitive level, our deepest apprehension of the meaning to which both of these novels work seems to be made possible through the feelings her ambiguous and enigmatic language with its many diverse rhythms evokes in us.

Through the playing out of many different ideas within these novels, and the continual acts of returning to them, retiring and then restarting words, phrases, and sentences which hold suggestions and possibilities, we reach a state at the end of these novels in which, though meanings seem able to continue expanding forever, our narrative energy is exhausted. The resolutions Woolf enacts within specific passages, or in her final narrative conclusions, work through the sensation that she describes as rapture. And again, as in the feelings of harmony and completion which Woolf's enigmatic endings elicit from most readers in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, here this tentative and ambiguous description of the sense of rapture, of Woolf's discovery of 'it' which finds an artistic form in her fiction, seems to encapsulate readers' experiences of completion in her work.

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