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# Writing a woman's sentence : Virginia Woolf's L'écriture féminine

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WRITING A WOMAN'S SENTENCE:  
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S L'ECRITURE FEMININE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

by

Christina Kay Moriconi

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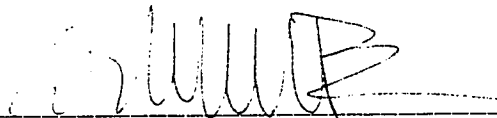
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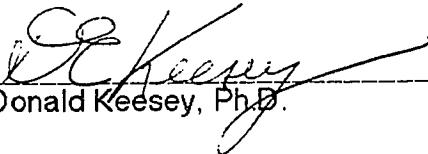
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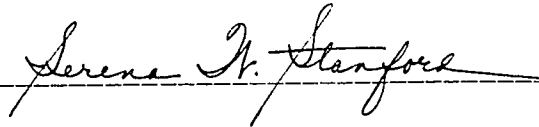


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#### ABSTRACT

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Examining how Virginia Woolf anticipates French feminism, the thesis explores Woolf's essays, diaries and novels in relation to Julia Kristeva's and Helene Cixous's discourses on l'écriture féminine. While Kristeva and Cixous dismiss Woolf's technical experiments with language and meaning as l'écriture féminine, their respective theories on how l'écriture féminine undermines symbolic language, its grammar, its sequences, and its meanings, are deeply related to Woolf's conception of a woman's sentence that she explores in her essays and in her novels.

A Room of One's Own, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves set Virginia Woolf's conception of a woman's sentence, modernism and feminism in relation to Kristeva's and Cixous's. Each chapter also reflects Kristeva's theoretical progression of poetic language, from the chora to the thetic, as the interior poetic languages of Woolf's characters are set in relation to Kristeva's theories of the chora and Woolf's wordless intimacy.



To Adam, who shared in the process, and  
to David, who helped give it shape.

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## CHAPTER 1

### An Introduction to Woolf's L'écriture Feminine : Merging Modernism and Feminism in the Text

Over the past thirty years, Virginia Woolf has gained increasing critical popularity, and the staggering number of essays and books discussing her novels and feminism would leave any critic wondering, at least for a few moments, if Woolf studies have reached a saturation point. John Burt, however, points out the "two varieties of Virginia Woolf studies. One variety . . . describes Woolf's technical experiments. The other . . . describes her ideology" (889). This apparent dichotomy in critical readings of her novels and essays is contrary to Woolf's own approach to literary criticism. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf merges her feminism with her modernism when she examines the "true nature of women and the true nature of fiction" (3). This merging is accentuated when Woolf outlines a female writing practice which includes interrupting "the smooth gliding of sentence after sentence" (84) as well as "tampering with the expected sequence" of the narrative (85). These technical experiments with sentence and narrative become part of her search for the true nature of fiction. In this essay, Woolf also recognizes that "the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before a woman could say what happens when she goes into a room" (91). Here, Woolf is searching for new forms and new meanings to move beyond the limited resources of symbolic language.

Woolf's essay "Dorothy Richardson" reformats this revisioning of language, when she points how her modernist contemporary has "applied to

her own uses . . . the psychological sentence of the feminine gender" and notes that this feminine sentence "is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shape" (191). She creates a woman's sentence which stretches, suspends, and envelopes language. When Woolf explores how "the very form of the sentence [made by men] does not fit her," she furthers her investigation of a woman's sentence (Woolf, "Women and Fiction" 48). Woolf develops not only a psychological approach to language and its meaning but also an investigation of new forms of the sentence which allow the woman writer to express herself.

When we examine both Woolf's essays and novels as examples of this feminine writing practice, we find that these works become examples of French feminism's theories on l'écriture féminine : "a practice of writing 'in the feminine' which undermines the linguistic, syntactical, and metaphysical conventions of Western narrative" (Showalter 9). We can view Woolf's l'écriture féminine as the undermining of the sentence and the sequence of narrative not only as a theory that she espouses in A Room of One's Own but also as essential part of her writing practice in Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves. Woolf's technical experiments, such as her use of stream-of-consciousness narrative and the dislocation of grammatical structures, highlight her modernism which undermines the linguistic, syntactical, and metaphysical conventions of language and narrative. We recognize how Virginia Woolf anticipates French feminists' theories on l'écriture féminine. Conceiving a revolution of language by creating a woman's sentence, Woolf is very much linked to the French feminist view, which Alice Jardine defines as a theoretical view of symbolic

language where "'woman,' 'the feminine,' and so on have come to signify those processes that disrupt symbolic structures" (42). These symbolic structures are the linguistic, syntactical, and metaphysical conventions of language and meaning. Woolf's recognition of how the feminine disrupts the symbolic structures of language, meaning, and writing significantly prefigures French feminists Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous. In Language: The Unknown, Kristeva discusses

a plurality of signifying systems of which each is one layer of a vast whole. . . . Thus, gesturality, the various visual signals, and even the image, photography, cinema, and painting are so many languages to the extent that they transmit a message between a subject and an addressee by using a specific code, even though they do not obey the rules for the construction of verbal language that have been codified by grammar. (296)

This plurality, which is a significant part of Kristeva's theory of l'écriture féminine, can be seen in the wordless gestures which Woolf uses in Mrs. Dalloway to highlight the communication between Clarissa Dalloway and her Bourton friends, Sally Seton and Peter Walsh, in the investigation of the image in Lily Briscoe's painting process in To the Lighthouse, and in the disobedience of a verbal language "codified by grammar" when Louis and Rhoda disrupt its symbolic structures in their stream-of-consciousness dialogues in The Waves. For Woolf, the stream-of-consciousness interior of her characters becomes another signifying system which disrupts verbal language. As her characters' ~~streams of consciousnesses are set apart from the confines of verbal~~ language, their interior reflections become "one layer of a vast whole" which mediates their use of language as they recognize the plurality of languages which make up their self-expression.

Interestingly enough, Kristeva does not perceive Woolf's awareness of the plurality of language. Kristeva dismisses as a woman rather than admits Virginia Woolf as a modernist disrupting language when she expound her theory of l'écriture féminine in "Oscillation Between Power and Denial":

in women's writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land; is it seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body? Virginia Woolf describes suspended states, subtle sensations, and above all, colors—green, blue—but she does not dissect language as Joyce does. Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak. (166)

Emphasizing Woolf's use of suspensions and sensations, Kristeva focuses on the suspensions, the sensations and the colors which develop her stream-of-consciousness narrative through her character's interior reflections. When Kristeva views Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness character as "the point of view of asymbolic, spastic body," she does not recognize the plurality of signifying systems which Woolf explores by attempting to translate the suspensions of verbal language by her characters, the sensations of gestures between characters, and their vision of the outside world through color. Shortly, however, we will see that this asymbolic, spastic body becomes an essential component of Woolf's disruption of language in an examination of Kristeva's definition of the chora.

Kristeva's estrangement of Woolf from the disruption of symbolic structures is reiterated by Hélène Cixous in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing: "I don't like the name Virginia . . . for you soon feel . . . an echo of Virginia Woolf, a woman doomed to drown" (70). Cast as a woman doomed to drown, Woolf is set outside Cixous's conception of l'écriture féminine in relation to modernism. However, when Woolf writes, "great poets do not die; they are

continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh," she anticipates Cixous's use of the female writer's body as a vehicle for expressing the once-unheard voices of women (A Room of One's Own 117). For Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," the flesh of the female body becomes the site where the dissection of symbolic language begins; she believes that a woman writer

must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which . . . will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations. . . . By writing her self, women will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her. . . . Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" of language and meaning. (250)

Through the stream-of-consciousness, Woolf can disrupt the conventions mediating symbolic language by "altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it" ("Women and Fiction" 48). In Woolf's novels, this natural shape is accentuated by incomplete sentences, ellipses, and parentheses which rupture and transform language in her essays and in her novels. To move beyond the censorship of the female body, Woolf uses A Room of One's Own, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse to create the body which has been "confiscated" from women when they have written within the confines of the male sentence.

~~We can perceive how Cixous's ruptures and transformations become an~~ essential component of l'écriture féminine when they are reiterated by Kristeva as the process of "introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language" in order to dismantle symbolic systems ("Oscillation" 165). Admittedly, Woolf's technical experiments do not dismantle the physical character of language to

the extent that Joyce's phonetic play does in Finnegans Wake. However, Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narrative produces ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into the language, by creating a interior site where a new language to describe women develops. Woolf's natural shape of the thought also prefigures what Kristeva describes as a "so-called 'natural' language [which] allows different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic" (Revolution in Poetic Language 24). For Kristeva, the semiotic pre-exists symbolic articulations, and in this sense, pre-exists enunciation of a language (Revolution 26); the symbolic refers to the emblematic nature of language, its "syntax and all linguistic categories" which restrict speaking subjects according to the "constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (Revolution 29). In many ways, these constraints reflect the conventions of language which Woolf explores in A Room of One's Own that have crushed and distorted a woman's sentence. When Woolf also explores in this essay the constraints of patriarchy which have estranged women from the writing process, she highlights how the woman writer's lack of financial, intellectual, and social autonomy negatively impacts her ability to explore her relation to language. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf contrasts the youthful Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton, their feminist ideology, and their semiotic kiss with their respective marriages, the social constraints of marriage, and their lack of self-expression. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf juxtaposes Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, particularly their conflicts with social constraints and the patriarchal symbolic systems which estrange women from language. Mrs. Ramsay, a representation of the Victorian matriarch, is estranged from autonomy, submitting to the demands her husband's and children's needs and



desires. Lily Briscoe seeks her autonomy through her artistic process, attempting to move beyond the male sentence: "women can't paint, women can't write" (75). When Louis and Rhoda are estranged from symbolic language in The Waves, they return to the sensations and suspensions of semiotic expression. In all of these novels, Woolf highlights how each character's return to an asymbolic, spastic body develops a semiotic sense of self which undermines the constraints of symbolic systems of language and meaning.

Woolf's opposition of stream-of-consciousness and social subjectivity in A Room of One's Own as well as in Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves illuminates the central component of sexual difference in relation to l'écriture féminine which Kristeva and Cixous explore. While Kristeva writes, "all speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverizes, and finally revives it," her criticism of Woolf fails to recognize how Woolf's conception of the androgynous mind in A Room of One's Own anticipates this view of bisexuality to explore the sources of signification ("Oscillation" 165). In A Room of One's Own, Woolf writes: "if one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties" (102). When Woolf uses stream-of-consciousness to explore the woman part and the man part of her character's mind, she connects their interior poetic languages to highlight this bisexuality, this androgyny, that occurs with a fusion

between the minds of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith in Mrs. Dalloway and between the minds of Louis and Rhoda in The Waves. In these novels, the communication between men and women comes not from a sexlessness in the text, but rather from a shared poetic language which can join both sexes. In both novels, each character "experiences sexual difference, not as a fixed opposition ('man'/'woman'), but as a process of differentiation" which multiplies, pulverizes and revives symbolic language ("Oscillation" 165). This vision of bisexuality, in relation to women's writing, is also explored in Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa":

writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other . . . not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion . . . but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another . . . a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn . . . ).  
(254)

As Woolf creates a shared poetic language between her characters in her novels, she highlights this "in-between" writing which emphasizes the connections rather than the oppositions between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith as well as between Louis and Rhoda. As Woolf creates a multiplicity of meaning which moves her characters beyond the categories of sexual difference, the shapes, the forms of their streams-of-consciousness highlight the androgynous mind which is Woolf's conception of writing in the in-between in order to disrupt the fixed structures of language. We can also view Woolf's sense of transformation of writing when she notes: "if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other . . . we face the fact . . . that our relation is to the

world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (A Room of One's Own 118). These remarks set up the relation to the world of reality found in the Kristeva's and Cixous's bisexuality as well as in Woolf's androgynous mind. Woolf, like these French feminists, are seeking to move beyond the fixed confines of sexual difference in order to illuminate new forms and, thus, new writing practices which become part of l'écriture féminine .

