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“Life Stand Still Here”
The Prone “I” and Deixis in the Work of Virginia Woolf

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Abbreviations

- OBI *On Being Ill*
- JR *Jacobs Room*
- ROO *A Room of One's Own*
- TL *To The Lighthouse*
- D *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (5 Volumes)
- L *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* (6 Volumes)
- LM *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Hélène Cixous,

Introduction

“But words have been used too often; touched and turned, and left exposed to the dust of the street. The words we seek hang close to the tree. We come at dawn and find them sweet beneath the leaf.”

Jacob’s Room, 128

The question posed to Virginia Woolf and her Modernist contemporaries was how to invigorate writing. The English language, poetry and prose, had grown stale in their hands. Their world had been rocked by cataclysmic change, as Woolf famously write, “On or about December 1910, human character changed” (*Mr. Bennett*, 4). These artists were charged with the task of writing this new human character, of capturing the urban experience, of writing life after the war. They had to reinvigorate these dusty and overused words and allow them to say more, to say something other than what they had said before. This task was undertaken by a radical re-imagination of narrative time, of character, of the self, of how language could be used.

While this describes the general revolt of modernism it must be understood specifically in regards to the work of Virginia Woolf as a revolt against the diverse and complex structures of the patriarchy. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney writes in his introduction to his book on subjectivity in Woolf, “For Woolf, the feminist and modernist aesthetics converge, at least initially, in this attempt to challenge phallogocentrism” (Minow-Pinkney 5).

Woolf’s modernist project is a feminist one and should be understood as such. While there is no denying her rightful place as a pre-eminent figure of the British literary scene at this time, she should not be type cast as the suicidal, sexually

experimental member of Bloomsbury group, the token female among the male modernist greats. Indeed, much of the scholarship on Woolf has grouped her in with the other experimental writers of this era, even subordinating to these male greats. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, in use up until the early 2000's, listed her among these figures calling her, along with E.M. Forester "brilliant minor figures" of the modernist age (Abrams 1756).¹

I feel this canonical placement does a disservice to Woolf's work. While it is irresponsible to overlook Woolf as a woman, it also irresponsible to over look "the woman" in Woolf's work. She writes from her position outside, she does not belong in the hierarchy; the cannon cannot hold her. Woolf's experimental project, similar in so many ways to that of her male contemporaries, it without a doubt also a feminine project, one concerned at its core with issues of gender and its relation to the male mode of knowing.

Thus, while Woolf is frustrated, like many of her contemporaries, with novelistic time she, unlike many of her male counterparts, locates this convention in a logocentric male literary tradition. She thinks that the conventional narration, "the appalling narrative business of the realist," as she writes in 1930, has "left practically everything out" (D3, 209). By contrast she wants to include it all, the whole moment. She seeks to write what is left out by plot, the moments, its sensations and rhythms, that which exceeds language. This project undertaken, I argue, in part by Woolf's use deixis. Woolf's writing is replete with words such as 'this' 'here' and 'now' and they play an important role in her re-imagination of narrative time.

¹ This citation was given to me by Heesok Chang from his research for his project *The Modernist Handbook*

I also argue that Woolf's drive to "write the moment" by use of deixis is ultimately an act of deconstruction of the transcendental ego. Working within the tradition of language to which she is heir, Woolf disrupts the male, upright "I", putting it at the mercy time and space. As Howard Harper examines his introduction to his book, *Between Language and Silence*, Woolf's reimagination of the novel in terms of consciousness, of the search for consciousness of the state of being intent upon something (employing Husserl), is a radical break with the conventions of the novel, that demonstrates, "Meaning is not something inherent, or at least self-evident, in the given world; rather, it is something to be discovered, achieved, wrested from the struggle with the protean phenomenal world" (Harper 3).

Woolf thus fleshes out an alternative "I" in a posture of receptivity, which I argue, through both Woolf's non-fiction the work of Hélène Cixous, must be understood as the position of the "female." I seek to expose how Woolf's female alternative to the male "I" is a position of openness to the Other and a gesture toward unsaid that pushes upon the boundaries of language as a signifying process.

In order to best engage with Woolf's feminism and the complex phenomena of deixis as it appears in her work, much of theory supporting this thesis comes from so called 'post-structuralist' writing. This is not to re-inscribe Woolf within the academic cannon but rather to put Woolf in conversation with these thinkers, to use their writings to reinvigorate hers, to destabilize, rather than codify. This is not an attempt to legitimate or elevate her work because her work as woman is always already illegitimate, female, and fugitive.

I. Trespassers in Tradition: Feminine Re-Writing in *A Room of One's Own*

“What hasn't women flown/stolen?”

Laugh of the Medusa, 887

Woolf is known for her far-sighted and lucid criticism of the patriarchy that, considering the male chauvinism that dates her male modernist contemporaries, is somewhat remarkable. The politics of Woolf's feminism is an area of scholarship in and of itself and will not be discussed as a whole here. Rather, what will be explored in particular is Woolf's understanding of the male patriarchal literary and linguistic tradition and woman's relationship both outside and within these traditions.

In her seminal feminist text, *A Room of One's Own* Woolf asks the question of how woman as disinterred and other to the literary and intellectual tradition can come to language in writing. She sets out by thinking of “the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer...” (24). She describes the difficulty that female writers face when they come to language, “when they came to set their thoughts on paper—that is that they had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help” (75). Excluded from the structures of learning, from the institutions of higher education, from the economic freedom to practice writing and scholarship, women are effectively silenced as writers. As Woolf articulates, “Indeed, since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such a lack of tradition, such a

scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously on the writing of women” (76).

She locates the inheritance of this male tradition directly in language, in the thetic organization of sentences the transcendental ‘meaning’ of words. When a woman comes to the page she finds “no common sentence ready for her use” (75). The male sentence is formed into “arcades or domes” as a book, built by men “for their own needs for their own uses” (75). This male mode of knowledge formation and writing, as informed by institutions such like Oxford that Woolf takes on specifically here, instructs and excludes at the level of syntax, in the very words.

Men, therefore, are in a position of material, intellectual and psychological advantage. Their training as men allow them both the means and self-assurance to write. She describes the experience of reading men after reading women, “It was so direct, so straightforward after the writing of women” (RO 98). The male tradition cloaks one in self-assured safety, it allows one to speak as Woolf writes, as if “One had a sense of physical well-being in the presence of this well-nourished, well-educated, free mind, which had never been thwarted or opposed, but had had full liberty from birth to stretch itself in whatever way it liked” (98). This is, in brief, the basic thesis of this essay, that women cannot write because they have no been afforded the basic necessities, five hundred a year and a room of ones own. Men have these basic privileges, along with many others, which helps explains the tight male grip on intellectual and artistic production.

However, this essay offers a more complex critique than this explication of the women’s social and economic exclusion. It is couched in a multifaceted account of the limitations of this mode of knowing itself. While men’s minds are in some ways more

free, more at “full liberty” they are also in some imprisoned by the their inherited approach to learning (98). After expressing a sort of ironic relief at the “straightforward” writing of men, she qualifies, “But after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’” (98). The ego of this “I,” this most respectable position, is “honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and feeding” yet it becomes tiring (98). There is something outside and left out by this “I” as she writes, “I turned a page or two, looking for something or other” (99). The “I” places limits on what can be said, it is “boring.” As she says, “the dominance of the letter ‘I’ and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there” (99). This inheritance of the ability to say “I,” the learning, the self-assuredness, the ability to believe in what you say, is both an privilege and a limitation. It ignores ambiguity, difference, multiplicity and women, for both Woolf and post-structural feminist Hélène Cixous, are thus in a unique position to write these things. Men say ‘I,’ women say ‘But.’

This passage in which Woolf critiques the “I” is strung together by a series of “buts” continually deferring the formation of stable thesis. Woolf notes this non-male circuitousness writing, “But...I have said ‘but’ too often. One cannot go on saying ‘but.’ One just finish the sentence somehow, I rebuked myself. Shall I finish it, ‘But—I am bored!’” (99). This “but” is put in contrast by Woolf with the male “I.” She is thus, via exclusion, free to allow her sentence to build, to not posit a secure meaning.

This upright “I” is the position of the self-assured male ego that, for Woolf, a logocentrism originates, from which the structures of the patriarchy emanate and are legitimated. It is the self-assuredness of this position that allows man and his tradition to make claims to truth, these claims that exclude and deny the other, are in many ways

claims to a self. For Woolf, and for the feminist thinkers who come after her, the male social hegemony is constituted with the philosophical tradition that is produced by and for it. As Cixous writes:

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism. (*Laugh of the Medusa* 880)

This logocentric philosophical tradition that orients the entirety of so called “western” thought, is also the tradition of literature and is co-constituted with language. Language itself, as Cixous writes, is “governed by the phallus” (881). It is expressed in the architecture of sentence that do not fit a woman’s pen as Woolf describes. This teleological mode of meaning production that pervades at the very level of the syntax works to keep women out. As Cixous writes, philosophical logocentrism has been used to “create a foundation (to found and fund) phallogocentrism, to guarantee the masculine order a rationale equal to history itself” (*Newly Born Woman*, Anthology, 350). Women are thus structurally excluded from the rationale to maintain the masculine order.

Woman as Trespasser

However, by the same token that men are constrained by their inheritance, women, as Other to this tradition, are in some ways unbound by this outsider status. Indeed, images of freedom, of wandering, of looseness characterize Woolf’s descriptions female exclusion.

A Room of One’s Own opens with the speaker strolling across the quadrangles of Oxbridge contemplating the topic, “Women and Fiction,” when a beadle shoos her from

the grass and sends her thought, “her little fish,” “into hiding” (6). She is an illegal fugitive upon the lawns of Oxbridge and in the patriarchal tradition of learning. However, when she is turned from the lawn she is paradoxically able to wander more freely. She is freed in her position as trespasser from the trappings of this logocentrism.

As Woolf writes:

What idea it had been that had sent me so audaciously trespassing I could not now remember. The spirit of peace descended like a cloud from heaven, for if the spirit of peace dwells anywhere, it is in the courts and quadrangles of Oxbridge on a fine October morning. Strolling through those colleges past those ancient halls the roughness of the present seemed smoothed away; the body seemed contained in a miraculous glass cabinet through which no sound could penetrate, and the mind, freed from any contact with facts (unless one trespassed on the turf again), was at liberty to settle down upon whatever meditation was in harmony with the moment. (6)

In being declared ‘trespasser’ by an arbiter of the male structures of power Woolf is released from her “idea” and continues her wandering path for the whole of the essay. Paradoxically in being driven off the lawn her route becoming free, more winding, sending her to sidewalks, rooms, The British Museum, and coffee shops. This drifting and winding path recalls what Woolf writes later in response to female writing, “I must leave them, if only because they stimulate me to wander from my subject into trackless forests where I shall be lost and, very likely, devoured by wild beasts” (RO, 76). The realm into which the woman ventures, is a place where one can be lost, where the assurances of male tradition are removed, where one is exposed to the wholly other in ones self and is outlaw to the structures of power.

This position of the female is other to the thetic posture of the “I” is learnt at the institution of Oxford “where they are so adept at putting people into classes and fixing cap on their heads and letters after their names” (RO, 104). It is the search for transcendent truth, for meaning that can be extracted. This thetic orientation is satirized

by Woolf through the student in *A Room of One's Own* who, frantically copying from a scientific manual, was as Woolf writes, “extracting pure nuggets of the essential ore every ten minutes or so” (28). If one does not have this training, they might not be so self-assured emitting “grunts of satisfaction,” their “question far from being shepherded to its pen flies like a frightened flock hither and thither, helter-skelter, pursued by a whole pack of hounds” (28). Thus exclusion, what is allowed when one is excluded, is again understood as a kind of freedom. Is one more free at Oxford where they learn to categorize, to extract what they have been taught to expect are “pure nuggets” of truth? Or rather when running “hither and thither” (28)?

This image of a thought running like a “frightened flock”, like the image of Woolf being chased off the lawn by the Beadle at the outset of this essay, implies a release. While male writing is directed toward a unification of text and meaning, sign and signified, a drive to locate a center, towards the singular bodily point of pleasure, the phallus, the female is characterized by all its writers as multiple, heterogeneous. Women, here signifying that which is other to this tradition, may write outside it. As Cixous writes, “Woman un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield” (LM, 882). Woman is thus a term that comes to denote for Cixous, and I argue for Woolf, the other to the tradition of phallogocentric writing. As Cixous articulates

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. (LM 883)

Philosophico-theoretical discourse limits, the “I” closes off, saying I am not this I am this, while a practice of feminine writing does not offer such delineations. Writing outside of this tradition Woolf tries to include all: she put things together that contradict, she circles back on her own logic, she says “but” too often, she writes the sentence of a woman that need not ever end.

Although working within a sort of essentialist rhetoric the feminism of her time, Woolf calls for an opening of vision, of difference. She says, “It would be a thousand pities if women write like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only” (86). While one could read this as a claim to fundamental sexual difference, which it is in many ways, one could also read the ways in which it points to the outside, the other to, in excess of the gender dichotomy. She reaches toward things that are varied, vast, and fail to be captured by both the patriarchal tradition and, by the division of the multifarious “world” into the two sexes.

Thus, by both Cixous and Woolf, woman is called upon to write. While one is never outside the male discourse there are ways to push upon that language itself. As Derrida says in his lecture *Dissemination*, “We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.” (*Dissemination* 2).

Her recognition of the pervasiveness of a thetic orientation in the language does not leave her paralyzed but rather to push upon this orientation. She attempts to create a new aesthetic and ethics of female writing that is other to the male tradition, yet, within the English language. For Woolf, words always already in some ways betray

themselves or rather the tradition they are supposedly beholden to. As Woolf said in her only recorded interview, “Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries.” Words do not fit into neat categories they “do not live in the dictionary, they live in the mind.” Words have a life of their own, they can never be completely assimilated by a logocentric understanding. Rather they live, “Variously and strangely, much as human beings live, ranging hither and thither, falling in love, and mating together.” As Woolf says in this interview it is not “our business” to invent a “whole new language but rather “to see what we can do with the old English language as it is. How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth? That is the question.” Indeed this is the question the Woolf asks of her writing.

A Female Inheritance in A Room of Ones Own

Part of this project takes the form for Woolf in the construction of a female cannon in *A Room of Ones Own*. She offers women an alternative tradition writing, “For we think back through our mothers if we are women” (75). The women writers of the past, imaginary or real, live as specters in all female writing. Woolf creates a sort of phantasmatic tradition, never present to itself, by which future female writing may be haunted. She creates a fantasy, the narrative of Shakespeare sister, as she speculates, “I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the moor...” (48). Shakespeare’s sister never lived, but we can imagine her, indeed Woolf in this work creates a narrative of her life. This imagining is not nothing, as Woolf says, “Now my

belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroad still lies. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight.” (112). In this way Woolf creates a feminine literary tradition by way of hauntological presences.² She offers a disruption of self-presence. Shakespeare’s sister, needn’t ever be present to herself in order to be a presence of a different kind. In the paradoxical state of the specter she is neither being nor non-being.

This female tradition haunts the masculine cannon in the form of the writer named ‘anonymous.’ Anonymous marks the absence of a presence, an author that was never present to herself. As Woolf writes, “Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (49). To invoke Derrida’s “Signature, Event, Context,” the signature, the naming, that attests to the singularity of an utterance and the total self-presence in the moment of production, is absent from these works.³ “Anonymous” marks the presence of an absence, marks an alternative tradition, the unknowable Other that we cannot name. This unknowable Anon, this woman, is the source of Woolf’s tradition, as she says, “And I must consider her – this unknown woman—as the descendent of all other women whose circumstances I have been glancing at and see what she inherits of their characteristics and restrictions” (79). Woolf as she describes all “great figure[s] of the past” are both an “inheritor and an originator” (108).

² The language of “spectres” and “hauntology” are gleaned from Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* in which Derrida outlines an alternative to ontology with the concept of hauntology. To inadequately schematize for the purposes of clarity, the figure of the spectre, one that sees but cannot be seen, describes the paradoxical state of being and non-being, the way in which the present is haunted by the past.

³ This essay and Derrida’s “iterability” discussed in greater depth in Part II.

In this way Woolf creates an alternative inheritance, revealing how one is always already within language and its tradition and yet also able to select, cite and appropriate that tradition. Derrida writes:

When you inherit a language, it does not mean you are totally in it or you are passively programmed by it. To inherit means to be able to, of course, appropriate this language, to transform it, to select something. Heritage is not something you are given as a whole. It is something that calls for interpretations, selections, reactions, response and responsibility. When you take your responsibility as an heir, you are not simply subjected to the heritage, you are not called to simply conserve or keep this heritage as it is, intact. You have to make it live and survive, and that is a process - a selective and interpretive process. ("An Interview with Jacques Derrida")

Inheritance is not a passive process; one must select from the words available and take them as ones own. All words are always already in use, part of a heritage, yet always have the possibility never fully belonging to this inheritance. To cite again, "Words do live in the dictionary, they live in the mind" (Interview 1937). Words, the words from every male author, of the whole tradition, always already echo, betray themselves. She need not disregard Shakespeare rather she appropriates him, she selects from the tradition, takes out of context, calls Shakespeare androgynous, creates his female sister, never born and never dead. Woolf appropriates language, she makes it echo, reverberate through her texts.

Derrida offers a striking representation this reverberating appropriation of language and tradition in his unpacking of Narcissus and Echo. As the myth goes, Echo can only repeat the last syllables of Narcissus's words. Language's necessary ability to be repeated, its citationality, allows Echo to speak. As Derrida says, "In repeating the language of another, she signs her own love" she makes Narcissus' words speak for her, "in repeating she responds to him" (Derrida, "Narcissus and Echo"). Narcissus' intention, what he meant to say, is lost to Echo's repetition. She appropriates his

language so that it becomes hers. She, like Woolf in the male tradition, is not left speechless rather is able to speak by taking language so that the words becomes hers. While Narcissus intended these words them to mean one thing, she says them to mean another and thus they become a debt, a reverberation, an echo. There is no meaning what ones says, as Derrida says, “to speak is to not see.”

Woolf’s construction of a hauntological female tradition is like Echo’s appropriation. She does not disregard or negate, the male cannon, she simply transforms it. It would be a mistake to understand this in light of theory that speaks of killing the author. This is not Barthes’ “Death of the Author.” This position of receptivity from which writes and engages with tradition is not, in Barthes words, “the neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (Image-Music-Text, 142). Passivity is not the dead or neutral; it is an activity, receptivity as openness not as negation. This phallogocentric position says that if there is not the subject in the traditional sense, if there is no upright “I,” then there is nothing, the negative, death. The position of the female is the third, the Other to this dichotomous formulation. She is neither absent nor present, she is neither upright nor dead, rather she is alive, lays prone upon the ground but is not beneath it.

She does not, in this re-imagination of the cannon, kill her predecessors. It would be a mistake to read this as an example of Harold Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence. Woolf is not anxious; she is excluded from the male lineage that creates this male drive toward domination in which one must kill to innovate. To re-appropriate Bloom’s Oedipal fantasy, she cannot kill her father because she is not a son. In fact, she enacts a kind of third, she summons her mother’s specter. She is not the male, she is the female, she

does not stand upright, she receives. To cite Maurice Blanchot, “Passivity is a task—but in a different language: in the language of the nondialectical drive” (*The Writing of the Disaster*, 27). The task of passivity allows one receive and select from the tradition, to be open to the Other always already implicit in language itself.

II. The Prone “I”: Deixis and the Writing Moment

Moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are...

Mrs. Dalloway, 219

Woolf's appropriation of her linguistic and literary tradition can be located in part in her re-writing of the “I.” As exposed in part above the transcendental ego is an important point of Woolf's feminist critique and becomes, as to be discussed here via an exploration of Deixis and Woolf's own understanding of “the moment” in writing, an important point of re-writing of what I call, using Woolf's word, the self as recumbent. This chapter takes on the theory of some very famous men but this not an attempt to inscribe Woolf within the cannon. Rather I hope to have the theory speak through her and she through the theory and to reveal the places where their theory perhaps lets Woolf in.

Hegel's “This”

Perhaps the best place to begin a study of deixis in relation to the experience of the self is with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁴ In his first chapter, “Sense-certainty” Hegel explains sense-certainty as the most immediate mode of apprehension through a study the This, in the twofold shape of Here and Now. The double form of the This appears as the richest kind of knowing. However, as Hegel exposes through the analogy

⁴ Phenomenology as discipline that engages with experience of consciousness in relation to the sensory experience of the object of perception is a good place from which to ground a philosophical understanding of deixis and the self in this context.

of writing, the grasp of This to “truth” is tenuous. As he writes, to test this truth, “We write down this truth; a truth can’t lose anything by being written down; much less can it lose anything from our preserving it. If we look again at this written down truth now, this noon, we shall have to say that it has become stale” (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 60). While the content the This, of what is, in this case “Now it is night,” has become through the passing of time a “something that is *not*” the Now as concept is preserved. Now it is day. Through an act of negation, the Now is “determined as a permanent and self-preserving,” and “the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty” (60). Thus, the content of the truth changes but the universal ‘this’ remains. This accounts for the first two turns in Hegel’s. By first showing how Now becomes past and Here becomes another here Hegel comes to understand Now and Here as an abstract universal. One could say that the now is outstripped by token of its belonging to another now, revealing itself as a series. It is in this way that Hegel attempts to mark the presence that does not appeal to the object and subject.