By transcending the fixed opposition between men and women in her novels, Woolf prefigures Kristeva's belief that "in social, sexual and symbolic experiences, being a woman has always provided a means to another end, to becoming something else: a subject-in-the-making, a subject on trial" ("Oscillation" 167). As Woolf uses her characters' semiotic interiors dismantle symbolic language, they become subjects-in-the-making which can be explored through Kristeva's progression of language acquisition: the chora, the mirror-stage, and thethetic. The chora develops as the stage where the subject receives the impressions from the outside world; the mirror-stage is where the subject begins to juxtapose a semiotic impression with its symbolic representation; and thethetic is the stage where the subject participates in systems of language by defining the semiotic sensation through symbolic enunciation. In order to relate these stages to Woolf's dissection of language, we must highlight the asymbolic, spastic body, this choraic body which Kristeva highlights in assessment of Woolf's writing.

The impressions, suspensions, and sensations which appear in Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narrative reflect what Kaja Silverman summarizes as Kristeva's first definition of the chora: "the chora is itself the condition or regime under siege by the symbolic, the unity which must be ruptured if identity is to be

found" (104). This conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic which threatens to disrupt the unity of the chora is an essential component of understanding the asymbolic, spastic sounds, sights, and gestures which Woolf highlights in her characters' streams-of-consciousness. This imaginary language occurs in Mrs. Dalloway between Clarissa and Sally Seton through their kiss in the garden at Bourton. Woolf further develops this choraic connection between Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa as an intuitive communication in the attic room, between the living and the dead. A unity is maintained between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse when Lily remember the gesture of Mrs. Ramsay taking Lily's head to rest on her lap. For Louis and Rhoda, this unity is evident in their parenthetical communication in The Waves—a communication under siege by the re-entrance, the imposition, of the symbolic language expressed by the other characters.

In the mirror-stage, the subject recognizes the distinctions between the physical body and its reflection, its representation in the mirror. Kristeva notes that "this signifier/signified transformation, constitutive of language is seen as being indebted to, induced and imposed by the social realm" in early childhood (Revolution 48). We can see through Woolf's characters' return to a choraic relation to language, they must also return to the mirror stage in order to dissect this signified/signifier opposition as various mirrors appear in her novels and her essays. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf examines how "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses . . . reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). Here, the identity of man is reflected but not the identity of women. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa, while looking in the dressing mirror, formulates a distinction between her fragmentary interior identity, "all the

other sides of her," and her social identity as Mrs. Richard Dalloway, "composed so for the world only into one centre" (55). In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe must separate herself from the social mirror reflected in Charles Tansley's assessment: "women can't paint; women can't write" (75). Thus, Lily acquires the ability to create the distinctions between the object and its representation in her very act of creating the canvas as the mirror. In The Waves, when Rhoda looks into the mirror and notes, "I have no face. Other people have faces," Woolf accentuates Rhoda's inability to acquire the signifier/signified transformation (43). When the asymbolic, spastic body that Kristeva perceives in Woolf's novels becomes the "body agitated by the semiotic motility . . . which fragments . . . more than it unifies [the character]. . . in a representation," we can see how Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness produces the fragments which are not reflected in the mirror (Revolution 46). In Mrs. Dalloway, when Clarissa returns to the chora, she finds that there is an "inner meaning almost expressed" yet fails to be expressed within the conventions of symbolic language (47). In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe creates this fragmentation as "the moment's flight between the picture and her canvas" (32). When Rhoda returns to the chora, she loses the distinctions between objects and finds that she has "to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to the body" in order to reinstate the distinctions between the signifier and the signified (44).

~~In Kristeva's framework of language, "all enunciation, whether of a word~~ or a sentence, is thetic" (Revolution 43). Jardine notes that in French feminism, the chora undermines the thetic when the "modern text lays bare . . . the conflictual state at the interior of the subject of enunciation" (59). Woolf creates this conflictual state in A Room of One's Own when she uses a stream-of-

consciousness narrative to propel her search for a new language to enunciate the true nature of women and the true nature of fiction. When this interior conflictual state is examined in Mrs. Dalloway, the stream-of-consciousness reflections of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith dissect the social constraints which mediate their self-expression. In To the Lighthouse, Lily's artistic process as a whole creates this interior conflict as she struggles to represent her semiotic impressions on the canvas. In The Waves, the internal conflicts of Louis and Rhoda center on their inability to acquire its formal structures of symbolic language. In the classroom of the early childhood, Louis's Australian accent inhibits his acquisition of symbolic enunciation and Rhoda's inability to replicate structures of language inhibits her acquisition of its meaning. Thus, they become two figures estranged from the thetic. As these interior conflicts come to light in the streams-of-consciousness of Woolf's characters, Kristeva's third definition of the chora, which builds adult "subjectivity as a spatial series in which each term is superimposed upon the preceding one, much like a palimpsest," comes to the forefront (Silverman 104). In order to point out the near-erasures of the thetic in A Room Of One's Own, her narrator deconstructs the symbolic language through the linguistic, syntactical and metaphysical conventions which have restricted the previous enunciations by men and by women. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa's memories of her relationships with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh at Bourton point out the near-erasures of these previous thetic enunciations in her assumption of her social identity as Mrs. Richard Dalloway. In To the Lighthouse, as Lily paints, she finds that she must dislocate the palimpsest and its the layers of symbolic language which create mother and child as "objects of universal veneration" (81). Lily

creates a new impressionist painting where Mrs. Ramsay and James, as mother and child, can "be reduced . . . to a purple shadow without irreverence"(81). Thus, for Lily, this impressionistic painting becomes a way in which she can move beyond the constraints of the *thetic* (81). In The Waves, Louis and Rhoda deconstruct the palimpsest, the near-erasures of their subjectivity; their return to the *chora* allows them to escape the symbolic systems of language which have estranged them from enunciation. We must also note that the parenthetical dialogues, which Woolf uses to connect Louis and Rhoda, prefigure what Kristeva notes in artistic practices as "a resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic *chora* within the signifying device of language" (Revolution 50). As Louis and Rhoda communicate with each other, their words and their sentences are within the confines of the *thetic*; Woolf must use signifying device of language to create their dialogue.

When the resurfacing of the semiotic dissects the symbolic in her novels, Woolf produces what Jardine calls a "gynesis: a new kind of writing on the woman's body, a map of new spaces yet to be explored" (52). As we view l'écriture féminine as part of this "map of new spaces," Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" is helpful for understanding the new spaces that Woolf explores as a stream of consciousness communication between her characters:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes. they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence." (256)

Woolf creates a "silence" between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay, and between Louis and Rhoda, as their semiotic interiors wreck the regulations and codes of enunciation.

Woolf creates a shared interior poetic language in these novels which "burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put in frames" of the thetic utterances between individuals in other writers' novels ("Laugh" 246). As Woolf's characters participate in an intuitive communication which transcends verbal exchanges, the "dialogues" between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, and Louis and Rhoda produce Woolf's transformation of subjects. Thus, when this gynesis, this map of a new communication between characters, returns to the impressions, sensations, and suspensions, we recognize Woolf's "attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again" that the semiotic chora produces (Three Steps 9). Thus, Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness to unerase all of the markings on the palimpsest reflects each character's subjectivity.

To explore Woolf's l'écriture féminine, the following chapters will use A Room of One's Own to provide the overarching framework of Woolf's technical experiments with a female subjectivity precariously balanced between the semiotic and the symbolic. In Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves, as subjects and objects lose their distinctions in her characters' streams-of-consciousness, Woolf explores her characters' semiotic relation to language and to real world. As she connects her characters through their experience of asymbolic impressions, suspensions, and sensations, her characters articulate their identities through their recognition of an interior reality which the thetic is unable to translate.



## CHAPTER 2

Writing from A Room of One's Own

Developed from two lectures at Newnham and Girton in October, 1928, A Room of One's Own is set up around "one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she to write" (4). While Woolf investigates the different social and economic components which have restricted the woman writer, she tackles a much larger topic, "the true nature of women and the true nature of fiction" (3). Woolf's introductory remarks create a framework for her discourse on this topic: "women and what they are like . . . women and the fiction that they write . . . women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together" (3). Through these four approaches, Woolf counters previous conceptions of women and fiction by re-presenting women and the fictions and discourses written about and by them throughout the centuries.

In her representation of women and fiction, Woolf prefigures the discursive practice in French feminism which Alice Jardine describes in Gynesis:

gynesis --the putting into ...course of "woman" as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is, historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking. (25)

Woolf's first three chapters explore the historical privileging of discourses and fictions written by men. When Woolf uses the stark contrast between the fictional educational institutions of all-male Oxbridge and all-female Fernham in chapter one, the cataloging of the glut of critical and fictional written by men in the British Museum in chapter two, and the scarcity of female writers in the

Renaissance through the fictional form of Judith Shakespeare in chapter three, she creates new modes of thinking, writing, and speaking about the social, economic, and intellectual hierarchies which have privileged men and the fiction they write. In the latter three chapters, Woolf begins her valorization of the feminine and the female speaker. As Woolf explores the shift from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, where a woman writer could "make her living by her wits" (69) in chapter four, Mary Carmichael's "tampering with the expected sequence" (86) of the sentence and narrative in chapter five, and, in chapter six, Coleridge's concept "that a great mind is androgynous" (102), she creates new and necessary modes of thinking, writing and speaking about women and the fiction that they write.

Woolf's new modes of thinking, writing, and speaking include the use of multiple speakers and stream-of-consciousness narrative found in her fiction within her essay. Woolf radicalizes the form of critical essays through this modernist experimentation, and we find that the "medium of Woolf is . . . neither absolute fiction nor absolute essay. It is language" (Lawrence 374). By incorporating fiction into A Room of One Own, Woolf prefigures the discursive practices of Helene Cixous in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing, Julia Kristeva in "Stabat Mater," and Luce Irigaray in This Sex Which Is Not One. These French feminists, who have also used fiction in their critical essays, do so in order to outline their linguistic and ideological exploration of l'écriture feminine. A Room of One's Own becomes an example of Woolf's own l'écriture feminine as she dissects the patriarchal structures which have mediated the representations describing and inscribing women as the other sex. Like these French feminists, Woolf highlights the alterity of her approach to a patriarchal

language when she deconstructs the approaches in past discourses and past fictions used to describe women by both men and women, in order to formulate new processes of language and representation.

Woolf's use of fictional figures becomes a new and necessary mode if she is to move the essay away from the confines of presenting a single discourse on the true nature of women and fiction. From the outset, Woolf calls into question her "first duty of lecturer—to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth" (3). She further subverts the expectation of pure truth, as well as her role as a critical lecturer, when she recognizes "the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker" whenever discourse is limited to a single point of view (4). Her dislocation of the first-person speaker becomes the focal point when she notes, "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being" (4). She accentuates this dislocation when she moves into her use of fictional figures: "Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought" (5). By creating this polymorphous subjectivity, Woolf sets up these fictional women as extensions of her "I" throughout the essay. In this moment, the speaker, Mary Beton, supplants Woolf's own voice as a lecturer, and the discussion of women and fiction comes from a figure who has "no real being." ~~By using the fictional "I" to disclose her discourse on women~~ and fiction, Woolf undermines the search for a unitary truth in A Room of One's Own.

As Mary Beton sits on the bank of the river at Oxbridge, her stream-of-consciousness reflections on this fictional environment comes to the forefront:

"To the right and left bushes of some sort, golden and crimson, glowed with the colour, even it seemed burnt with the heat, of fire. . . . The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and boat and burning tree" (5). Woolf creates a semiotic landscape filled with choraic sensations and gestures, and we may be tempted to agree with Kristeva's assessment that "Virginia Woolf describes suspended states, subtle sensations and above all, colors . . . but does not dissect language" ("Oscillation Between Power and Denial" 166). However, this suspended state creates the environment through which Woolf's l'écriture féminine explores the conflict between interior reflections and symbolic language:

Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it, until . . . the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked. (5)

Woolf dissects language by returning to the perspective of the choraic, stream-of-consciousness interior, in essence to point out the confines of discourse. Here, Woolf's investigation in many ways exemplifies the deconstruction of symbolic language by the semiotic that Kristeva theorizes in Revolution in Poetic Language: "the chora, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality. Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it" (26). Woolf undermines discourse by her use of colors to create her environment as well as her use of the rhythm of the stream to create the rhythm of the stream-of-consciousness reeling in the thought from the undisclosed depths of the choraic interior. The sudden conglomeration of the

idea that is brought to the surface escapes the utterances of language, whether spoken or written. Woolf recognizes that the process, which has led her to the insignificant thought that a woman needs money and a room of one's own if she is to write, cannot possibly be fully disclosed in its entirety through symbolic language. Through this failure to represent her thought, Woolf begins "set up such a wash and tumult of ideas" on women and fiction that she wishes to explore later within the framework of her critical essay (5).