While the content of the Heres and Nows slip out from under themselves, “the vanishing of a single Now and Here that we mean is prevented by the fact that *I* hold them fast.” (61). As Hegel writes, “The force of the truth lies now in the ‘I’” (61). However, the “I” in some ways fails to “hold them fast” in that “I” gets upstaged by the presence of an other, by a you, and/or by the next presence. Just as when one refers to “this Here” or “this Now” one refers to “all Thises, Heres, Nows, all single items, when one says ‘I,’ the singular ‘I,’ one says “in general all the ‘Is’” (62).

Thus, at the beginning of this third and last turn of the chapter Hegel expresses frustration with the inability to separate the “I” from the reception of Heres and Nows. In his words, with the understanding that we “have to posit the *whole* of sense-certainty

itself as its *essence*.” One of these general ‘I’s could assert here as a tree and another I could assert here as *not* a tree (p104). Similarly the Here and Now that belongs to one “I” is upstaged by the next presence and in this way does not really belong to the “I.” The “I” does not transcend the moment of apprehension but rather is “a pure [act of] intuiting,” and sticks “firmly to one immediate relation. The “I” can only be understood as the posture of experience of the This. The “I” is not an active force it does not point to the This but receives the Now and Here which is pointed to. Hegel uses the passive voice to describe this receptive posture writing, “The Now is pointed to, *this* Now” (63).⁵ Thus, the “I” becomes defined as a point of passive reception.

This understanding of the “I” which marks Hegel’s final turn in this chapter seems to be a fertile ground from which to begin a discussion of the “I” as subject in Virginia Woolf. While Woolf speaks often and with eloquence of dethroning the “I” hers in many ways a different, less deictic in Hegel’s sense, understanding of the pronoun. Hegel’s “I” seems far off from Woolf’s formulation in *A Room of Ones Own* as the “I” as “a straight dark bar, a shadow” which in its dominance casts a shadow where nothing will grow (98). Whereas Woolf defines “I” as the location of the male ego, self assertion, a tyrannical force that asks one to postulate a transcendental identity outside of the spacio-temporal experience of the body, Hegel’s understanding of “I” is tied inseparably, at the mercy even, of space and time, and in fact more akin to Woolf’s writing of an alternative subjectivity.

Throughout both Woolf’s fiction and non-fiction she fleshes out of the experience of the “I” in relation to the politics of experience. This self is in the posture of experience

⁵ This exposition of Hegel’s “Sense-Certainty,” particularly the understanding of the “three turns,” is based primarily on a conversation with Professor Mitchell Miller had on April 9th, 2013.

of here and now which begins in an experience of the body in time. She writes often most eloquently of her sense of self, the fractured nature of her experience as ego and the role of temporality in her diaries and letters. In a letter in 1931, speaking of her advancing age, she would turn fifty next year, she writes:

I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feeling. Therefore I wanted to give the sense of continuity, instead of which most people say, no you've given the sense of flowing and passing away and that nothing matters. Yet I feel things matter quite immensely. What the significance is, heaven knows I can't guess; but there is significance—that I feel overwhelmingly. Perhaps for me, with my limitations—I mean lack of reasoning power and so on- all I can do is make an artistic whole; and leave it at that. But then I'm annoyed to be told that I am nothing but a stringer together of words and words and words. I begin to doubt beautiful words. (L4 397-8)

This is not a complete disavowal of the 'I' but rather a reimagining in which it is not transcendent, consistent, and atemporal but rather vulnerable, to the experiences of the body. It is not a rejection of experience on the contrary, it is a posture of receptivity to sensation, to one's location, moving and unfixed, to the ability to "feel overwhelmingly". Woolf's subjectivity here is constantly in flux, in a state of becoming, located physically and at the mercy of time. Indeed, Woolf's description of self does not transcend the temporal-spatial condition, that which diexis linguistically expresses, but rather its location in space and time acts as its defining element. She emphasizes her bodily exposure to time as a structural element of her selfhood writing "the special Virginia whose body I live for the moment" (L4 397). This exposure makes her "violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feeling" (L4 397). The feelings one experiences are not unified they are separate, multitudinous. One can only understand

them, these particulars, to employ Hegel, via abstraction to the universal, the ‘this’ and ‘now.’

In other words, the “I” is unstable as the here and now that locates it. As Hegel makes clear, one can never take a Now from its series, from the belonging of every Now to Nows and Here to Heres in what he calls “an absolute plurality” (*Phenomenology* 64). Here and Now cannot be isolated as an hour, minute, even moment, these are only the words we put to them. The “I” is thus equally plural. It is defined by its positioning in space and time and thus belongs to the particularities that outstrip themselves.

On Being Ill and the Recumbent “I”

The politics of embodied experience, of the “I” at the mercy of space and time, is perhaps best developed in Woolf’s essay “On Being Ill.” She begins this text with the simple question of why illness, for all its universality, “has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature” (3). Literature has left “unrecorded” the “daily drama of the body” (5). She locates this blindness in the mind’s domination of the body as coming out of the philosophical and literary tradition, arguing “people always write the doings of the mind” at the expense of the body, “by ignoring the body in the philosopher’s turret” (5).

She suggests that philosophy and the logocentric tradition, in purist of a pure study of the mind, posits a metaphysical hierarchy that places mind over body. Since before the Cartesian ego cogito, the orientation of Western Philosophy has been to separate the mind from the body, to render the body irrelevant and the mind as outside of time. Woolf maintains that literature has reflected this dichotomy, in her words, “literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a

sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear” (*On Being Ill*, 4). The body is not, Woolf argues, “a sheet of plain glass,” or to employ Descartes’ language, a machine in which the mind lives. Rather it acts as the general medium through which the mind can “know” a world. This is in many ways Hegel’s project, to start with the phenomenology of perception, to understand how we come to know from the position of our bodily senses. Writing, as beholded to this philosophical tradition, ignores the body as a structuring element of lived reality.

However, the illusion of the sameness and transcendence can and will be disrupted by the body. As Woolf writes, remarkably using language Derrida would use decades later to describe the disruption of the metaphysics of presence, “All day, all night, the body intervenes” (4).⁶ The body intervenes upon this system that places concepts outside of time and space, that differentiates between the signifier and the transcendental signified, that assumes, the total presence of a producer of spoken language.⁷ Time, space the embodied experience, the context, the unrepeatability, the other (itara) in Derrida’s iterability, comes to intervene upon this construction of the mind.⁸

In *On Being Ill* this hierarchical relationship of mind and body is put directly in the terminology of colonization, the mind and health being set up as forces of domination over the wilderness of the body. “The mind,” Woolf writes, “civilized the universe,” it has ignored the body “in the pursuit of conquest or discovery” (5). This

⁶ An Example: “At the point at which the concept of *différance*, and the chain attached to it, intervenes, all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics (signifier/signified; sensible/intelligible; writing/speech; passivity/activity; etc.)” Jacques Derrida, “Interview with Julia Kristeva” in “Positions” (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 28–30.

⁷ See Derrida’s interview with Julia Kristeva, “Semiology and Gramatology” in *Positions* particularly pages 21-22.

⁸ See section on Iterability

mind calls for things to be known, for land to be settled, for the other to be assimilated, for explanation, for information, for clarity, for the “I” to be enunciated. It seeks to reduce relations to a universal order, to abstract particularities and thus the other is not in its particularity but co-opted as part of the concept. As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, “Philosophy itself identified with the substitution of ideas for person, the theme for the interlocutor, the interiority of logical relation for the exteriority of interpellations” (88). It is the “I” within this tradition that posits a knowing of itself, “that sought”, in Levinas’ words, “that foundation of the self in the self, outside of heteronymous opinions” (88). This tradition looks for sameness rather than difference, unity over multiplicity, searches for firm ground for the ‘I’ to stand on. The thetic drive toward a unification of meaning is associated with the health as Woolf writes, “in your health the genial pretense must kept up and the effort to communicate, to civilize, to share, to cultivate” (5). The healthy, the upright, the productive, the able bodied are the male forces of civilization. Thus, with mind established as the colonizing force of logocentrism the body and its illness is the uncivilized other, the particular and embodied. As Woolf says, in the condition of illness, “undiscovered countries” are “disclosed” (3).

Women in Repose

The body as “undiscovered” Other to logocentric tradition also includes, for Woolf and Cixous, the realm of women. In “Laugh of the Medusa” Cixous similarly invokes the body in regards the unwritten territory of the female urging that woman must write herself, must write that “from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—fore the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal”

(LM 875). Like Woolf's undiscovered countries, Cixous calls the project of female writing the entry into ungoverned land:

I wished that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs." (LM 876)

These "unheard-of songs" are made audible when the hold of the colonizing mind and its "I" loosens its grip the body. Both Woolf and Cixous establish the body and woman as the realms of the other playing upon the traditional dichotomy that associates the woman the body and the man with the mind. The man is the active force, the colonizer, the woman, the passive object of conquest.

Woolf works from within this position to establish an alternative to the posture of the colonizing "army of the upright" in (image of the figure lying back (12). This self is reclined, at the mercy of the embodied experience rather than transcendent of it. This standing army recalls Woolf's image in *A Room of Ones Own* of the "I" casting its arid shadow.

This juxtaposition of the upright with the reclined alludes to perhaps the most fundamental element of the gender dichotomy: the privileging of male activity over female passivity. Within this ideological orientation, action is perceived as positive, productive, creative, meaningful, and passivity is seen as deadened, useless, irrelevant. The male penetrates, ejaculates, produces, the female receives and incubates.⁹

⁹ This is not to say there is an essential man or woman only that the dichotomy of masculinity/femininity, man/woman, exists within a dichotomous hierarchy in which man is at an advantage. This dichotomy carries with it a set of assumptions that while are not fixed, can also be identified. As Cixous says, "One can no sooner speak of "woman" than of "man" without being trapped within an ideological theatre where the proliferation of representation, images, reflections, myths." (Newly Born Woman 353)

However, the state of being recumbent, particularly as developed by Woolf in this essay, does have not altogether negative connotations. In many ways this prone figure speaks in language outside of the gendered hierarchy, it is neither active nor passive. One reclines to rest, to sleep, to lay upon the grass, even to think. This alternative to the male ego is not in a position of defeat; it is not inert nor dead, but rather engaged, receptive, alert, and open. In this way, Woolf's recumbent subject disrupts from within the schematization and degradation of a so-called female position. As Cixous writes, if woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of men "then it is time for her dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (LM 887).

In this position of receptivity, one is able to be dispossessed of the self that closes one to the Other, to the multiplicity and the ambiguous. As Cixous articulates in "Newly Born Woman," female passivity has radical potentials. This unasserted subject position of the woman offers an openness as she writes, "A woman, by her opening up, is open to being 'possessed,' which is to say, dispossessed of herself" (Newly Born Woman 353).

Thus, the ethics implied by both Cixous and Woolf offer a kind of alternative to the colonization of the thetic mind over the sensory body. It is a responsive to the other, an affirmation of the unassimilatable, singular nature of this other in time. As Derrida explains; "When you address the Other, even if it is to oppose the Other, you make a sort of promise - that is, to address the Other as Other, not to reduce the otherness of the Other, and to take into account the singularity of the Other." (Derrida, Interview)

A passive receptivity to the other is further explored in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. He writes that to approach the Other is to "*receive* only to the extent, an extent

beyond all measure, that it receives beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity” (*Totality and Infinity* 50, Italics’ Levinas). The capacity to receive exceeds the capacity of the transcendental ego. Levinas thus constructs an alternative philosophy of the “I” around the welcoming of the Other. Within his philosophy of hospitality, the self is not the shadow-casting “I” that Woolf attempts to dethrone but rather is defined *a priori* by the Other, and therefore, by its ability beyond the capacity of “I.” This recalls Hegel’s “I” as the position of receptivity to the ‘here’ and ‘now.’ Infinity, the never able to be fully said or disclosed, the Other that can never be assimilated, is the condition upon which the I is made possible.¹⁰

In *On Being Ill* Woolf continues to flesh out the politics of this alternative kind of activity as passivity akin in many ways to the position of receptivity sketched here via Levinas. For Woolf, the position on ones back, in receptivity is an unconditional welcoming of alternative modes of understanding, to the multiplicity and the Other. She writes, on ones back: “we float with sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time in years, to look round, to look up—to look, for example at the sky” (12). The singular “I” become the plural “we:” it is a “we” that floats down the stream as a collection of sticks. We lie on our backs and move through space. We are not settled or transcendent rather we lie in shifting waters in a diverse multiplicity. We, the pronoun Woolf most often takes on as an alternative to “I,” gestures toward an infinity of subjects. The “I” laying prone is not limited by its posture, but rather offered increased possibilities for perception The “we” that lies recumbent, exempt from so-called productive activity, knows more, or perhaps

¹⁰ This is a rather arbitrary set of citations from the work Levinas filtered in fact through Derrida. However, they shed some light on the possibilities of passivity as a mode of relation to the other. For more see Derrida’s “A Word of Welcome” in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 27-28.

knows differently. It looks up toward the clouds, toward a multiplicity, towards the many moving as a whole. As Woolf writes, “It is only the recumbent who know what, after all, nature is at no pains to conceal—” (16). The “I,” the upright, has no dominion over nature, over the body, of the experience of living but rather becomes the passive observer to the natural world

Language in Repose

Woolf argues that the “I” on its back, the body in illness suffers from a “poverty of language” (7). In illness, she writes, “Language at once runs dry,” that we need “a new language...more primitive, more sensual more obscene” (7). However she does believe this dooms us to silence. Rather she calls on the craftsmen of language writing, “We need the poets to imagine for us” (16).

The poets may imagine, Woolf notes, through the attraction during illness to sensation and nonsensical modes that are silenced by a thetic orientation. In illness we are open, as Woolf writes, to ‘incomprehensibility’ (21). This incomprehensibility can be understood as the unassimilated Other, Levinas’ infinity. It is a position in which we are estranged from the function of words, where words “seem to possess a mystic quality,” and we are able to “grasp what is beyond their surface meaning, gather instinctively this, that and the other.” (21). This is a renewed posture from which to read and write where words are not defined referentially but rather as, “a sound, a colour, here a stress, there a pause” (21). It is oriented by sensation, by the experiences of the body where words give off “their scent” and “flavour” (21). The body, the sensory, is the point at which Woolf seeks access to A new wealth in the English language as she writes of reading, “it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first” (22).

This is not the case for the upright where “meaning has encroached upon sound” and “intelligence domineers over our senses” (21). Intelligence, the orientation toward conceptual truths, resides in a realm that is allegedly wholly separate from time and our embodied existence in time. This division is present in the signifying process as traditionally understood. Written symbols exist visibly and audibly as a completely arbitrary representations of signified concepts that exists in a transcendent realm. Understanding language as a sensory experience, as Woolf does here, disrupts this division and opens up a new field of signification.

Rhythm

Sensitivity to rhythm, to this embodied linguistic mode, is an important facet of language opened up once the upright “I” has fallen to the ground. Woolf speaks often in her diaries, letters, essays of her search for a language that reverberates and echoes, of the desire to write with a rhythm, like waves. She writes to Ethel Smyth of *The Waves*, “I am writing to rhythm rather than plot” (L4, 204). She puts this writing in rhythm in direct opposition to the literary, logocentric tradition writing, “And thus though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction...” (L4 204).

Words never refer to just one thing; they do not produce meaning only at the referential level. Woolf loves words for their malleability, their ability have more than one meaning. With regards to symbolism Woolf wrote to Robert Fry in Nineteen Twenty-Seven, “directly I’m told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me.” (L3, 285). By token of their ability to be repeated they are always already taken out of context, always possibly said in error. The echo, reverberate and betray themselves.

Rhythm as a structuring element of writing is at the mercy of time. Words at the level of rhythm are able to access a level that, for Woolf, is deeper than their signifying function. As she says in a letter to Vita Sackville-West in Nineteen Twenty-Six:

Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to for it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, in makes works to fit it... (L3 204)

For Woolf, words in rhythm attempt to recapture, which could be read as implicating a certain extra-linguistic whole that is then transferred via language. However the pre-linguistic is not a thing in itself, but rather a rhythm that registers, even in a linguistic formulation, in a nonlinguistic register. A rhythm is not a transcendental concept, it is not it exists in time, outside of language only insofar that it exceeds linguistic communication. As she says, "you can't use the wrong words," there is no way to misrepresent with sings because the rhythm is always already outside of the signifying process. Rhythm is not of the order of language but, as Philippe Lacoue-Larbarthe's writes in "The Echo of the Subject," "it affects a language, and it affects the use of language...its *musical* part, prosodic or melodic" (Lacoue-Larbarthe 159). It evades linguistic distinctions rooted in a metaphysics; as Lacoue-Labarthe enumerates, "sensible/intelligible, matter/form, body/spirit, thing/idea," and is therefore "untherorizable" (160).

Rhythm is also a way to re-imagine the subject as embodied. It animates the body, creates movement. It intervenes upon the mind to activate the body, to bring one

toward the “here” and “now.” It brings the Other to language. As Lacoue-Labarthe writes, rhythm:

Brings forth essentially its unity, its simplicity its whole nature, open and undissimulated...; or, on the contrary, it will bring forth its heterogeneity, its plurality, or internal complexity, its multiversality and its lack of proper bearing (*askhemosune*), the ungraspable and fleeting nature that is brought about in general by the arrhythmic state.” (Lacoue-Labarthe 202)

One is attentive to rhythm in a state of receptivity. Rhythm allows one to be dispossessed of self, to be swept up in sensations of the body. It requires an active and receptive listener, as he writes, “Listening is the perception of the Other” (162).

Writing the Moment

Which of these people am I? It depends so much on the room

The Waves 58

For Woolf, the way to write this recumbent “I,” is to write the self at the mercy of time, which figures prominently in her work in the attention to writing “the moment.” The moment for Woolf is the location, spatial and temporal, in which the writer locates “reality,” in which the “I” on its back may be written.

As she explores in her essay, “The Moment: Summer’s Night” the experience of the present is one of receptivity, akin to that sketched in “On Being Ill,” to the overwhelming abundance of the moment. She locates the present in the sensation, of the experience of the body she writes, “To begin with: it is largely composed of visual and sense perceptions. The day was very hot” (*The Moment: Summers Night*, 9). For Woolf, the experience of time is not oriented by the transcendental subject but rather, as she

writes, “we are spectators and also passive participants in a pageant” (9). The experience of the moment leaves one with “nothing to do but accept, and watch” (10). While she can still locate subject, what she calls a “knot of consciousness, a nucleus divided into four heads, eight legs, eight arms, and four separate bodies” as the center of experience she also recognizes that which is beyond it (10). She writes, “Thus then the moment is laced about with these weavings to and fro, these inevitable downsinkings, flights, lamp lightings” but all this she writes, “is the wider circumference of the moment.” (10).

This excess of sensation is an important element in Woolf’s understanding of time. While she continually asserts that the moment is the proper subject of this new kind of writing, it is also – by definition for Woolf – in some ways other to language itself. As she writes in *A Room of One’s Own*:

What is meant by “reality”? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech---and there it is again in omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. (108)

The word “reality” as Woolf employs here, refers to the experience of subjectivity, to use Hegel’s words, the “Here” and “Now,” that is always already outside of language rather than reality as such. This reality, as informed by the position of the subject as receiver, is always shifting, sometimes this, sometimes that, “now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in daffodil in the sun.” It is put in quotations; it is not the reality but “this reality” (108). It exceeds language; it “overwhelms one.” It is something of the Other to language as Woolf elegantly states, it “makes the silent world more real

than the world of speech” (108). The “silent world” is that which exceeds and is outside of language yet it is also the proper subject of the writer. She goes on in this passage, “Now the writer, as I think has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us” (108). The singularity of an experience of reality makes it the subject of writing yet these sensations are the most fleeting, and furthest from linguistic expression.

This paradox of the excessive and the unsaid lies at the core of Woolf’s understanding of the moment; she attempts to both write more and to write less. In her diary of January 1920, she attempts to articulate an unconventional approach to writing, “ Suppose one thing should open out of another...doesn’t that give the looseness & lightness I want: doesn’t that get closer & yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything” (D2, 13). This sentiment, to say everything, to get it all, is one emphasized throughout Woolf’s writing. It should not be read within a masculine model that seeks to enclose all possibilities towards the ends of communicating a truth. Rather, it is a call to explore the limitlessness unsaid in every moment of experience. As she eloquently describes in her diary, she wishes to, “saturate every atom” to “eliminate all waste, deadness superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes” (D3 209).

The moment is thus the locus to the richness of life left undescribed in traditional narrative that, in rendering plot moves, is impervious to the singularity of the moment. The “waste” she describes belongs to narrative writing that does not give moments as moments but rather as she says “getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional.” She wishes to saturate where the traditional novelists simplifies and in doing so, in her words, “practically everything is left out” (D3 210).

But how can one, as she writes, “put practically everything in” (D3 210)? As she makes clear throughout her writing there is always that which exceeds. Woolf, in part, defines the “reality” of these moments by their extra-linguistic properties. Throughout her writings, Woolf expresses frustration with her inability to capture the whole of experience. Much of the impossibility of getting it all is expressed in her diaries, which speak directly to the act of writing life as it occurs. She writes, “The unrecorded clogs my pen” (D2, 303). In trying to explain the beauty of a trip to Charleston, which she describes as “abounding & superabounding,” she writes, “one almost resents it, not being capable of catching it all, & holding it all at the moment” (D2, 311) This “superabounding” experience of the Here and Now is the place where, for Woolf as for Hegel, *deixis* enters.