In chapter one, Woolf focuses on the economic factors to accentuate the privileging of the male speaker and his access to educational institutions. At Oxbridge, "money was poured liberally to set these stones on a deep foundation, and when the stones were raised, more money was poured in the from the coffers of kings and queens and great nobles to ensure that hymns should be sung here and scholars taught" (9). The fictional conversation between Mary Beton and Mary Seton, another extension of Woolf's "I," creates the intellectual poverty of women at Fernham through the history. Woolf points out that women have not been able to endow their own educational institutions because "the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned" (23). When their conversation also creates a portrait of women's lives, of "mothers who bore thirteen children to the ministers of religion at St. Andrews" (24), Woolf's focus on this economic and intellectual disparity highlights what Kristeva describes as "an objective ordering [ordonnement] which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure" (Revolution 26-7). Woolf points out that biological difference and family structure have been contributing

factors to women's subjection to the socio-historical constraints which have maintained the privileging of the male speaker.

Woolf uses the British Museum to dissect the hierarchal ordering of sexual difference, cemented in the minds of some men, through a fictional speaker who finds critical texts "by a whole pack of hounds, Professors, schoolmasters, sociologists, clergymen, novelists, essayists, journalists, [and] men who had no qualification save that they were not women" lining the stacks of the library (28). With all these opinions on women and what they are like, her speaker finds that her "notebook rioted with the wildest scribble of contradictory jottings" (30), and notes that, in her investigation, it was a "pure waste of time to consult all those gentlemen who specialise in woman and her effect on whatever it may be—politics, children, wages, morality. . . . One might as well leave their books unopened" (31). To invalidate the plethora of discourses by men which she lists in her essay, she creates Professor von X and "his monumental work entitled The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex" (31). First, Woolf satirizes the psychological causes of Professor von X's perception by pointing to a possible betrayal by a woman, as a prejudice, an idiosyncrasy, a limitation that undermines his discourse (31). While this betrayal may serve as one possible cause, Woolf indicates, "in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (31): ~~This submerged truth is that women are not inferior to men but that social~~ forces and personal prejudices, which have mediated the discourses by men, have created them as such. Woolf's speaker indicates that Professor von X's monumental work exemplifies the "rule of a patriarchy" (33) by pointing out that "when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of

women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority" (34-5). As Woolf notes this construction of male superiority in discourse, she prefigures the essential thesis expressed by French feminist Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex :

she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject. He is the Absolute—She is the Other. (xxii)

Woolf deconstructs the rule of a patriarchy, which creates men as the essential and Absolute and women as the inessential and Other, by illuminating the social forces which have maintained women in a position of inferiority, and she seeks out a way to move beyond the limitations of discourses by men as her essay continues. In essence, in this moment, Woolf "seems to practice what we might now call a 'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse" (Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics 9). To continue her deconstruction of the rule of patriarchy, Woolf finds that she must also deconstruct male superiority.

To create the social foundation which has supported male superiority, Woolf notes, "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). As points of reflection, women have been relegated to a position of supporting the male subject and his superiority. This looking-glass metaphor prefigures Luce Irigaray's observation that women "are a mirror value of and for man. . . . They yield to him their natural and social value as a locus of imprints, marks, and mirage of his activity" (This Sex 177). Woolf counters this valuation of the female yielding to a mirror by creating woman as a subject in her essay. By reintroducing the figure Mary Beton, now the aunt of

the speaker, into the essay, Woolf creates a scenario where her fictional speaker is "left five hundred pounds a year for ever" by this aunt (37). With this financial freedom, her speaker can occupy a room of her own and set out to write her own discourse on women and fiction. As her speaker claims her subjectivity, "the figure in the looking-glass shrinks" and no longer supports male superiority (36). Woolf's speaker breaks from what Kaja Silverman calls the "acoustic mirror" where "the female voice [is] called upon to perform for the male subject" (80). The insertion of her voice, which refuses to perform for the male subject, offers up a new mirror which reflects women as speakers on the discourse of women and fiction.

In chapter three, Woolf delves into the history and literature of the Renaissance to focus on an obvious fact about women: while "she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she is the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger" (45). In this historical framing, women are confined to the language used by men to describe them, and their absence from history highlights their subjugation to the rule of a patriarchy. When Woolf highlights the images of women that appear in Renaissance poetry and fiction written by men, Woolf prefigures Luce Irigaray's deconstruction of women's representation by men, where they are "paralyzed by all those images, words, fantasies. Transfixed . . . by [men's] admiration, their praises, what they call their 'love'" (This Sex 17). To counter the images, words and fantasies of fiction, Woolf returns to fiction and uses the figure of Judith Shakespeare to exemplify what representations women would have developed for themselves if history



had afforded them their own voices to create their own images, words and fantasies.

With the introduction of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, Woolf examines the absence of a female expression that "never got itself on the paper" (50) and the patriarchal voice that discouraged women from writing: "The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (54). Recognizing the delineation of the female voice, Woolf begins "looking again at the blank spaces on the shelves" which illuminate the absence of women in Renaissance literature (54). The short summation of Judith's life highlights why a blank space exists on the shelf: "she could get no training in her craft . . . yet her genius was for fiction . . . and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself" (50). While Woolf notes that "there have been women novelists of merit" (56), many women, like Judith Shakespeare, were given no opportunities to develop their genius in the real world. The shelf has blank spaces because many women's voices and their creations remained on the inside during the Renaissance.

Turning to the male artists of the Renaissance and, more specifically, to Shakespeare, Woolf illuminates where the true nature of women in the fiction may be found and also where the true nature of fiction finds itself on the shelf. Linking the true representation of women with the writing process. Woolf investigates in Shakespeare "what state of mind is most propitious for creative work . . . in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is him" (58). Woolf envisions Shakespeare as an example of what many discourses and fictions have failed to achieve when they "make all the

world the witness of some hardship or grievance" (58). What also comes to the forefront in her examination is how Shakespeare's "poetry flows from him free and unimpeded" and, thus, exemplifies an "incandescent, unimpeded" mind (59). This free and unimpeded mind sets the tone of her discussion of women and what they write in chapters four and five; then, in chapter six, Woolf builds on this discussion, through Coleridge's conception of the androgynous mind, to discuss the true nature of fiction.

In chapter four, Woolf creates the history of the female writer from two seventeenth-century contemporaries, Lady Winchilsea and Aphra Behn, to the nineteenth-century canonical writers, Jane Austen and the Brontës. Woolf inserts Lady Winchilsea's poetry into the essay to illuminate the fact that "one has only to open her poetry to find her bursting out in indignation against the position of women" (61). What is found in Lady Winchilsea's poetry is her inability to move beyond personal hostility in her artistic process. As Woolf critiques her poetry, she shows that "her mind has by no means 'consumed all impediment and become incandescent'" like Shakespeare's (62). Woolf also sees this hostility in Charlotte Brönte as she examines Jane Eyre: "she will write in a rage where she should write calmly. . . . She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot" (73). This rage, when it influences their writing process, mars the poetry of Lady Winchilsea and the fiction of Charlotte Brönte.

To move beyond this personal hostility, Woolf introduces Aphra Behn to mark the moment in the seventeenth century when "begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes" (67). Woolf returns to her minor point when she couples the

mental and fiscal freedom of women: "Aphra Behn proved that money could be made by writing" (67-8). When she turns to the nineteenth century and the middle-class writers, she notes the debt of all women writers to Aphra Behn "who earned them the right to speak their minds" (69). Woolf focuses on Jane Austen and Emily Brönte to explore "the freedom of the mind" in the nineteenth-century. Writing about Austen, Woolf asserts she "was a woman . . . writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching" (71). Here, the characteristics of the unimpeded and incandescent mind comes to the forefront. Woolf notes that Emily Brönte and Jane Austen maintained their artistic vision, because "they wrote as women write, not as men write. . . . They alone entirely ignored the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue--write this, think that" (78). Austen and Brönte move beyond patriarchy and escape its dictates for women's writing. These dictates of the eternal pedagogue are exemplified when Woolf uses the fictions of Thackeray, Dickens and Balzac as works which reflect "a man's sentence. . . that was unsuited for a woman's use" (79-80). This rejection of the man's sentence while searching for a woman's sentence connects with Helene Cixous' warning in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified" (263). Thus, for Woolf, the female writing practice becomes about moving beyond "a lack of [a female] tradition" and "a scarcity and inadequacy of tools" (80). When Woolf brings a conclusion to chapter four, she proclaims the need for a woman writer "knocking that [sentence] into shape for herself . . . and providing some new vehicle . . . for the poetry in her" (80). Woolf believes that, if a woman writer is to move beyond limitations of the man's sentence and literary tradition, "the book has somehow

to be adapted to the body" (81). In many ways, Woolf's linking of the female writing practice to the body prefigures Helene Cixous' declaration in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse" (256). To move beyond previous discourses and fictions which have defined the true nature women and fiction, the female writing practice becomes about creating a new tradition and a new language through which women can express themselves.

In chapter five, Woolf uses the fictional Mary Carmichael's writing practice to show how women can adapt the sentences to their body. In Mary Carmichael's writing, "the smooth gliding of sentence after sentence was interrupted. Something tore, something scratches; a single word here and there flashed its torch in my eyes" (84). As Mary Carmichael interrupts the smooth gliding of the sentence, we are reminded of Woolf's dismissal of conventional realism in her diary: "the method of writing smooth narrative cant be right; things dont happen in one's mind like that" (*Diaries* III: 126-7). However, Woolf places a restriction on Mary's "tampering with the expected sequence . . . [and] the sentence. . . . She has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating" (85). This process of re-inventing language and its structure by a women writer allows her "to devise some entirely new combination of her resources, so highly developed for other purposes, so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole" (89). In many ways, this balance of the whole has been the goal for Woolf in this essay. While breaking the

sentence and the sequence of present events through her inclusion of modernism, Woolf does so by combining her resources and using the inherited language and structure of the discourses written by men to create a new form for fiction within her own essay. Woolf notes, however, that "the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before a woman could say what happens when she goes into a room" (91). This deficiency in language is reflected also in Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which Is Not One:

If we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves. . . . Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but not our own. (205)

As Woolf calls for new words, a new language, she prefigures Irigaray's sense of a l'écriture féminine. Thus, with this issuing of words from the bodies of women as a unique language where "new facts are bound to be discovered" about the true nature of women, Woolf feels that a woman writer can escape her absence from a man's language where she is merely a speaking machine (95). She must radically create language to tell the truth about women and their fiction through new words, new sentences and new sequences.

In chapter six, Woolf moves her essay from strictly focusing on women. She creates a fictional scenario of London and sees "that the ordinary sight of two people getting in a cab had the power to communicate something" (100). What their sharing communicates to Woolf is visible when Woolf writes, "perhaps to think . . . of one sex as distinct from the other. . . interferes with the unity of the mind" (100). Throughout her essay, the distinctions between the sexes which both men and women writers, including Woolf herself, have

professed fall into two categories of writing fiction. However, when Woolf continues to reflect upon this unity, she writes, "for certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together in a natural fusion" (101). This fusion developed when Woolf writes on Coleridge's concept that "a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties" (102). Here, the true nature of women and the true nature of men are inextricably mixed together to achieve the true nature of fiction. When Woolf writes that "an androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided," we recognize the poetic language which Woolf has used to describe the minds of Shakespeare and Austen in previous chapters (102). Woolf develops this undivided mind through her belief that the writer "must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (108). Thus, Woolf extends upon her belief that the true nature of fiction comes from an androgynous mind.

Woolf utilizes this androgynous, incandescent, and undivided mind to first illuminate the writing by men which have disrupted or created its fusion in their work. First, Woolf creates a fictional scenario where she is examining a novel by Mr. A: "a shadow seemed to lie across the page . . . shaped something like the letter 'I.' One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it . . . [but] in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist" (103-4). Here, Woolf returns to her dislocation of the "I"-speaker in chapter one when she accentuates the limitations of the "I" as the landscape behind it becomes shapeless as mist. She further creates this mist when she continues to critique the novel: "Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. But . . . [Woolf's ellipses]

she has not a bone in her body, I thought, watching Phoebe . . . coming across the beach. Then Alan got up and the shadow of Alan at once obliterated Phoebe. For Alan had views and Phoebe was quenched in the flood of his view" (104). The lack of unity between the masculine and the feminine is presented by the dominating voice of Alan which "at once obliterated Phoebe." In the flooding of Alan's views, we are reminded of the bookshelves lined with male views at the British Museum. Phoebe's silence and her shapelessness return us to the fictional Judith Shakespeare and Beauvoir's construction of woman as Other and man as Absolute. Phoebe is essentially absent in this mirror which reflects only Alan. Woolf connects Professor von X with Mr. A when she notes that he "is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority" and the superiority of men in his narrative (105). Woolf returns to Coleridge to distinguish the true nature of fiction from Mr. A's writing: "when one takes a sentence of Coleridge into the mind, it explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas, and that is the only sort of writing which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life" (105). Thus, the true nature of fiction rests on a writer's ability to give birth to new forms and new shapes in the mind and not restrict women to hierarchal ordering of them as objects, strictly according to the belief of male superiority.

When Woolf returns to her discussion of women and what they write, she makes the important point that a hierarchal ordering which privileges the male subject is not the only fault that disrupts the unity of the mind: "it is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple" (108). Woolf specifically highlights the deficiency of unity that occurs with such single-mindedness when she notes, "it is fatal for a woman to lay the

least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. It ceases to be fertilised" (108). Through these fatal flaws, we are reminded of Woolf's criticism of Lady Winchilsea and Charlotte Brönte in chapter four. We are also reminded of Woolf's praise of Jane Austen and Emily Brönte in terms of their ability to move beyond speaking consciously as women, when Woolf writes, "the whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace" (108). Here, Woolf explores writers, male and female, as creators of art who are no longer restricted by their gender.

In her concluding remarks, Woolf professes that "intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom" (112). Woolf returns to her minor point by viewing the intellectual and the fiscal freedom necessary for women to indulge in the creative writing process. By attaining this freedom, Woolf notes that the female writer and poet, like her predecessors Sappho and Emily Brönte, will become "an inheritor as well as an originator" and "come to have the habit of writing naturally" (113). As we move on to study Woolf's own novels, we will find that they illuminate her position as an inheritor and as an originator of modern fiction. Woolf develops the fertilized mind through the collaboration of male and female minds in her narratives. She also creates the explosion of ideas and forms as she tampers with the sentence greatly through her use of stream-of-consciousness reflections. She creates a poetic language which reflects the internal shape of the sentence as well as the internal shape of the thought-process. From this internal thought-process,



Woolf recognizes that "if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves. . . no human being should shut out the view" (118).

This world of reality becomes central to understanding why Woolf places Clarissa in her attic room, to create the unity of the mind with a stranger, Septimus Warren Smith, in Mrs. Dalloway; why the real vision of Lily Briscoe's painting is understood through her interior reflections in To the Lighthouse; and why Louis and Rhoda escape the world of men and women to create a man-womanly and woman-manly sense of the reality of the present moment through their parenthetical dialogues in The Waves. It is the world of reality that Woolf creates in her novels that will become the central focus of the chapters that follow and how this world is born out in her prefiguring of French feminism through her modernist techniques.

## CHAPTER 3

## Clarissa's "Queer Power of Communicating":

Semiotic Intimacy in Mrs. Dalloway

Virginia Woolf's experimentation with stream-of-consciousness narrative in Mrs. Dalloway centers on her protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, and the conflict she perceives between her social identity and her stream-of-consciousness identity. Woolf opposes the spoken Clarissa, who communicates within the social limitations of her role as a wife, mother and party hostess, with the muted Clarissa, who communicates beyond these limitations in her stream-of-consciousness. As Clarissa continually returns to her stream-of-consciousness identity, the novel exemplifies what Kaja Silverman has noted as Kristeva's three definitions of the chora. By casting Clarissa as the adult subject returning to the chora, her stream-of-consciousness becomes the "regime under siege from the symbolic" (Silverman 104). Before localizing on a specific memory, Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness presents the moment first from "the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body . . . [as she] describes suspended states, subtle sensations and above all, colors" (Kristeva, "Oscillation between Power and Denial" 166). However, Woolf does not limit Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness to this asymbolic, spastic body. When Sally Seton and Peter Walsh, two figures of her young adulthood, surface in Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness, Clarissa points out the sounds, sights and gestures of the wordless intimacy that she shared with them spill over the boundaries of symbolic language. Her feminist sisterhood with Sally creates a strange merging between Clarissa's semiotic and symbolic expression, as if they exist beyond symbolic language. Her romance with Peter introduces the disruption

of a semiotic unity beyond the symbolic as he recognizes at Bourton that Clarissa's marriage to Richard Dalloway will lack such an intimacy. Thus, when we examine Clarissa's interior poetic language, particularly before Clarissa remembers a specific event from her young adulthood, we can view her stream-of-consciousness as "the force that assails language and meaning" (Silverman 104). When Clarissa's memories of Bourton become part of Kristeva's discussion of the chora, "which conceptualizes subjectivity as a spatial series in which each term is superimposed upon the preceding one, much like a palimpsest," the spoken and the wordless intimacies that Clarissa shared with Peter and with Sally become left-over markings, near erasures on Clarissa's social, spoken subjectivity (Silverman 104).

By viewing Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness as the space under siege by the symbolic, social identity and the wordless intimacy shared with Sally and Peter as the force that assails the language and meaning, Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness begins "introducing ruptures, blank spaces and holes" into her social identity ("Oscillation" 165). The conflict between Clarissa's spoken I and her muted I is displayed further when Woolf interlaces Clarissa's interior reflections with Peter Walsh's and Septimus Warren Smith's: "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters . . . the idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment" (Diary 2: 263). By connecting the streams-of-consciousness of Clarissa, Peter and Septimus throughout the novel, Woolf's narrative experiment prefigures the l'écriture féminine that Helene Cixous describes in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing :

The book unravels inside a character's body. Of course it is and outside but . . . it is about going beyond, about breaking through the known, the human, and advancing in the direction of the terrifying, of our own end . . . there where the other begins. (70-1)

While Clarissa, Peter and Septimus connect in the outside world through the car backfire, the sky-writing, Peter Walsh's walk in Regent's Park, and Dr. Bradshaw, the caves behind them connect through a shared, poetic language that advances them in the direction where their other identities begin. Focusing on how Woolf moves outside and inside the bodies of Clarissa and Septimus, we can see how Woolf "bursts, pierces, deforms, reforms, and transforms the boundaries the subject and society set for themselves" (Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 103). As Clarissa and Septimus unravel the boundaries of their social identities, an imaginary, unspoken communication develops between them. As they retreat to the caves behind them, their shared metaphors of the flame, its heat and its quivering, produce the chora's negativity that threatens to collapse both their known, outside identities and their other, inside identities. Their return to the chora places them on the brink of death; as they burst the boundaries of the subject, they create the threat that they will be unable to reinstate the limitations of their social identities. Septimus and his shell-shocked madness bring this threat to the forefront. As madness becomes the feature of his social estrangement, Clarissa's estranged other identity, the self that she explored at Bourton, also becomes a threat to her return to social role. The threat of this terrifying collapse culminates at the end of the novel when the image of Septimus's dead and tangled body enters the cave behind Clarissa at her party and illuminates how close Clarissa has been to such a terrifying end.

Woolf creates Clarissa's outside world by following her preparations for her party. While the narrative initially starts with Clarissa's departure to buy flowers for her party, the beautiful cave behind Clarissa returns her to her youth.

A rather different Clarissa comes to the forefront of the narrative. When she moves outside the doors of her London house, the morning air sparks a memory of Bourton:

How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen. (3)

In this memory of the Bourton landscape, she stands at the brink of her womanhood, unattached to her social identity as wife, mother and social hostess. The morning air at Bourton reflects a calm that is not present in her bustling preparations for her party. Standing at the open window at Bourton, the older Clarissa frames the lack of restrictions placed on her at eighteen. A "semi-transparent envelope [of an] unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" around this other identity develops in this present moment (Woolf, "Modern Fiction" 106). Bourton reflects the fluid identity between the inside and the outside, and Clarissa, in many respects, is a "subject-to-be" who has yet to rupture this unity between her imaginary and her symbolic communication with others (Grosz 43). Her self-expression has yet to be limited by something awful, by a submission to her social role that occurs in her marriage to Richard Dalloway.

When Clarissa returns from buying flowers, she withdraws to her attic room in the middle of the day. The attic room of her present connects with her bedroom at Bourton where the intellectual and feminist companionship between Clarissa and Sally developed:

There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They mean to found a society to abolish private property . . . read

Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour. (49)

Educated by Sally, Clarissa realizes "for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was" (49). At eighteen, they "defy unification, distinctive boundaries and social regulation" of their feminine identities (Grosz 43). As they read Plato and Shelley in Clarissa's bed and indulge in socialist thought, they seek to "reform the world" and their position in the social structure. Clarissa's bedroom becomes a "space of subversive thought" for Sally and Clarissa (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 249). Exploring a new language for women, the secret world of their companionship produces an "almost imperceptible, yet powerfully dominating impulse --an impulse that comes from the urge toward unique, creative, self-realization" (Franz 167). This creative, self-realization for Sally and Clarissa "sprang a sense of being in league together" (50). Yet this dominating impulse is also tinged with "a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe)" (50). The catastrophe becomes the "blur of deformation" of their feminist ideals by their respective marriages (Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 10). Clarissa only reforms the world as young, independent woman, and she loses this creative self-realization as the limitations of a wife, mother and hostess take over her life and her identity.

While Clarissa is "plunged deep in the richest strata of [the] mind" through her intellectual sisterhood with Sally, an erotic sisterhood also emerges in her memories of Bourton (Diary 2: 323). In her attic bedroom, her memory returns her to the "most exquisite moment of her whole life" (52). A wordless intimacy marks this moment between them: "Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The

others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally" (52). As their kiss makes physical the connection between them, this gesture also creates a semiotic communication between them. As the others disappear in the moment, the intimate bond between Sally and Clarissa reflects the "erotic merging at the interior of language" that Jardine describes in *Gynesis* (246). The distinctions between them have disappeared in this moment of an intimacy which unites and merges them. Sally and Clarissa connect beyond thetic utterances, communicating through a silent, choraic gesture. Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness recreates this wordless intimacy of her kiss and her feeling that "she had been given present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, which as they walked . . . she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through" (52-3). This gift shared between Clarissa and Sally removes them, temporarily, from the blur of deformation. However, this radiance between them lasts only for a moment before the outside world intrudes and disrupts its radiance.

The outside world reappears with old Joseph and Peter Walsh entering into the garden, interrupting this exquisite moment between Clarissa and Sally. For Clarissa, ending this moment "was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible" (53). Her secret world with Sally discontinues when they are no longer alone. Peter's interruption is given a different context when we recall that Clarissa and Peter Walsh were lovers at Bourton. A conflict develops between Sally and Peter as they vie for Clarissa's affection, and, in this memory of Bourton, Peter's "determination to break into their companionship" with his own companionship with Clarissa "would

interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness" with Sally (53). Peter's entrance marks Clarissa's loss of this wordless intimacy.