Indeed, despite this frustration, Woolf is not left paralyzed by this excess; rather she reaches, and attempts to write that which cannot be fully said. As she continues, in her diary entry from 1924, “I feel as if I were putting out my fingers tentatively on...either side as I grope down a tunnel, rough with odds and ends” (D2, 311). It is a struggle, it is not simple, it is “rough” with “odds and ends,” it is an exercise in groping. Woolf herself perhaps articulates this best in her essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art” writing, “Every Moment is the center and meeting place of an extraordinary number of perception which have not yet been expressed. Life is always and inevitably so much richer than we who try to express it” (Granite and Rainbow 23). There is always the “to come” in Woolf’s work, something that exceeds the limits of language, which is other to every utterance, unsaid in every act of saying.

However, there is the desire not to negate this other, rather there is always present the imperative to affirm the excess, to gesture toward it. This gesture takes the

form in Woolf's work in a politics of suspension. Describing life as a "silver globe" she writes in her diary that she would "like to take the globe in my hands & feel it quietly, round, smooth, heavy. & so hold it, day after day" (D3, 209). One must find a way to somehow take the globe in ones hands, to suspend it. As she eloquently phrases, "If one does not lie back & sum up & say to the moment, this very moment, stay you are so fair, what will be one's gain, dying? No: stay, this moment. No one ever says that enough." (D4, 245). Again, the position from which one "sum ups" the moment is the position of lying back. One must allow oneself to be possessed by the flowing, strange experience of time. As she reflects on her trip to Greece in 1932, "I ought to write about all these places, & try perhaps to solidify some of these floating sequences that go through my mind as we drive" (D4, 94). Thus she is not left completely without words; rather she gropes at the words to describe these "floating sequences." She goes on, "For the drives were long; Oh & the wind & the sun, & one's cheeks were hot & dry as if sitting unshaded by a hot fire" (D4, 94). Clearly, this description is not self-enclosed; the sentence runs on – connected by "and's" – and describes not any one scene but reaches at sensation, to capture the moment. While life is always more than can be put down on the page, Woolf still desires to take hold and suspend the moment.

Linguistic "Shifters:" The Unsaid and the Particular of Deixis

I argue that Woolf gets at this suspension of the moment, this gesture toward the unsaid, by use of deixis. As much as the moments she describes escape language's grasp, there are words that describe such spatio-temporal specificity that are equally tenuous. These words are called deictics, they are Hegel's Here, Now and This, and they are from within Woolf's inheritance.

Deixis as linguistic phenomena has posed a great challenge to linguists so, for the sake of clarity, I will sidestep the controversies surrounding its categorization and give the simplest definition possible. To put it simply, deictics are demonstratives. Taking its etymological root from the Greek *deiknuna* meaning, “to show, display, denote,” deictics point to some extralinguistic context in the moment of utterance. They are words exhibit rather than represent their own meaning. To quote the most basic understanding from Wikipedia; “Words are deictic if their semantic meaning is fixed but their denotational meaning varies depending on time and/or place.” They include: here, this, now, there, and personal pronouns such as I, you, him, her, they, etc. They are context dependent; they refer to the coordinates of context within their moment of utterance and therefore located in a specific time with a certain assertion of presence.¹¹

Deictic words are once one of the most fundamental elements of language, every language, linguists say, have some form of deixis and yet, the hardest to define. They are what the structural linguist Emile Benveniste famously called “shifters,” a definition which will do much to illuminate Woolf’s usage.

In his influential essay “Subjectivity in Language” from *Problems in General Linguistics*, Benveniste picks up on deictics as words that, like for Hegel, are defined as universals by their referential evasiveness. Via an exploration of deixis, he formulates a thesis on the inherent inter-subjectivity of all language as a communicative venture.

He grounds this exploration in an examination of the “I” and “you” in language and their accompanying deictics. He writes, “now these pronouns are distinguished from all other designations a language articulates in that *they do not refer to a concept*

¹¹ For more information on Deixis see LinguaLinks digital library at <http://www-01.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsDeixis.htm>

or to an individual" (Problems in General Linguistics 226). Deictics are at once the most basic and primary of linguistic designations and the most anomalous. They do not accord to the Structuralist understanding of the sign. There is no transcendental signified for "I," as Benveniste articulates, it "does not dominate any lexical entity" (226).

He notes the paradoxical nature of the "I," in that it at once refers indiscriminately to any individual and yet is the very mark of individuality. He explains further that this activity of the "I" is exclusively discursive, it does not refer to any individual but rather, grounded in the act of utterance, "it refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced" (266). Benveniste ultimately posits that language puts forth these "empty forms" or "shifters" into which "the speaker in the exercise of discourse, appropriates himself as *I* and a partner as *you*" revealing language as a discursive instance (266).

We can extend, as Benveniste does, this analysis of personal pronouns to deictics in general. Indicators of deixis like "here," "now," and "this," as Benveniste writes, "organize the spatial and temporal relationship around the 'subject' taken as referent" and share "being defined only with respect to the instances of discourse in which they occur, that is, in dependence upon the *I* which is proclaimed in the discourse" (226). There is no meaning to the word "I" without a spatial and temporal context, without these indicators the "I" is an empty form left empty. Indeed, through an examination of the subjectivity in language Benveniste finds that language always has some expression of temporality and this temporality related to a "present." As he articulates, "The temporal referent of the present can only be internal to the discourse" (227). The time that one is the time that one is speaking, "Linguistic time is *self-referential*" (227).

Benveniste's exposition of "shifters" reveals language as the discursive instance and thus demonstrates how deictics are tied to space and time. In this way, these words gesture toward the "unsaid" and the extralinguistic that we see Woolf concerned with. They always demonstrate, gesture towards a context that is always already outside the purview of linguistic expression, they gesture toward what cannot or is not said. These words leave room for that which cannot be colonized by language, the unsaid, the excess, of every moment, without negatively denying them their existence.

Thus, while Deixis could in some light be understood as the logocentric attempt to encompass the whole, to make all known, there is a paradox to these words exposed by a close analysis of Hegel and Benveniste. They gesture toward the specific but can be applied to any particular. As Hegel makes clear in "Sense-Certainty," deictics are only stable as abstracts; their particularities are impossible to pin down. He describes "the sensuous This that is meant *cannot be reached* by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal" (66). The "This" slips out from under itself in the act of saying. The moment one pronounces a this, the moment of recognition, it, in Hegel's words, "crumble[s] away" and becomes something which "is not" (66). The deictic "this" only gestures toward the moment, the particular "this" and "now", that in its multiplicity, escapes language's grasp. Deixis are able to suspend the moment linguistically and in the same movement reveal the incompleteness of this suspension. The experience of a deictic moment is an experience, to use Hegel's words, of "sensuous" excess that "cannot be reached by language" (66).

Deictics, like Woolf's moments themselves, are elusive. Like Woolf's moments they in the same linguistic motion gesture toward a particularity and the impossibility of fully expressing this particularity. Accordingly, that, to which a Woolfian "this" refers, is

constantly being amplified, multiplied, the ultimate meaning indefinitely deferred. In this way moments can be linguistically described as multifaceted, poly-vocal and ambiguous in a way that the normal, assumed relationship of signifier and signified cannot. These words are as slippery as time itself.

Derrida: Context and Iterability

In their total context dependency deictics in some ways betray the fundamental premises of language and language analysis. As Derrida explicates via his concept of “iterability,” the assumption of language’s total communicability rests on the partial denial of the effects of spatio-temporal context of an utterance upon which all language, especially deictic words, are in part dependent.

Iterability, a play on the word reiterate, references the repeatability of words upon which, Derrida argues, the entire foundation of communicative language rests. It also references his own invented etymological reading of the Sanskrit word, “itara” meaning “the Other.” This word-concept is meant to at once indicate the predication of language on repetition and at the same time the context unrepeatability in every speech act. First, Derrida establishes that in order for language to communicate, that is to pass meaning, it must be repeatable; the code must be able to be re-presented and mean the same thing. To be code words must mean the same thing no matter where or by whom they are uttered. Derrida fleshes out this word-concept in his essay “Signature Event Context” in which, through an analysis of the linguist John L. Austin’s work on speech acts, Derrida unpacks the tension between language’s context dependency and its iterability.

As Austin explicates in his concept of performative speech acts in *How to Do Things With Words* language becomes meaningful within a context. With his attention to the singular context of a “speech act” Austin exposes the possibility of what he calls “infelicities;” that is the possibilities of misinterpretation, of things being taken out of context and therefore changing the meaning of language itself. Austin, while demonstrating infelicities in a speech act as a possible, still considers it a risk that Derrida describes as “accidental, exterior, one which teaches us nothing about the linguistic phenomena being considered” (15). Derrida furthers Austin’s analysis by taking full stock of infelicity as not just *a priori* possibility but as the essential predicate of a speech act, as he writes, “a possibility-- possible risk-- is *always* possible, and is in some sense a necessary infelicity” (15). While repeatability implies a simple origin in which a speaking, or writing, producer is present to himself via consciousness, it also implies the possibility, in the singular moment of production, of words being taken out of this context and into a different one. This citationality would, if we take seriously Austin’s notion of performative speech acts, have the ability the intended, so-called “original” meaning. As long as one can repeat one can cite. Derrida, there is that which is always unassimilably other in every speech act, that is, the singularity of its context which cannot be fully repeated.

Thus, Derrida’s iterability acts as a third to the dichotomy of success/ failure in a speech act revealing language’s co-dependent ability to be both repeated totaken cited. Iterability is a way to imagine language in which intentionality no longer governs the entire system of utterance. Indeed, every utterance is in a way always already a citation; Derrida says, “the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content” (18). This is, in Derrida’s words, the “teleological lure

of consciousness” that calls one to imagine all language as intention manifest and all miscommunication as accidental. This is the position of the “I,” from which one intends to say.

Deictics exhibit Derrida’s iterability in the extreme. They are at once the most repeatable of words, the “most general” as Benveniste notes, yet at the same time the most particular as they are defined completely by their context in the moment of utterance. By the nature of their spatio-temporal dependency the “meaning” of these words is fragmented from the start.

In her use of deixis Woolf does not deny the possibility for infelicity but rather works within this framework to help reveal the Other, the itara, of iterability. Because these words are never present to themselves, Woolf is able to build meaning, to gesture, to work their instability as linguistic malleability. In this way meanings can be put together, not as a unified object but rather via a politics of proximity and accompaniment. This is the relationship, of particularities netted together by a deictic moment, which Woolf fleshes out in *To the Lighthouse*.

III . The Summoning of Mrs. Ramsay: Artistic Creation and Deictic Moments in To The Lighthouse

“Of what else, other than mother, could there in fact be reminiscence? What other voice could come back to us? What else could echo, resonate, seem familiar to us?”

Lacoue-Labarthe, 206

Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* is a fertile text from which to explore the ways that deixis functions in her work. In order to examine these moments in their particularity, their effusive content as “heres” and “nows,” I have selected several instances of “the moment” as experienced by Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay. I call these passages deictic moments as they pay heed, as the do deictics that envelope them, to the subject in context. These instances of deixis represent Woolf's attempt to write in the moment, to write the subject at the mercy of time and offer an opening to the effusive unsaid in every act of saying.

In *To The Lighthouse*, as in all of Woolf's writing, the experience of the moment is tied closely with the position of the female. Within this work Mrs. Ramsay, the literary summoning of Woolf's own mother, is a sort of suspender moments. Her stream of consciousness is characterized by images of suspension, flight, of the many moving as one of, the multiplicity left uncaptured by linguistic expression. These deictic passages suggest both uncertainty with the expressibility of language and, at the same time, make use of language, long sentences with effusive and heterogeneous description, that allude

to the effusive quality of the ever escaping experience of time. This voice of the female reverberates throughout the text.

Lily Briscoe's Elastic "This"

Let us begin with one such moment, with Lily Briscoe's moment at the opening of the first section:

How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking? And to those words, what meaning attached, after all? Standing now, apparently transfixed, by the pear tree, impression poured in upon her of those two men, and to follow her thought was like following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil, and the voice was her own voice saying without prompting undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things, so that even the fissures and humps on the bark of the pear tree were irrevocably fixed there for eternity. You have your greatness, she continued, but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death; but he has what you (she address Mr. Bankes) have not; a fiery unworldliness; he knows nothing about trifles; he loves dogs and his children. He has eight. Mr. Bankes has none. Did he not come down in two coats the other night and let Mrs. Ramsay trim his hair in a pudding basin? All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvelously controlled in an invisible elastic net—danced up and down in Lily's mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind, until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings. (28)

Like many instances of deixis in Woolf's work Lily Briscoe's 'this' introduces and umbrellas the multiplicity of the moment to which it gestures. Lily's thoughts are heterogeneous, multitudinous, and contradictory yet they come, through their initial designation as a 'this,' to be understood as an ambiguous, diffuse whole.

This passage opens with Lily's expression of uncertainty as to the potency of words to express meaning asking, "How did one add this up and that and conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking?" She seems unable to categorize the range of her

feelings for Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes within a traditional linguistic framework, dichotomously between “liking” and “disliking.” She is brought to this same sense of ambiguity later in the text as she sits at dinner. She thinks,

Such was the complexity of things. For what happened to her, especially staying with the Ramsays, was to be made to feel violently two opposite things at the same time; that’s what you feel, was one; that’s what you feel, was the other and then they fought together in her mind, as now. (104)

Language does not offer Lily an avenue to describe the complexity of this co-habitation of two opposite feelings. The whole language of dichotomy upon which the philosophical tradition is based betrays Lily’s feelings.

So Lily and Woolf turn to deixis. She does not feel angry or sad or hurt but rather “that” and at the same time “that” and these two “thats” are brought together by their temporal co-existence in the “now” that ends her sentence. These deictics are not empty markers, in the context of this passage a reader could begin via a politics of accompaniment to assemble some images or words to which the that’s might refer. They gesture toward Lily’s mixed feelings of jealousy toward Minta and Paul and the relief of not having to marry. They gesture toward her dual love and hate of Mr. Ramsay, of her resentment of Mrs. Ramsay as the police of Victorian society and intense love for her as, here at a loss of words myself, the rhythm that pervades their lives and this place. These “thats” could refer to all of these things at once, or rather, disrupt the logocentric expectation that these things could be linguistically separated as I have done here. They gesture toward that which is left out, some sensation of the “now” that is left unsaid by this sentence.

Indeed, as Lily’s “this” in front of the pear tree, she goes on to interrogate the objectivity of the connection between signifier and signified that language seems to

assume asking, “And to those words, what meaning attached, after all?” (28). Indeed, as deixis exhibits to the extreme, words draw their meaning not only from referential function but also via their position in a chain of relational elements. Their lack of a stable signified allows them a greater flexibility of expression; a flexibility that Lily herself seems to be searching for.

As the passage goes on, Woolf continues her exploration of the limits of language via a meta-commentary on writing itself. Following the ‘this’ of Lily Briscoe’s thought is like “following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by the pencil...” (28). Here, through Lily, we hear again Woolf speaking of that which words fail to capture

Lily’s subjectivity, her “I” does not stand above or beyond the spatial-temporal conditions of her moment. She is at the mercy of “this”, her selfhood diffused through the space and time, the here and now. Indeed as Lily’s ‘this’ continues it becomes intertwined with the physical environment. Lily simultaneously reflects on the characters of the two men and, equally as importantly, looks at the pear tree in the garden. These two elements of Lily’s experience cohabit within the ‘this.’ They are co-constituted, as the text describes compactly, “Standing now, apparently transfixed, by the pear tree, impression poured in upon of those two men.” By token of their temporal simultaneity, as indicated by the deictic “now,” the spatial and internal become fused.

As we reach the climax of Lily’s ‘this’ the border between the interior and exterior completely evaporates. As the text describes, “all of this danced up and down in Lily’s mind, and in and about the branches of the pear tree.” Held together by one sentence, her thoughts again move from her mind to the ‘real’ pear tree as represented by the image of a moving cloud of gnats. The ‘this’ then merges with the image she projects upon her physical reality, the scrubbed kitchen table, and as it spins further from her

linguistic control, her thoughts becomes constituted in “reality.” Her internal climax is expressed in the actual shot from a gun, as she hears the shot she feels “released,” and it then takes form, perhaps, in “frightened, effusive, tumultuous” flock of starlings. The ‘this’ of the moment in neither the interior of Lily’s thoughts, nor the exterior of her physical location, it does not hold up under this dichotomy. Via use of deixis Woolf is able to envelope a more direct discourse, in this case internal thought, with the conditions of time and space. In this way, Lily’s “I” does not hold up; it falls back with the force of time. She is constituted only by her experience of time and space as her thoughts are represented in the “real.” The “this” dispossesses her of a transcendent self.

The linguistic gesturing of deixis comes into play as Lily’s “this” expands and comes to say, as the text describes, “undeniable, everlasting and contradictory and things.” Lily, rather than positing a solid picture of Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes, offers a myriad of thoughts and images, diffuse and ambiguous, which evade a thetic reading. Each image or word describing Mr. Ramsay is separated by a semi-colon, each is its own independent clause yet connected inextricably to all the others.

Adding to this multiplicity, each descriptive phrase or word strikes a different register. At some point, Lily employs simple adjectives, as she thinks of Mr. Ramsay, “He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical.” This description seems fairly self-enclosed painting a rather solid picture of Mr. Ramsay’s deficiencies. However, as the sentence continues contradiction and heterogeneity build. Turning from Mr. Ramsay to Mr. Banks by way of a semi-colon she goes on, “He knows nothing about trifles; he loves dogs and his children.” In one sentence, Mr. Ramsay has been described by use of clear, descriptive adjectives and then represented more hazily via the statement that he loves

dog and his children. That Ramsay “loves dogs and his children” is fairly open for interpretation, especially in comparison to the more negative adjectives that precede it.

Lily departs further from a straightforward mode of characterization by juxtaposing her initial statements to a small narrative, a moment, that attempts to present the qualities of Mr. Ramsay that cannot be summarized by one word. Lily remembers, “Did he not come down in two coats after dinner and let Mrs. Ramsay trim his hair into a pudding basin?” One could not exactly put a word to the personality trait that this small scene evokes: perhaps humility, playfulness or, lightheartedness? Lily indeed does not provide us with such words. Rather the reader, like Lily herself, is left to ponder how this moment works in concert and contrast to the other elements of Mr. Ramsay’s character.

Lily’s reflections leave us with no stable understanding of the natures of these two men. However, that does not mean it says nothing. Rather, the description is able to see more, to express the complexities and ambiguities that reside in these characters. Mr. Ramsay can be at once vain but also allow his hair to be cut in a pudding bowl. As we read throughout “The Window,” people’s feelings change from moment to moment and the characters evade simple readings. Sometimes Mrs. Ramsay finds her husband intolerable and the next moment she can’t live without him. Sometimes he is a tyrant and sometimes he leaves her be as she knits her stocking. These elements, contradictory, changing and ambiguous move together in this passage like the company of gnats that comes to represent Lily’s thoughts, “each separate, but all marvelously controlled in an invisible elastic net.”

Importantly, the voice that casts this invisible net, that slips out from under itself, that speaks too quickly to be captured by the pencil, is the voice of a woman. Lily’s “this”

takes the form of “her own voice.” Her voice bleeds into and fuses with the physical elements of her this-ness, her voice so strong that “even the fissure and humps and the bark of the tree were irrevocably fixed there for eternity.”

Mrs. Ramsay’s Moment Suspended

The tone of this voice, its mode of description, its relation to the present moment, and use of deixis is developed as a sort of feminine aesthetic throughout “The Window.” Near the close of the first section, Mrs. Ramsay undergoes the same experience as Lily. While listening to poetry being read aloud by one of the men at the table, she is struck by how “the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice” (112). These women are both, in these deictic moments, overtaken by the embodied sound of their own voice, by the rhythm of spoken language. The words of this poem, “Luriana Lurilee,” are no longer Charles Isaac Elton’s, they are not Mr. Ramsay’s the patriarch who reads them here, rather they are Mrs. Ramsay’s. These women, like Echo, appropriate words of the tradition for their own use. They cite, they take out of context, they rhythmically echo and thus make these words their own.

Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay’s passage is characterized like Lily’s by the rhythm of parts moving as a whole, unified only in their movement in time. As Mrs. Ramsay hears the poem in her own voice, “The words...sounded as if they were floating like flowers on the water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence themselves” (112). These words are freed in Mrs. Ramsay’s voice from the constraints of being signifiers for signified. They are, like the “I” in repose, understood in their existence in time and space, reappointed for a different use. It matters not what they have ever meant before, they are flowers cut from the root, they are not part of

signifying system, or even of the poem being read now, but float in unison in this particular temporality.

Meaning is left in deference to the power of this embodied sensation recalling Woolf's writing on the importance of rhythm. They move in rhythm through the water of time, not empty or meaningless, but, on the contrary, the most powerful words Mrs. Ramsay seems to ever have heard. The embodiment of this language is pushed further as Mrs. Ramsay, reflecting later as she knits, hears these words again and they begin "washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically" (121). These words seemed "cry out to be echoed" as they fall into rhythm with the movement of her knitting needles and the sensations climax (121). This is a decidedly erotic moment, an experience of language in simultaneity with her body that reaches an orgasmic peak.