On the day of her party, Peter Walsh returns, however, not as an intruder, but as another figure from Bourton with whom she has experienced at unspoken, intimate connection. During her morning walk towards Bond Street, Clarissa creates a connection with Peter prompted by her memory that "he would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which" (4). Without a physical connection with Peter, Clarissa recognizes a "fluid, secret, center, inside" communication with him (Three Steps 83). Clarissa connects this inside communication with Peter to the natural landscape:

In the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (12)

This memory of Peter prompts Clarissa to contemplate their inside identities that remain outside spoken utterances. As Clarissa views herself as part of the trees, her house and people she has never met, Clarissa conceives an unspoken merging between people and their surroundings. Clarissa's conception of this wordless intimacy with Peter reflects how the chora's "negativity is the liquefying and dissolving agent that does not destroy but rather reactivates new organizations" (Revolution 109). A "mist"-ical communication develops, and this mist becomes the dissolving agent which lifts and spreads Clarissa and Peter beyond the confines of symbolic utterances. In the ebb and flow of their imaginary communication, language finds itself in an unspoken site.



not from an inability to verbalize, but rather from an ability to move beyond spoken utterances.

Woolf further develops the intimacy between Clarissa and Peter, "their queer power of communicating without words," in her drawing-room, after Peter comes to visit, unannounced (90). In Peter's inspection of their "queer communication," he finds that in their connection, "there had risen up a lovely tree in the brisk sea-salted air of their intimacy (for in some ways no one understood him, felt with him, as Clarissa did)—their exquisite intimacy" (68). Here, the tree returns as the image which represents their wordless intimacy rises. Brought together in the physical world of the drawing-room, Clarissa and Peter re-establish their wordless intimacy: "suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable force thrown through the air, he burst into tears . . . and Clarissa had leant forward, taken his hand, drawn him to her, kissed him" (69). The kiss returns their interaction to a choraic gesture. Through this moment, Woolf also creates Clarissa's regret of her marriage to Richard Dalloway. In the re-birth of their exquisite intimacy, Clarissa is tormented by the thought that "if I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day! (70). This gaiety becomes the moments of intimacy which are now infrequent, almost absent in her life. Watching Peter in her drawing-room, she imagines her escape from the confines of her present social identity: "Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively . . . and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over" (70-1). As a figure of Clarissa's escape from her current life, Peter continues to represent the other life. While she knows that she will not run away with Peter, the thought

itself does allow her to create an imaginary world without the self-sacrifice of being a wife, mother and social hostess.

Peter's arrival in Clarissa's external present also returns them to the moment where the intimacy between them was ruptured at Bourton. In St. James's Park, returning home from buying the flowers, Clarissa finds that "some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness" (9). This bitterness comes not from Peter's intrusion on her kiss with Sally but from a conversation at Bourton when Peter recognized what limitation marriage would impose on her: "she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of a perfect hostess" (9-10). Calling out after Peter when he leaves her drawing-room, "Remember my party to-night!" Clarissa's utterance accentuates how she has indeed become the perfect hostess. Her recognition of Peter's prophetic words tempers the volatile nature of the interaction at Bourton: "how he scolded her! How they argued!" (9). Peter, during his walk in Regent's Park, recalls "that summer, early in the 'nineties, when he was so passionately in love with Clarissa" (88). On the first afternoon when Richard Dalloway arrives at Bourton, the romantic intimacy between Peter and Clarissa ruptures:

Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners . . . and wanted to introduce him to some one—spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him. . . . 'The perfect hostess,' he said to her, whereupon she winced all over. But he meant her to feel it. He would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway. So she left him. (93)

Peter delineates Clarissa according to her social role as the perfect hostess. In a sense, Peter sees in Clarissa what her intimacy with Sally had distracted her from, the recognition that her present social identity was already evident at

Bourton. They are, in a sense, making peace with this memory of Bourton. For Peter, by "starting again, after thirty years, trying to explain her," their meeting again in the physical world returns them to a friendship which they had lost (115). Their inspection of Bourton, their love and their arguments becomes necessary if Clarissa and Peter are to resume their intimate connection without the old bitterness.

Returning to her memories of her other identity at Bourton, Clarissa recognizes that in her present, "this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing. . . . She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; . . . this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (14). Being Mrs. Richard Dalloway, she finds that she has "no history, no language" to represent herself outside her social roles (11). She is "transfixed . . . [as] a woman who was that very night to give a party" (54). Woolf develops this transfixed, social identity in her essay, "Professions for Women" as the Angel in the House: "She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own" (59). Clarissa perceives the disparity between her role as Angel in the House and her other self remains which remains invisible, unseen, and unknown:

That was her self—pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point. (55)

Clarissa's reflection in the mirror transfixes the meeting-point of social role with her physical body. Her other self is "trapped within the frontiers of her body" (Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual Dissident" 296). As Mrs. Richard

Dalloway making a meeting-point, she recognizes that "no 'I' is there to assume this femininity" that society demands that she create in her drawing room ("Oscillation" 47). The looking-glass creates the disparity between "her self," her outside, pointed social identity from "herself," her inside, boundless other identity.

Presenting Clarissa's exploration of her incompatible parts in her attic bedroom, Woolf prefigures Luce Irigaray's retelling of Alice in Wonderland as a conflict with the construction of a social identity. Irigaray's Alice notes, "either I don't have any 'self,' or else I have a multitude of 'selves' appropriated by them, for them, according to their needs or desires . . . But I was more than half absent. I was on the other side," and we are reminded of Clarissa's conflict with her composed identity as Angel in the House (This Sex 17). Thus, when Clarissa ascends to her attic bedroom, "like a nun withdrawing or a child exploring a tower," her stream-of-consciousness reflections rupture and deconstruct the language and meaning that has constituted her self to the role of Mrs. Richard Dalloway (45). Upstairs and away from the drawing-room on the day of her party, she finds that she "must put off [her] rich apparel . . . must disrobe" and discard the costume which masks her other side (45). Clarissa moves "behind the screen of representation" where she is wife, mother and social hostess (This Sex 9). She begins "letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of the unconscious being" and explores this unseen, other self ("Professions for Women" 61). In her moments of solitude throughout the day, Clarissa seeks out the submerged and muted "I" that exists on the other side of her social identity.

Woolf develops a shared poetic language that describes the other side of their social identities and connects the caves behind Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith in the present moment. First, Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa are brought together in the physical world; as they wander about London perceiving the same sights, the connection between them begins with the backfire of a car. Clarissa's cave, which develops right before their physical connection, focuses on a Shakespeare quote in a shop window:

'Fear no more the heat of the sun, nor the furious winter's rages.'  
This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all  
men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and  
endurance; a perfect upright and stoical bearing. (13)

Reflecting on society after WWI, Clarissa views the heat and rages of the war as something that London society has survived; the resumption of the upright and stoical bearing of their social identities becomes a survival mechanism. Septimus views this resumption of a social order, "this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him" (21). Shell-shocked, the heat and rages continue to exist for Septimus, and inside his body, "the world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames" because of his madness (21). His cave, which follows the car backfire, points to his failure, his inability to resume the upright and stoical bearing of sanity. His madness keeps him from drawing everything to one composed, center. As Clarissa explores her unseen, unknown self and Septimus explores the dark places of his shell-shocked madness, Woolf marks how Clarissa and Septimus collapse spoken language by moving behind their social identities. A recurring image, the flame, with its heat and its quivering, accentuates the unraveling,

choraic rupture of the social identity that occurs in the caves behind Clarissa and Septimus.

When Clarissa and Septimus view the airplane sky-writing, this physical event connects them right before Clarissa ascends to her attic bedroom and remembers the kiss she shared with Sally Seton. As Clarissa goes upstairs, her stoical world as the Angel of the House unravels: "she could see what she lacked. . . . It was something central . . . which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together" (46). This cold contact, which has become a survival mechanism for society, points out the limitations of spoken language. This cold contact also reflects the "lack or . . . the desire which constitutes the subject during his or her insertion into the order of language" (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 198). Clarissa's insertion into the order of language as well as the order of social identity in her drawing-room comes from the lack of the wordless intimacy that she shared with Sally and Peter at Bourton. This wordless intimacy becomes the force which breaks up the surfaces when Clarissa remembers Sally's kiss in the garden:

A tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer . . . [and] split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! (47)

With its semiotic sensations, the memory of the kiss produces cracks and sores in her social identity. ~~Clarissa becomes the adult subject who explores her~~ other side of her mirror identity, an unreflected side. The tinge of the blush represents the choraic gesture between Sally and Clarissa that remains "unarticulated, sexually suggestive, semiotic . . . [and] offers the immediacy of the world without words" for Clarissa (Scott 377). The quivering reinserts the

semiotic flame that represents the muted, other side of Clarissa and Septimus: "Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed" (47). Rushed to the farthest verge of expressing her other side, the thin skin of Clarissa's social identity collapses from inside her body. As the match burning in a crocus reflects an inner meaning almost expressed, the image of the "innermost flame" which threatens to collapse the outside world returns (Woolf, "Modern Fiction" 107). However, for Woolf and for Clarissa, "the crocus is an imperfect crocus until it has been shared" (Woolf, "The Patron and the Crocus" 149-50). Thus, from this sharing, Woolf emphasizes the semiotic flame which connects Septimus and Clarissa in their recognition of the inner meaning that spoken language fails to express.

As the airplane begins to sky-write TOFFEE. Septimus's madness overthrows the shape of the letters forming in the sky. In his viewing of this physical event, he thinks:

They are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty . . . as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky . . . one shape after another of unimaginable beauty. (31)

Septimus's viewing of the words becomes an inspection of language itself, and he returns to the chora where there are indeed no actual words. His mad perception of the sky-writing, in a sense, places in a space before language, ~~before his insertion into the social order. His lacking sanity produces this~~ exquisite beauty of viewing the world as shapes. The smoke-words of language diffuse in the sky as the shapes of the very letters dissipate and melt into other forms. Here, the bounded permanency of symbolic language is lost as one sight melts into another sight of unspeakable beauty. Septimus's

description of this exquisite beauty connects with most exquisite moment of Clarissa's life, Sally Seton's kiss in the garden, where the concrete forms of the Peter and old Joseph were overthrown and melted away as the world was turned upside down.

Woolf uses Peter Walsh during his walk in Regent's Park to continue to connect Clarissa and Septimus. While Peter muses on his love affair with Clarissa at Bourton after he leaves her drawing room, he meets Septimus and Rezia during their walk in the park. Through this physical encounter, Peter's remembered love for Clarissa is juxtaposed with Septimus's young love for Isabel Pole. As Peter remembers the moment when he knew Clarissa would marry Richard Dalloway, he lifts, carries Clarissa into Regent's Park when Peter remarks on "'the death of the soul.' He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do—the death of her soul" (89). Indeed, Clarissa's marriage becomes the death of her soul, the death of her other identity. When Peter and Septimus see each other in the park, we find Septimus contemplating what "made him fall in love with Miss Isabel Pole . . . [who] lit in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime, without heat, flickering a red gold flame infinitely ethereal and insubstantial over Miss Pole" (128). The cave behind Septimus recalls the flame which Clarissa uses to represent her passions at Bourton, yet this flame exists without the heat and rages of WWI, and thus, before Septimus's shell-shocked madness. ~~Septimus's love represents his~~ other side and, at the time, like the ending of Clarissa's love for Peter, signals the death of his soul. When he returns from the war, the death of his sanity threatens to rupture his identity completely.



Septimus's sanity continues to unravel inside his body, and the urge to kill himself becomes a constant fixture in the cave behind him. Through his suicidal thoughts, Woolf connects Septimus's struggle with madness to Clarissa's struggle with her other identity. When Septimus's wife goes to buy flowers, the immense magnitude of his madness comes to the surface when he is alone for the first time:

The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes . . . alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. (140)

Septimus's call to death ushers in a "primordial homelessness," a consuming semiotic negativity that threatens the collapse of his physical body as he contemplates suicide (Scott 376). When he detaches himself from the limitations of the physical world, Septimus finds a freedom, an alleviation from the demands made by his doctors and his wife to fight his insanity. The freedom to collapse his symbolic identity, however, poses the danger of complete isolation from others when his mental disintegration completely takes over his mind in his final moment of solitude.

There remained only . . . the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his. . . . (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. . . . Only human beings—what did they want? . . . "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down. (226)

In his final moments before death, Septimus's desire to live contrasts with what other human beings, specifically Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw, want. For Septimus, his vigorous and violent plunging into the "real" inner world, this choric site has conflicts with the "artificial external life," especially the treatment of this madness (Guth 21). As the gulf between his inner world and the external

life widens, Septimus loses any connection with the physical world; his imaginary world takes over and urges him to his end. In death, the artificial external life can no longer exist, and any remnants of sanity unravel inside his body.