Indeed, in many ways, we can characterize Mrs. Ramsay as a rhythm herself that pervades the novel both in her life and after her death. During her life in the novel's first section, Mrs. Ramsay experiences a deictic moment similar to Lily's as she dissociates from the conversation at the table and is brought to her experience of self in time. She thinks:

Just now she had reached security, she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body filly and sweetly, not nosily, solemnly rather, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards holding them safe together. (106)

This moment suspended evades linguistic characterization, as Mrs. Ramsay thinks in the next sentence, "Nothing need be said; nothing could be said" (106). This passage is oriented by a "now" as Lily's was by a "this" and represents Mrs. Ramsay as the "I" in repose, becoming co-constituted with a moment in time. She recognizes that the feeling

will pass thinking, “this cannot last.” Nonetheless this “joy” comes to fill the nerves of her body *as* she looks around the table and helps Mr. Bankes to a piece of meat. While Mrs. Ramsay’s intense bodily feelings and her mental state are disassociated from the conversation at hand they are not disassociated with the physics of the moment. Woolf takes time to include Mrs. Ramsay’s concurrent physical actions; they sit beside the poetic images of smoke rising and a hawk flying suspended, they are fused within this sentence. As Mrs. Ramsay says in the next line by way of the deictic “there,” “There it was, all round them” (107). Her intense sensation is not only within her, in the nerves of her body but, there. It is a “there” which is neither outside nor inside, without a transcendental meaning it comes in this passage to evade this dichotomy and gesture toward, without more appropriate language, the spatio-temporal conditions of an self within time and space.

While Mrs. Ramsay recognizes, as deixis does, the transience of the moment she is never the less is overcome here by the passing feeling of stability. She goes on in this same passage, “It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability” (107). Echoing Lily’s “everlasting” and bark of the pear tree that was “irrevocably fixed there for eternity” this stability, this fixedness, suspension, is expressed via deixis (28). Despite the transience that defines any “here” “this” or “now,” Mrs. Ramsay feels that there is “something... immune from change, and shines out...in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby...” (107). Mrs. Ramsay cannot say what this thing immune from change is but maintains, as she ends her passage, “Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures” (107).

This sense of eternity, a suspension of the excessive multiplicity of the moment, is developed throughout Mrs. Ramsay's passages. It is characterized by the hawk "suspended" and the flag that "floated"; as she describes her "this" later on, "For the moment, she hung suspended" (106, 109). It is a moment enveloped by the deictic 'now' that is somehow, like Lily's, hovering within the text, taken from its quick temporal succession and held in deferral. These images of suspension recall the gnats and flock of starlings in Lily's passage. The multitude held together as one diffuse and moving whole. Like Lily's gnats the many nerves of Mrs. Ramsay's body come together under one image, they "seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together" (107). Employing similar imagery Mrs. Ramsay compares her ability to see the thoughts of her guests to "a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling" (108). The image of the animals, solid objects, suspended and moving yet visible recalls Lily's starlings, gnats and the kitchen table in the pear tree.

That which endures, some thing in the moment, is really only the gesture toward it, the deictic gesture. Although these words mark the passing of time, the ever-changing temporal and spatial relations, they also attempt to linguistically freeze, to hold, these moments, as do the women of this novel, before they pass. To recall Lily's language, they are like the flock of tumultuous starlings or the moving cloud of gnats. Like an elastic net the "this" envelopes yet does not limit or suffocate the heterogeneity of meaning and thought that takes shape within these moments. "This" is able to gesture towards the existence of a moment, at the diffuse and ambiguous reality of the temporal, that is not a self-present whole but rather, the multitudinous and fragmentary moving in unison.

It is an affirmation of the effusive experience of time that is silenced by a language that ignores time. This represents an alternative form of meaning formation. Rather than being left silent and empty without a definitive meaning Mrs. Ramsay experiences a sort of epiphany thinking, “Here, she felt putting the spoon down, was still space that lies about the heart of things, where one could move or rest; could wait now (they were all helped) listening” (107). She is left at or near “the heart of things” listening, waiting, as an “I” on its back, not dissatisfied by a lack of transcendental truth but “at peace” and open to the particularities of this moment.

The Male Interruption

Mrs. Ramsay’s deictic moments, these experiences of the “I” at the mercy of the moment, are interrupted by the male search for truth. Immediately after expressing her feeling of rest she hears her husband talking proclaiming, as an upright “I” is want to do, the “square root of two hundred and fifty three” (107). This brings to her mind questions that seek an answer, she asks herself, “What did it all mean? To this day she had no notion” (107). But, the teleological modes of male learning offer no solution. As she goes on, “A square root? What was that? Her sons knew” (107). A square root does comically little to explain the series of words and images that transpired in Mrs. Ramsay’s preceding “now.” Unlike a square root, her sense of meaning is not transcendent but co-constituted with time and space and her body/mind within it.

This thetic drive, the men discussing square roots, comes to be directly associated with the assertive male ego. In the next paragraph, Mrs. Ramsay looks on at Charles Tansley, “observing him rather than listening to what he said” (108). She, within her receptive alternative to a phallogocentric impulse toward meaning, need not hear “what”

he says, the signified, rather focuses on the signified, how he is, and is led to a greater depth of understanding. His need to assert himself is revealed to her as insecurities about his place within the patriarchy that will persist, she thinks, until he achieves his rightful position, “till he got his professorship or married his wife” (108). His drive to say “I-I-I” is thus, as Mrs. Ramsay now sees, is no more an expression of uncertainty and fear. In the language of this essay, the “I” that stands upright can always be knocked down while the “I” in repose, Mrs. Ramsay’s “I” here, of a woman, is already at rest, stable with its back upon the ground and its eyes to the clouds.

The animation of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily’s Painting in “The Lighthouse”

Mrs. Ramsay’s deictic impulse to suspend the moment comes to be, in the novel’s final section and after her death, an impulse integral to Lily as an artist. The novel picks up after the ten years represented by “Time Passes,” the decimation of the First World War and the death of Mrs. Ramsay among others, with the remaining Ramsays and their guests visiting the summerhouse.¹² This section begins and ends with Lily and her painting. Watching Mr. Ramsay and his children finally make their way to the lighthouse Lily sits upon the lawn where she had sat ten years earlier and attempts, succeeding finally, to complete her work.

However, she does not simply pick up where she left off. The world has been radically altered. With the death of Mrs. Ramsay came the death of the Victorian order giving way to the so-called modern era. Lily is both emancipated by this cataclysmic

¹² As this section of the thesis focuses on the deictic moments of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay “Time Passes” is not taken under direct analysis. However, its representation this ten year period re-imagines, in a similar way that the recumbent “I” has been fleshed out here, a subjectivity at the mercy of time. Rather than relaying the dramatic events that would, in a traditional novel, be the markers of plot, this section defers from male historicity to the passing of time itself, to the effects of time on the house and thus in sense, disrupts thetic, human centric, historical narrative.

shift, more able to live according to her desires, to paint, to remain unmarried, and yet, left in the lurch this set of massive losses. As established in “The Window,” Mrs. Ramsay acts as amalgamating force, her rhythm, like deixis in many passages, is a sort of, to quote Lily’s passage, elastic net. However, Mrs. Ramsay is no longer embodied rather, she haunts the contemporary scene. For Lily she is the presence of an absence that Lily, in these moments of artistic creation, comes to reanimate.

With the same concerns of her “this” cited above, “The Lighthouse” begins with Lily’s question, “What does it mean then, what can it all mean?” (149). Again, some ten years later, Lily is brought to the limits of languages expressibility. In the Ramsay’s kitchen in the early morning she is unable to “contract her feelings” to make them fit into a phrase. She feels in excess as she asks herself, “For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing-nothing that she could express it all” (149). Lily is not without feelings only without the ability to express them or even bring them together in some fashion. The death of Mrs. Ramsay has left everything disjointed. In her words, it is “as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was...” (150). While in earlier passages these particularities became rhythmically integrated into a moving whole, like Lily’s cloud of gnats, now each part has become more estranged.

Whereas in past passages Lily’s sentences had been long and expansive now they contract. They are curt and abrupt: “Going to the Lighthouse. But what does one send to the Lighthouse? Perished. Alone. The grey-green light on the wall opposite. The empty...” (151). Lily is unable to organize these things into words or sentences at all. As she says, “And like everything else this strange morning the words become symbols,

wrote themselves all over the grey-green walls. If only she could put them together, she felt, write them out in some sentence, then she would have got at the truth of things” (150). In this state of chaotic fragmentation Lily asks the central question of this section and of creation, “such were some of the parts, but how to bring them together (151).

Left in the dissolution of Victorian social structures, Lily is both alienated and liberated. She revels to a degree in the post-war chaos, as she says early on in the section; “This extraordinary unreality was frightening; but it was also exciting” (151). The fluidity of this new reality, as yet unformed, not socially solidified, allows Lily the opportunity to go against the social restrictions that Mrs. Ramsay had helped enforce. She has, to use her word, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay in many ways. She takes joy in the radical changes; she thinks “I’m happy like this. Life has changed completely” (178).

In some ways, one could put this relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in oedipal terms or perhaps in language of Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*. She must kill Mrs. Ramsay as the emblem of oppressive Victorian society in order to build a life of her own. Mrs. Ramsay’s expectations as the prototypical “Angel of the House” would act as a barrier to Lily’s artistic freedom.

Woolf explicitly acknowledged the oppressive nature of this model of femininity in her essay “Professions for Women” published in 1931. She writes of “The Angel of the House,” “It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her” (Collected Essays V2, 285). It is this phantom of Victorian womanhood that comes between women and writing and so it is, for Woolf, “part of the occupation of the women writer” to kill her (286).

However, this oedipal analogy, falls short. Lily is not a son, Mrs. Ramsay is not a father. The politics of maternal influence are complex for Woolf. The Angel of the House

is not only a figure of Victorian domesticity but one closely tied to Woolf's own mother, upon which Mrs. Ramsay is explicitly based. While the social expectations this mother figure are a barrier to the practice of writing Woolf's mother, Julia Steven, as mother herself, is the creative source of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf writes that until *To The Lighthouse* the "presence of my mother obsessed me" (MB 81). This "invisible presence" haunted her from the age of thirteen until forty-four, until "in a great, apparently involuntary, rush" she wrote this novel (MB 81). The memory of her mother propels Woolf's great rush of creative energy that takes form in this text.