At her party, through Peter's perception, we find Clarissa's social identity returns as she performs her duties as the Angel in the House: "And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister . . . having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed . . . all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element" (264). Ironically, Clarissa's performance as the social hostess is emphasized when Sally Seton, now Sally Rosseter, arrives at the party. Sally's arrival also marks what has been lost since their days at Bourton; Sally no longer has "her daring, her recklessness, her melodramatic love of being the centre of everything . . . to end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married" (276-7). Their social identities are limited by "the shelter of a common femininity, a common pride in the illustrious qualities of husbands" (279). They have silenced their Bourton femininity as they live as the pointed, dartlike, and definite figures of the drawing-room. While the confines of Clarissa's social identity are set in place, Woolf shadows Clarissa's party with Septimus's suicide. Peter Walsh hears the "light high bell of the ambulance siren" (229) as he contemplates going to her party, and Dr. Bradshaw notes that his late arrival is due to the fact "a young man had killed himself" (280). When we acknowledge that in "planning stages of the novel Clarissa was herself to die at the end," Septimus's suicide gains greater significance (Batchelor 85). Upon hearing of his death, Clarissa connects with Septimus:

her body went through it first . . . her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. (280)

Septimus's contemplation of suicide wells up in Clarissa; the innermost flame of his madness creates an imaginary connection between them. His extinguished existence in the physical world, his suffocation reminds her of the suffocation she feels as a wife, mother and hostess. Clarissa finds that she must retreat upstairs from the party; she must be alone and away from her guests and her social identity.

In her moment of solitude, Septimus's suicide "unravels inside" Clarissa's body, and they merge, as if one body. The cave behind Clarissa heralds the dangers of an imaginary identity. The threat that she, too, will vigorously and violently bring an end to her life, as did Septimus, if her return to the chora ruptures her social identity. Yet, in the upstairs room, Clarissa begins to differentiate Peter, Sally and herself from Septimus: "they went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter and Sally), they would grow old" (280). Clarissa recognizes that the rapture of Bourton has faded for Peter, Sally and herself. While Clarissa inspects what she has lost as she performs the role of the social hostess, she also inspects Septimus has retained in his suicide: "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (280-1). Septimus's communication through his death reinserts the poetic language of Clarissa's conflict between her social identity

and her other side. We find that the streams-of-consciousness becomes the place "where the subject is both generated and negated" (Revolution 28). While Septimus's death preserves his semiotic unity, his madness negates his return to the limitations of a social identity. While Clarissa fails to maintain the rapture of the chora, she generates her social identity when she finds that "she must go back; she must assemble. She must find Peter and Sally" (284). While Clarissa seemingly regenerates the confines of her role as the hostess by returning to the party, we find that the exquisite intimacy between Peter and Clarissa and between Sally and Clarissa has survived in their memories of Bourton. Thus, Clarissa's "mingling of self and other is not just death and annihilation of the self but a restorative wholeness and life-affirming intimacy" (Kaivola 30). Clarissa recognizes that, while she "felt something very like him . . . [and] he made her feel the beauty" of the other side, Septimus, in his death, frees Clarissa from her own plunge from the open window (283-4). Clarissa recognizes the life-affirming intimacy with Peter and Sally awaits her at the bottom of the stairs. The remnants of the exquisite beauty of Bourton are affirmed as their memories insert the other side of their identities into the present moment of Clarissa's party.

While Clarissa returns to her social identity, its confines are changed by the fact that she has unraveled its limitations inside her body. Her stream-of-consciousness prompts her to appreciate the wordless intimacy that she shared with Peter and Sally. Their return into her life at her party offers Clarissa a second chance to revisit the exquisite beauty of the connection between them. Thus, the imaginary communication between Septimus and Clarissa serves to highlight the restorative wholeness which Clarissa can capture if she returns to

party and connects again with Peter and Sally. Clarissa, unlike Septimus, has figures who can move her beyond the cold contact that has mediated her social expression.

In To the Lighthouse and The Waves, Woolf continues to explore the disparity between her characters' social identities and their stream-of-consciousness reflections. To the Lighthouse, the novel that follows Mrs. Dalloway, also dissects the confines of the social roles of women by opposing Mrs. Ramsay, another Angel in the House, with the independent Lily Briscoe, who reflects Clarissa's other identity at Bourton. Through Lily Briscoe, Woolf creates a connection between her semiotic and her symbolic perspective of the physical world as the narrative follows the progression and completion of Lily's painting. In The Waves, Woolf explores a sustained poetic language and meaning that develops between Louis and Rhoda. They are characters who are estranged from symbolic language throughout the narrative. The connection between their inside bodies becomes more remarkable the connection between Clarissa and her Bourton intimates or between Clarissa and a stranger, Septimus. The caves behind Louis and Rhoda continually connect in the present moment, and each chapter builds their parallel estrangement as well as their exquisite intimacy along a life-long timeline. Thus, these two novels will allow us to perceive how Woolf continues to use the stream-of-consciousness to dissect symbolic language from inside her characters' bodies.

## CHAPTER 4

## Against the Confines of Verbal Language:

Plurality in To the Lighthouse

In To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf uses Lily Briscoe to create a narrative portrait of the twentieth-century female artist. As Lily Briscoe's painting process highlights her struggle for expression, Lily confronts the patriarchal negation which repeats in the novel: "women can't paint, women can't write" (75,137, 237). This negation develops from the social forces which desire her to remain silent, to cease painting and to marry. In her stream-of-consciousness, her struggle for expression develops the potentialities of l'écriture féminine as the artistic process itself. If we recall the "plurality of signifying systems of which each is one layer of vast whole," which Kristeva discusses in Language: The Unknown, we can view Lily's painting as one of the signifying systems that Woolf explores in To the Lighthouse (296). Lily's artistic process reflects an irrepressible need to create her own meaning by creating a vision which does "not obey the rules for the construction of verbal language" (Language 296). As we examine the stages of Lily's artistic process throughout To the Lighthouse, we find that Woolf anticipates Kristeva view that

painting has become a process of production that does not represent any sign or any meaning, except the possibility, starting from a limited code (a few forms, some color oppositions, the relation of a certain form to a certain color) of elaborating a signifying process that analyzes the components of what was originally given as the foundations of representation. (Language 314)

Within Lily's stream-of-consciousness we find that Woolf highlights the inspection of form and color as well as the connection between them as Lily moves from creating a realistic portrait of mother and child towards inspecting

the impressions of this image and displaying them as impressions of form and color to disrupt the foundations of representation which have mediated painting techniques but also have mediated the social structure. Taking up the brush, Lily produces a different sort of thetic utterance and a different approach to meaning so that she can "repaint [her] half of the world" (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 246). Thus, throughout the novel, we can see how Woolf anticipates Kristeva and Cixous by exploring how a woman artist can move beyond the confines of symbolic language.

When Lily enters the narrative in the section titled, "The Window," she sits on the shore, poised to paint and create her own windowing, her own framing of the life of the Ramsay family. Lily uses the Ramsays to set herself in opposition to a social structure which, imbued with the remnants of Victorian values, has relegated women to artistic silence. Through her observations of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Lily highlights the hierarchy where men are speaking subjects and women are silent objects. Her artistic process becomes an integral part of her refusal to be silent, and, thus, Lily claims her subjectivity by painting. Woolf uses the distinctions between Lily, the subject, and Mrs. Ramsay, the object of Lily's painting, to develop her canvas as the site where Lily originates her female utterance, her language. This subjectivity that Lily explores in her stream-of-consciousness and on her canvas becomes a voice which produces a new language and meaning for women while, at the same, it dissects the patriarchal representation of women in silence. When Lily leaves her painting unfinished before WWI, the importance of its completion is stressed by Mrs. Ramsay and her daughter, Prue, whose deaths underscore the patriarchal negation which Lily must counteract. Lily's return to her canvas after

WWI continues her challenge of the subjugation of women to the patriarchal negation of their artistic abilities.

Lily's creation of a new language begins when she inspects her impressions of the landscape at the Ramsay's summerhouse. Lily's artistic process begins with her contemplation of color: "she would not have considered it honest to tamper with the bright violent and the staring white, since she saw them like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr. Paunceforte's visit to see everything pale, elegant semi-transparent" (31-2). This emphasis on color recalls Kristeva's vision that Woolf only sees "suspended states, subtle sensations and, above all, colours" (Kristeva, "Oscillation between Power and Denial" 166). This narrow assessment would frame Lily as a choraic child, an asymbolic body, lacking a language to distinguish the objects of her perspective. Lily's retention of color however has a different contingency, "beneath the color was the shape" (32). Lily maintains a certain realism of connecting the vision and the canvas through colors, refusing to view the world as pale, elegant and semi-transparent. For Lily, the color becomes an integral part of translating the shape beneath it; color allows Lily to see the object clearly in her vision of the landscape. Linking the color and shape of the objects in her vision, we see the intersection of two forces of language and meaning, asymbolic impressions and symbolic expressions. These two forces are highlighted as Lily is set in constant juxtaposing between the landscape, where she receives the impressions of color and shape, and her canvas, where she reproduces color and shape:

She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing change. It was in that moment's flight between the picture



and her canvas that . . . made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. (31-2)

Lily struggles to produce a unity, a shared language, between her vision and her canvas. While Lily's "passage from conception to work" starts with her impulse not "to tamper with the bright violet and the staring white," the difficulty for Lily becomes when her eyes move from the landscape, the site of impressions, to the blank canvas, the site of representation. In this moment, Lily continually struggles to attain the unity between her vision and her painting, however, she only achieves a choraic unity of color. The bright violet and the staring white overwhelm Lily's vision, and she remains unable to represent the shapes beneath the color on her canvas. Lily remains within the confines of the dark passage between her vision and her canvas.

Woolf continues to explore color through Mrs. Ramsay, an observer of the artistic process. In her walk with Mr. Tansley (the character who uttered, "women can't write, women can't paint"), Mrs. Ramsay sees a male artist and reflects:

Artists had come here . . . had gazed, dipping; imbuing the tip of his brush in some soft mound of green or pink. Since Mr. Paunceforte had been there, three years before, all the pictures were like that . . . green and grey, with lemon-coloured sailing boats, and pink women on the beach . . . her grandmother's friends . . . took the greatest pains; first they mixed their own colours, and then they ground them, and then they put damp cloths to keep them moist. (23-4)

Mr. Paunceforte and the male artist serve as figures which tamper with the colors. The importance of color is seemingly lost to them, as they choose to paint lemon-colored sailboats and pink women. As Lily and Mrs. Ramsay are joined in their dismissal of Mr. Paunceforte's colors, their perspectives highlight the act of a feminine translation of color in a resistance to the "lemon-coloured

sailing boats" and "pink women"—a resistance to a vision which does not reproduce the subtle, unique colors that the landscape offers. While not grounding her colors like the friends of Mrs. Ramsay's grandmother, Lily mixes her colors, like them, beyond the limiting green and the grey, the lemon and the pink. Lily differs from these women in merging realistic color and realistic shape. Lily's realistic "colours melting into another" reflects the impressionistic shape of the object losing its distinctions on the canvas (255). Through this impressionistic melting of distinctions, Lily moves not only beyond the given, symbolic colors of Mr. Paunceforte's work but also gives a feminine vision of the connection between the landscape and the canvas.

In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf figures herself as an impressionist painter. The conflict between the impression and translation of color is revisited:

If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green . . . I should make a picture that was globular; semi-transparent . . . what was seen would at the same time be heard; sounds would come through this petal or leaf—sounds indistinguishable from sights. Sound and sight seem to make equal parts of these first impressions. (6-7)

While the "pale" and "semi-transparent" vision of the landscape points to Mr. Paunceforte's approach to painting, Woolf's conception of its sensations of sights connects with Lily's artistic process. Woolf's inclusion of sounds, as part of the object itself, moves beyond the confines of color. The unity of sounds and sights parallels the unity "bright" and "staring" colors with the shapes beneath them in Lily's vision. This connection returns us to the world seen from the point-of-view of an asymbolic, spastic body; in To the Lighthouse, Woolf's narrative returns her adult subject, Lily, to the semi-transparent envelope, the chora. Attempting to create a unity between the landscape and the canvas,

Woolf produces "various material supports [matériaux] susceptible to semiotization: voice, gestures, colours" that emerge in Lily's artistic process (Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 28). After Lily semiotizes the color impressions of the landscape, she must turn to the shapes beneath to surmise their meaning. Essential to this progression is Lily's choosing of a point of view. This becomes her next struggle.