As Woolf writes in *A Room of Ones Own*, "Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father" (RO 102). While Julia Steven, as an arbiter of Victorian society would have, had she lived, acted as a barrier to Woolf's writing, she in her memory, as mother, was a source, both effuse and elusive, to Woolf's creation. Thus, while mothers for Woolf exercise a sort of restrictive social force they also are part of her imagining of an alternative feminine creative tradition. As she famously wrote, "For we think back through our mothers if we are women" (RO, 75).

Thus, while *To The Lighthouse* clearly put the specter of Woolf's mother to rest, it was not an act of murder. On the contrary this work animates Woolf's mother. Her sister Vanessa called it, as paraphrased in Woolf's diary, "a sublime, almost upsetting spectacle," and "an amazing portrait of mother...has lived in it, found the rising of the dead almost painful" (*A Writer's Diary*, 106). This work brings Woolf's mother back to life, as Nessa says the portrait "has lived in it." As Cixous articulates, writing gives us the gift of "bringing back our dead alive" (*The Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 12). Certainly this is what Woolf does here; she brings back her mother alive in order to put her to rest.

Just as Woolf's mother acts as the creative source for *To The Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay becomes the central influence upon Lily's artistic creation. While painting Lily seems to call forth Mrs. Ramsay's rhythm, to allow her voice, her suspension of the moment to pulse through her. While the social chaos allows Lily new freedoms, as an artist she seeks a way to bring these things together in the way the Mrs. Ramsay had. She asks herself, in these moments of uncertainty, "such were some of the parts, but how to bring them together?" (151).

Left in this confused and chaotic state she turns to her painting. Desperately trying not to "break the frail shape" she "suddenly" remembers her painting and resolves, "She would paint that picture now" (151). Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay's feminine aesthetic, the company moving in rhythm, the freezing of the moment, come to be represented in Lily's work:

And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. (161)

In this way Lily thinks back through her mother figure. Mrs. Ramsay and her world have vanished but this rhythm of accompaniment come to be re-constituted in Lily's art. The sentences are again long, connected as independent clauses. It recalls the lightness, the rhythmic pulsing of earlier deictic passages.

This pulse animates Lily to work past the "looming" barrier. This looming force represents the interruption, the self-doubt that lives within women as installed by the patriarchy. Lily hears these words of doubt, "some voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create" and whereas she once heard her voice speak to her in her deictic moment, or as Mrs. Ramsay hears hers' repeating poetry, Lily hears these words,

“as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after a certain time experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them.” (162). These words come from the outside in, in a foreign voice and unknown origin. It is this outside voice that asks, why create? Lily, knowing this painting would end up “rolled up and stuffed under a sofa” asks, “Why then did she do it?” (162). Charles Tansley’s words, that women “Can’t paint, can’t write” become disembodied and said from within Lily, but not in her own voice (162).

However, Mrs. Ramsay’s current, is stronger. Lily begins again, despite this self-doubt, to move her brush, “as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her (she kept looking at the hedge, at the canvas) by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current” (163).

It is Mrs. Ramsay, this memory, which allows Lily to continue painting. While again interrupted by the voice of the patriarchy, by Tansley standing behind her, “parading his poverty, his principles” she is offered an antidote to his intrusion: she sees Mrs. Ramsay writing letters on the beach (163). Lily herself puts these two impulses in opposition saying, “But after all, she reflected, there was the scene on the beach. One must remember that.” (163) This is a reflection on the power of Mrs. Ramsay as that elastic net, Mrs. Ramsay as a sort deictic herself. As Lily describes Mrs. Ramsay, “she brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite (she and Charles squabbling, sparring, had been silly and spiteful) something” (163). Mrs. Ramsay takes the “this” and “that” of the moment and brings it together. Like deixis she is able to suspend the moment. Here suspension works as an alternative to a proclamation of the upright “I.” Mrs. Ramsay does not add up this and that and end

up with meaning but rather brings them together into “something.” Something could be anything but it is certainly not nothing. It is a sort of silence, to use Lily’s word (163).

Continuing to paint Lily thinks of the scene of Mrs. Ramsay on the beach and of her silence. Lily is left with the great power of silent moments, moments where the “I” lies prone and listening. She was glad “to rest in the silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships” (174). This seems the answer to her question that has plagued Lily throughout the text: how to make sense of contradictory feelings? Of human relationships? How, to quote her “this” in “The Window,” “to conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking?” (28).

It seems Mrs. Ramsay, reverberating as memory, provides Lily an answer. One need not put these things, these “thises” and “thatism” into larger linguistic categories. As Lily summons the voice of Mrs. Ramsay she speaks through her saying, “Aren’t things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked... by saying them? Aren’t we more expressive thus?” (174). The receptivity of silence is not a position of lifelessness but rather of heightened awareness to the multitudinous conditions of the moment. It is not the position of the “I” upright speaking into the world and deciding meaning, nor is it the “I” underground and lifeless rather, it is the “I” in repose. It is like a woman on her back, ears and eyes turned outward toward the Other.

Indeed as Lily continues in her act of creation, taken up by this rhythm, like in the earlier passage, she loses her self-enclosed I to an experience the outer world. She becomes an “I” in repose that overcomes the white space:

And as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality, and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes and names, and sayings, and memories and

ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring hideously difficult white space, while she modeled it with greens and blues.” (163)

This loss of a stable self is not a decent into total chaos but rather a release, an expanded vision, a venture in the effusive like a “fountain spurting over.” It is tied to the excess of the moment. As Lily says, seeming to speak straight from Woolf’s diaries or essays, “The moment at least seemed extraordinarily fertile” (174). Clearly this position of silence is not one of nihilism but of renewed vision. The text continues, “She rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of bringing in it the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illuminated the darkness of the past” (174). She is brought, like Woolf, to the excessive everything and the desire to somehow express it. Seeming to channel Woolf’s statements on writing and the moment from diaries and essays she says, “And she wanted to say not one thing, but everything. Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing” for “The urgency of the moment always missed its mark” (181). It is this to which Lily is brought to by Mrs. Ramsays’ speechlessness. Silence it is not a place with arid ground, not the shadow of the “I” where nothing can grow, but in the fertile soil of the effusive and temporal. Indeed Lily goes on to finish her painting, this silence spurring her artistic creation.

Under the influence Mrs. Ramsay’s memory Lily no longer searches, as she did earlier, to fit things into words and sentences. She now, through painting, can attempt to bring things together in a non-thetic manner. As Lily articulates:

The great revelation never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck in the dark; here was one. This, that and the Other, herself and Charles Tansely and the breaking wave, Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, “Life stand still here”; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily tried to make of the moment something permanent – this was the nature of the revelation. (165)

The answer to Lily's questions about the meaning of life comes in the form of a "this," a word with no stable meaning, and the answer thus deferred again. This deictic instance gestures toward this moment of a non-epiphany epiphany, a realization that is never realized, the absence of telos. This long sentence, all its many parts unfixed by the closing "this," presents a polyvocal heterogeneity that says at once everything and yet not any one thing. Recalling again the language from Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's deictic moments like the leaves shaking in the, the company of gnats or the minnows in the water, it is a representation the many moving in unison. It is a movement, a "flowing" that is "eternal" replicating again the paradox of freezing the already passing moment in which deixis works.

Ultimately, Mrs. Ramsay's current, her ability to suspend, is for Lily an object of creative inheritance. She says that this image of Mrs. Ramsay, "stayed in the mind affecting one almost like a work of art" and looks to her painting (164). Lily has, like Woolf, made a selective act as heir. This work of art, this moment on the beach, influences her art as the poetry of a past generation of canonical male authors affects the next. She archives this moment, she does not attempt to interpret its meaning but rather consumes it.

Lily herself recognizes her debt. While she may of felt triumph over Mrs. Ramsay and her historical position, she now calls out to her understanding, "She owed it all to her." (165). This inheritance allows her to bring from the "chaos" a "shape." She describes the rhythm of her painting as, "this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability" she is brought back to Mrs. Ramsay's suspension. She says, allowing Mrs. Ramsay's to speak through her, "Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' She repeated. She

owed it all to her” (165). This creation, this ability to look at the clouds and the leaves shaking, this rhythm is Lily’s inheritance from her maternal figure, it is her thinking back through her mother.¹³ Mrs. Ramsay is part of Lily’s cannon, her memory affects her mind “almost like a work of art” and survives, lives on, haunts. Thus Lily, like Woolf, selects from her history, she cites, and from here she is able to create.

Thus, in this emptiness, this search for meaning, Lily is brought back, as always, to her picture. While she recognizes the transience of moments, of deictic expression specifically, “how ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish, nothing stays,” she finds her suspension, Mrs. Ramsay’s suspension, in art, “all changes; but not words, not paint” (182).

The ability to gesture toward time, to say “life stand still here”, is for Lily, and Woolf too, found in the act of artistic creation. The place from which ones creates is a position in the moment, as an “I” laying open to the inexpressible Other that colors every moment. For Lily, as for Woolf it is the problem of getting “the thing itself before it has been made anything” of trying to “get hold of something that evaded her” (196).¹⁴ The moment is evasive but the access point is the deictic gesture. As Lily ponders, “For there are moments when one can neither think nor feel. And if one can neither think nor feel, she thought, where is one?” (197). When the moment of experience so exceeds expression where does one begin? How can one say anything? This is the impasse of

¹⁴ This echoes Woolf’s language of the pre-linguistic ‘thing’ in letter to Vita written the year *To the Lighthouse* was published: “I was trying to get at something about the thing itself before its made into anything: the emotion, the idea” (L VII). Or in the previous year: “A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to for it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words)...” (16 march 1926, pp 204 *Congenial Spirit* 1989).

creation. If one is without a transcendental ego where is one? However, Lily answers this question simply with deixis. Where is one? One is “Here on the grass, on the ground” (197). It is from this “here” that Lily can finally finish her painting

Conclusion

In *To The Lighthouse* Woolf asks herself through Lily Briscoe the question that pervades her entire oeuvre: how to create in the overwhelming excess of experience. I argue that Woolf is not left inert but rather silent by this question. This question puts her in an alternative mode of experience, in the position of receptivity to time and space, in the position of the recumbent “I.” She is not defeated but rather alert. She is active in her passivity trying to say everything, bring all into a folding, overlapping thread of traces whose meaning is continually deferred, this chain growing and echoing through and beyond her time. To use Blanchot’s language Woolf writes “suggesting that something not being said is speaking: the loss of what we were to say” (*The Writing of the Disaster* 19).

As trespasser to the male tradition Woolf is perhaps more able to traverse its boundaries, to radically re-write the time and space of narrative fiction and create a renewed posture of subjectivity. It is a, for lack of better words, a philosophical and feminist project that continues to speak. Woolf continues to trespass on the lawns on Oxford and to look toward the clouds. She and her recumbent “I” live past death, survive, live on the borders of the cannon that will never fully contain them.

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