Lily's attempt to represent the shape of objects develops her struggle for subjectivity. Here, the shapes of objects not only reflect Lily's passage from conception to work and but also mark the distinctions of the perceived object. Lily's gaze is set between the landscape and the canvas and creates an interior questioning of what perspective the objects produce in her vision:

Where to begin? –that was the question at what point to make the first mark? One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests. Still the risk must be run; the mark made. (235)

Inspecting where to begin, Lily starts the process of representation. Complex choices mediate the first mark, beginning with which objects to represent and from which viewing point. Viewed from the cliffs or by the swimmer, there are two visions of the waves created, symmetrical and divided. This difference in perception requires Lily to make irrevocable decisions and take innumerable risks when translating the "subject and the object and the nature of reality" (38). Lily's canvas becomes a site where "discrete marks which are . . . articulated

according to their resemblance or opposition, either by slippage or by condensation" in their translation (Revolution 28). Lily's complex process of representation attempts to resist the demons of slippage and condensation; yet when she has looked away from the landscape, Lily perceives that a slippage has occurred between her vision and her representation. She recognizes the "change" of the object on the canvas that necessarily occurs when one privileges a perspective, whether that view is seen from the cliffs or the swimmer. The change of the object reiterates the slippage and condensation that the painting subject produces. As this discontinuity between the vision and the canvas occurs, Lily still struggles to express her point-of-view. For Lily, the "risk must be run" if she is to establish her subjectivity, her vision. Thus, the mark of her brush initiates her translation of the landscape with "one line placed" on the canvas.

The brush creates the artist's symbolic language. In order to paint or write, Lily must attempt to shape the world that she perceives. She must risk the representation of her own body and her desire outside a patriarchal language. As the impressions of the landscape cannot be fully translated, the brush becomes the tool which produces the slippage or condensation. Lily's brush becomes the vehicle through which she, as a subject, can produce her translation, her thetic utterance:

She looked . . . could not see it even herself, without a brush in her hand. She took up once more her old painting position. . . subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general; becoming once more under the power of that vision which she had seen clearly once and must now grope for among hedges and houses and mothers and children—her picture. (82)

With the brush in hand, Lily seeks out her vision that returns her to her painting position, her place of perspective. As she moves her picture beyond her

impressions as a woman into something more general, she essentially returns to site of the chora, where a fresh perspective of the landscape can evolve. Choosing the confines of her painting, in an attempt to create the power of that vision that resists slippage or condensation, Lily selects the objects of her vision, the hedges, houses, and mothers and children, specifically Mrs. Ramsay and her son, James. While she fixes her perspective from this point of view, Lily also seeks to produce an asymbolic, spastic perception, which moves beyond the lines of hedges and houses and mothers and children. Her return to a choraic space "inscribes negativity, difference and disruption . . . [which] is characteristic of the mobile, unfixd, subversive writing subject (le sujet-en-procès—the subject in process/on trial) which re-presents itself" (Moi, "Introduction to Revolution in Poetic Language " 89). On her canvas, Lily disrupts and subdues the perceived objects; she distorts the shape of the mother and child, as she removes herself from the given pathways of utterance: Mr. Paunceforte's and Mrs. Ramsay's grandmother's friends.

Lily's artistic process represents a dismantling of symbolic language as her canvas becomes a subversive utterance. Lily's vision of colors and shapes disrupts and dissects symbolic language's process of representation. This dismantling is key when we recognize that Lily's artistic process contradicts Kristeva's statement in "Oscillation between Power and Denial" that Woolf "does not dissect language" (166). Lily's subversive utterance begins when she undermines the patriarchal negation which censors her art by the basic fact that she can and does paint. As Lily moves from conception to work, she transverses the dark passage to dissect language. Her artistic process becomes an act of "making the unknown known. . . . It is this attempt to shape

... a woman's experience of the world, her own body and her desire" (Kairola 37):

she often felt herself--struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: "But this is what I see; this is what I see," and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision . . . which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her . . . as she began to paint. (32)

As social and symbolic forces seek to pluck, to remove her vision from the canvas, Lily finds that she must maintain courage to struggle for her own voice. Commandingly, she proclaims, "but this is what I see; this is what I see" to counter the patriarchal demons which dismiss her craft. This proclamation becomes the thrust of her subversive, radical voice, and Lily moves beyond "the enormity of the repression that has kept [women] in the 'dark'—that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute" ("Laugh" 245). Her struggle against the "thousand forces" of repression begins with the clasp of her hand on the brush. Lily wields her tool, her brush, to combat the subjugation of women which relegates them to artistic silence. Lily, through her brush, is able to bring her feminine expression to light.

While Lily radicalizes her utterance, she does not forget that some women remain silent, relegated to a "code of behaviour" which reinforces the subjugation of women to a position of artistic silence (137). This code of behavior, one of the thousand forces of repression, is brought forth in Lily's interaction with Mr. Tansley at the dinner table. Remembering his proclamation that "women can't paint, women can't write," Lily inspects this patriarchal negation and its advocacy that "behooves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to

assert himself" (137). Lily resists subjecting herself to Mr. Tansley's own vanity and urgent desire to assert himself; however, the social code of behavior urges her to submit. Mrs. Ramsay, as an intermediary between them, urges Lily to allow Mr. Tansley to assert his subjectivity: "her eyes said it, of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment—what happens if one is not nice to that young man there" (139). Mrs. Ramsay undermines Lily's desire to assert herself, her vanity despite the code of behavior which mediates the voices of women.

To view how Mrs. Ramsay maintains the code of behavior, we must view how she stands as an example of women's assimilation into the clutches of patriarchal negation. As a wife and mother, Mrs. Ramsay has accepted these social roles as the defining features of her existence. Mrs. Ramsay's symbolic shape beneath and beyond her social definition remains in the dark as she has "the whole of the other sex under her protection," particularly Mr. Ramsay, during his periods of self-doubt (13). When Mr. Ramsay distrusts his intellectual contribution, he seeks out his wife for the protection of his vanity: "it [is] sympathy he want[s], to be assured of his genius . . . and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile. . . . He must have sympathy" (59). In seeking Mrs. Ramsay's sympathy, he expects her to restore, to regenerate his identity. Mrs. Ramsay becomes the silent womb and protects her man-child, her husband, by placing his desires over her own. Woolf's inspection of this female support in A Room of One's Own adds another dimension to Mrs. Ramsay's symbolic and social role: "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at

twice its natural size . . . take it away and man may die" (35). The "magic and delicious power" euphemizes how women serve as a generative mirror for the male ego. As a womb-like entity within the circle of life, Mrs. Ramsay and her maternal fertility reproduce the male mirror while a female mirror remains unreflected.

In To the Lighthouse Woolf sustains Lily's symbolic portrait of marriage as an exploration of the social structure of subjectivity. In stream-of-consciousness narrative, Lily, who is

making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outside which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. (110-1)

The artist's vision creates the symbolical outside on the canvas, transcending the real figures of the vision. In this translation of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, we can return to a discussion of Woolf's artistic process. For Woolf, these symbolical, representative figures in the novel bear a resemblance to her parents. She is "making some use of symbolism" to explore the social dynamic of their marriage (Diary III: 109-10). In A Sketch of the Past, Woolf's use of Lily to highlight her relation to her parents comes to light: Mrs. Ramsay, who has offered her lap to Lily, surfaces as Woolf's mother, "my first memory is of her lap . . . her voice is still faintly in my ears" (15); Mr. Ramsay, who desperately needs Lily's sympathy at the end of the novel, surfaces as her father, "he needed always a woman to sympathize, to flatter, to console" (33). This symbolic portrait of the social representation of women and men as wives and husbands is displayed throughout the novel. Woolf dissects, through Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the



consoling and care-taking role which women have performed to satisfy the needs of others, specifically their husbands and their children.

Returning to her painting, we find that Lily's perception of Mrs. Ramsay also radicalizes the relation between subject and object. Translating the flow between herself, the subject, and Mrs. Ramsay, the perceived object, Lily asks:

what art was there . . . what device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? . . . Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity she desired, not inscription on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. (79)

Attempting to unite her vision with her object, Lily recognizes that her intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay produces a slippage in her translation of their connection on the canvas. Rather than seeking to reproduce the unity of language which connects the word with the object, Lily pursues an intimacy which resists inscription on tablets or paint on a canvas. By moving away from "any language known to men," Lily radicalizes their unity, the silent communication that occurs as she leans her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. In this instance, Lily becomes "one with the object," one with Mrs. Ramsay. While a temporary intimacy exists between them, Lily's recognition of this unity creates a change in her representation and signification of Mrs. Ramsay.

"Leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee," Lily returns to maternal gestures and creates a semiotic connection between women. Their intimacy produces a continuum between subject and object which undermines the "reproduction of the male social order," the reproduction of a male entrance into language and meaning (Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous* 108). Lily recognizes a communication which pre-exists the subjugation of women to male desires.

Between silent impressions and spoken language, taking up the brush, Lily refuses to let this connection between women be muted. By envisioning a semiotic language and meaning, Lily can "create a social order in which [she] can make use of [her] subjectivity with its symbols, its images, its dreams and realities" (Je, Tu, Nous 91). Her unity with Mrs. Ramsay moves beyond the clutch of a male speaking subject's symbols and phrases, beyond his systems of representation, beyond the male mirror.

Lily's translation of her impressions of Mrs. Ramsay to her canvas focuses on the feminine attribute of love for a child. This intimacy, this oneness produces a different voice within the circle of life. As Lily's semiotic unity with Mrs. Ramsay re-emerges in To the Lighthouse, Lily reproduces the gestures, the symbols of a maternal "love that never attempted to clutch its object; but, like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain" (73-4). Lily's translation of maternal love releases Mrs. Ramsay from the symbols and phrases which produce her as an object in male-speaking subjects' clutches. Her sense of feminine intimacy reflects a womb-like unity that exists outside the clutches of the male mirror. When painting, Lily resists clutching her object; she resists any attempt to possess or define it. Thus, her expression is no longer "stuck, paralyzed by all those images, words, fantasies" of the male speaking subject (Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One 17). On her canvas, Lily can spread woman beyond the images, words, and fantasies of the male mirror. She creates the female mirror which reflects the female speaking subject, who is no longer paralyzed in a social hierarchy of sexual difference. A unity from the interior occurs and her canvas resists the Lacanian separation from the

mother which produces the masculine subject. Therefore, Lily initiates her voice by refusing to lose this unity with the maternal, choraic intimacy.

As her artistic process evolves as an feminine expression, the differences between the real Mrs. Ramsay and the represented Mrs. Ramsay comes to the surface. She seeks to represent Mrs. Ramsay beyond a specific external attribute. Lily seeks to move beneath her surface color and shape:

she was unquestionably the loveliest of people (bowed over her book); the best perhaps; but also, different too from the perfect shape which one saw there. But why different, and how different? she asked herself, scraping her palette of all those mounds of blue and green which seemed to her like clods with no life in them now, yet she vowed, she would inspire them, force them to move, flow. . . . What was the spirit in her, the essential thing, by which, had you found a crumpled glove in the corner of a sofa, you would have known it, from its twisted finger, hers indisputably? (76)

Distinguishing her vision from her canvas, Lily seeks the essential thing which represents the internal Mrs. Ramsay. She searches for a clarity which reflects her impressions of the silent Mrs. Ramsay, bowed over her book. Lily paints the life, the flow, the force of her perception which overwhelms her expression. In scraping her palette, Lily is scraping away the confines of the patriarchal clutch of its object. Lily resists the perfect shape of Mrs. Ramsay; she seeks a perception where the glove produces impressions which distinguish Mrs. Ramsay from other women. The twisted finger produces a different shape and impressing the infinite richness beneath Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's mind. Lily undermines the notion of a "uniform, homogeneous, classifiable-into-codes" woman ("Laugh" 245-6). Her artistic process captures the Mrs. Ramsay which has been relegated to a dark silence. Taking up the brush, Lily moves beyond the uniform, homogeneous, classifiable-into-codes, perfect shape of women; she envisions a continuum of different women.

Along this continuum, she finds that women can paint and write themselves beyond the symbols and phrases of a male language. By removing herself from a male social order, "gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law," from the code of behavior (77). While Lily has the courage to emerge the essential woman from the dark confines of the universal law, her experiment with a new shape to define women still fights the restrictions of feminine expression:

even while she looked at the mass, at the line, at the colour, at Mrs. Ramsay sitting in the window with James, she kept a feeler on her surroundings lest some one should creep up, and suddenly she should find her picture looked at. But now, with all her senses quickened as they were, looking, straining, till the colour of the wall and the jacmanna beyond burnt into her eyes, she was aware of some one coming out of the house . . . but somehow divined . . . so that though her brush quivered, she did not . . . turn her canvas upon the grass, but let it stand. (30)

As she paints on the lawn, Lily divides her artistic process between the interior perception and her exterior awareness of the landscape. Lily's looking and straining are not muted; she allows her perception to stand as a work of permanence. The color, "burnt into her eyes," commands her reproduction on the canvas. When Lily does not turn her canvas away from an other's eye, specifically Mr. Bankes, she begins to share her perception of the landscape, her semiotic impressions. Finding this courage to share her vision, Lily continues to fight the patriarchal forces which seek to subvert and mute her expression. Her "feeler on her surroundings" protects her against the threat of the patriarchal collapse of her subjectivity. Protecting the "fusion between a child and its mother" from the "rupture of this fusion by . . . the father, law, Name of the Father," Lily's canvas returns to the choraic suspensions of language (Je, Tu, Nous 42). While Lily's vision remains susceptible to rupture by a male

social order, she struggles to maintain her courage, her faith in her semiotic impressions and her translation on the canvas.

Sharing her fusion of mother and child with Mr. Bankes, Lily resists the universal law of feminine silence. While Lily divulges her vision to the wifeless and childless Mr. Bankes, we must reflect that Mr. Bankes is an exception to the patriarchal negation represented by Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley. Lily shares her gaze with a man that does not seek her assimilation to his desires and vanity. Their mutual gaze produces a dialogue between them when Lily explains her impressionist vision which exists outside the social shape of mother and child:

It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection—that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said. For what reason had she introduced them then? he asked. Why indeed?—except that if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness. . . . Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration . . . might be reduced . . . to a purple shadow without irreverence. (81)

As Lily creates her vision of mother and child before likeness, before slippage or condensation, she returns to her vision of bright and darkness, to her impressions without producing the male mirror. The "purple shadow without irreverence" indicates that beneath color "all shape is distorted" (275).

Moving beyond an attempt at resemblance, she is "losing consciousness of outer things," the physical confines of the objects themselves (238). On Lily's canvas, we see evidence of what Kristeva notes as "the process that 'decenters' the painting structure and goes beyond the pictorial code itself. . . . The object then ceases to be a painted object in order to become an infinite process that takes into consideration the whole of the forces that produce and transform it in all their diversity" (Language 314). As Gillian Beer notes, "Lily's picture through

the book is away from representationalism towards abstraction . . . It is almost free of reference" (43). She has moved outside the patriarchal clutch of mother and child as "objects of universal veneration." Outside the universal symbols and shapes, she reflects how she creates her vision from the interior, "before habits had spun themselves across the surface . . . between things, beyond things. Empty it was not, but full to the brim" with the subversive power of the chora (285). She creates feminine expression before its relegation to silence by Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley.

Lily takes the risk to translate her impressions; the color and the shape beneath the objects must find permanence. "In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing . . . was struck into stability" (241). Lily moves from the passing and flowing of the chora as she strives for stability on her canvas. Her painting process recognizes "different ways of negotiating between the demands of the self and the demands of the world" (Roe 69). The canvas brings these different demands, where the subject and the object must find a unity, to the surface:

It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken. (82-3)

Lily's separation between reality and representation moves her into a thetic enunciation where "the fictiousness of the separation between object and subject, the question of where to draw the line, is passionately explored" (Beer 34). The unity of the whole surfaces as Lily's primary concern. In order to achieve this wholeness Lily has "to try the accepted forms, to discard the unfit, to create others which are more fitting . . . before there is freedom" in her

expression (Woolf, "Men and Women" 67). The vacancy on the canvas seeks a form, an object which not only connects the colors and shapes but also produces the stability of permanence on her canvas.

As Lily's painting is left uncompleted at the close of the first section, the loss of many members of the Ramsay's family are noted in "Time Passes." Significantly, Woolf use the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and her adult daughter, Prue, to highlight how the loss of women affects the male identity. To show Mrs. Ramsay's absence, Woolf gives a portrait of her husband: "Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay, having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty" (194). Mrs. Ramsay's death marks his loss of her sympathy, the absence of her caress which soothes his male ego. Thrown into the dark, Mr. Ramsay resembles Lily in her search for her artistic vision; they are both seeking the reassurance of what they see. Prue's death posits the social structure within the narrative, reflecting both the male mirror and the quieted female expression beneath the constraints of patriarchy:

imagination of the strangest kind—of flesh turned to atoms which drove before . . . cliff, sea, cloud, and sky brought purposely together to assemble outwardly the scattered part of the vision within. In those mirrors, the minds of men . . . and the white earth seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules; or to resist the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life. (199)

This description of Prue's life emphasizes the retention of the marital structure, and the male mirror it displayed. The male imagination which assembles the vision within relies on the processes of domestic life. Order rules because of the silenced feminine; however, the subversive female voice develops as

something alien, as the impulse to overturn order. Lily Briscoe is quite familiar with the extraordinary impulse to scamper away from the social structure. While Prue and Mrs. Ramsay choose the marital order, Lily remains free, not only from death but also from the male mirror. No longer the flesh serving as a looking-glass for the male ego, Prue and Mrs. Ramsay are no longer "marked by their signifiers, a prop for their soul-fantasies. [They no longer occupy] the place where their encoding as speaking subjects is inscribed and where the 'objects' of their desire are projected" (*This Sex* 96). Their deaths usher in a masculine barrenness, and the male-mirror is broken. The deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and Prue highlight Lily's feminist charge to collapse the "surface glassiness" of the mirror which has subjugated women to the desires of men "when the nobler powers sleep beneath" (202). Lily's artistic process becomes about exploring what exists beneath the order of the male mirror; she moves from the symbolic flesh of her objects to their semiotic atoms.

To set up Lily's return to the Ramsay summerhouse, Woolf concludes "Time Passes" from Lily's point of view. We find "Lily Briscoe stirring in her sleep. She clutched at her blankets as a faller clutches at the turf on the edge of a cliff" (214). Lily's desperate clutch at her blankets marks the physicality that surrounds her. As she awakes, her alert eyes restores her vision of the world. Awake, she return to her canvas in the final section, "The Lighthouse," and also returns to her struggle against the patriarchal order. When meeting on the shore, Mr. Ramsay seeks Lily to act as a surrogate mirror: "when an enormous need urged him . . . to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy" (225). As his desires are projected onto Lily, he seeks Lily to relegate herself to his



expectation of sympathy, to soothe his male ego. In this moment, she necessarily chooses to return to her own mirror, her own needs rather than relegating herself to Mr. Ramsay's "insatiable hunger for sympathy, this demand that she should surrender herself up to him entirely" (226). His demand threatens her vision, the subversive utterance on the canvas. Knowing this she returns to her artistic process with a yearning for the completion of her painting.

Lily's return to her subversive expression reinstates the connection between her picture and her canvas. Her feminine utterance again becomes part of the process of language. As she approaches her canvas, Lily knows that the vacancy of "the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. 'Mrs. Ramsay!' she said aloud, 'Mrs. Ramsay!'" (268). Lily's utterance becomes a calling out for the maternal, choraic unity which guides the shape and space of Lily's canvas. When Lily's spoken utterance fails to reinstate Mrs. Ramsay as the object of her vision, Lily recognizes that Mrs. Ramsay's "love had a thousand shapes" when viewed as a silent gesture (286). However, Lily also finds that "when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay . . . phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was . . . the thing itself before it had been made anything" (287). This recognition of the inadequacy of symbolic language is reflected by Woolf in her diary. Like Lily at this moment, Woolf attempted to "catch [her objects] before they became 'works of art' . . . hot & sudden as they rise in the mind. . . . Of course one cannot; for the process of language is slow & deluding . . . there is the form of the sentence, soliciting one to fill it" (*Diary II*: 102). Lily wishes to resist the temptation to restrain the representation of Mrs. Ramsay as a work of art as she seeks out her from before

it has been created by symbolic language. She wishes "fifty pairs of eyes to see with" so that she can produce the thousand shapes of Mrs. Ramsay (294). She wants to avoid limiting her canvas to a single point-of-view (294). Lily seeks the choric chaos beneath Mrs. Ramsay in her translation of her vision onto the canvas.

By undermining the fictitiousness of the separation between subject and object, Lily creates a unity which requires her to "tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary" nature of her impressions (Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 337). The unity of the whole evolves into a complex portrait of her interior picture and her exterior canvas:

there it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its ` lines running up and across, its attempt at something . . . it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. . . she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (309-10)

Lily, in this passage which closes the novel, is able to recapture the clarity of vision. She is able to remove herself from the blurred vision which has undermined its completion. She is able to draw the line, to create the center with her brush. Her vision of the maternal, Mrs. Ramsay allows her to produce the balance between the semiotic and the symbolic on her canvas. Lily's painting reflects the "most primitive state of form and volume. It's as if she were capable of reading the signs of the body: not those of the unconscious . . . but the body signs . . . before language" (*Three Steps* 135). Lily's impressions of the body signs before language commands her brush. The intensity of this vision allows this choric intimacy to be translated to the canvas. The primitive state of her impressions resists representationalism. The intensity, the intimacy

which unites the subject and the object, allows for the abstraction, which undermines language, to fill the canvas.

The conflict between the patriarchal order which restricts feminine expression and Lily's artistic process reminds us of the conflict that Clarissa Dalloway recognizes between her social identity and her stream-of-consciousness identity in Mrs. Dalloway. This conflict takes a different shape in The Waves when Louis and Rhoda fail to replicate the order of symbolic language. In all three novels, the abstract interior resists representation in symbolic language. Lily's artistic process highlights how the impressions received by the chora dismantle an ordered system of representation. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf emphasizes the intimacy between individuals as the force which allows characters to move beyond the rigid forms of their bodies. A choral connection develops between Louis and Rhoda, much like the choral connections between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay and between Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith as well as Sally Seton and Peter Walsh. This movement beyond the rigidity of symbolic and spoken language becomes central to the following chapter as well as to the perception of their intimacy which Louis and Rhoda share in The Waves. As we explore how their stream-of-consciousness highlights the abstraction of their physical bodies, the shared poetic language between Louis and Rhoda creates a dialogue which moves them beyond the limitations of spoken language. Thus, Woolf creates Louis and Rhoda like Lily Briscoe as they search for new forms and new shapes of expression.

## CHAPTER 5

The Choraic Conspirators, Louis and Rhoda, in The Waves

When Virginia Woolf began writing The Waves, she inspected the different narrative qualities of her previous novels in her diary: "People say [Orlando] was so spontaneous, so natural. . . . But those qualities . . . came of writing exteriorly; and if I dig, must I not lose them?" (Diary III: 209). This exterior narrative develops in Orlando when Woolf creates the outside world from the "spontaneous" and "natural" stream-of-consciousness of Orlando. As the male-Orlando and the female-Orlando are connected to one body, only one interior voice has a sustained relation to the outside world. In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Woolf uses multiple streams-of-consciousness to "dig" the narrative "interiorly." She creates the outside world through her juxtaposition of the characters' stream-of-consciousness reflections as they fade in and out of the narrative. When Woolf theorizes that "some combination of both of them ought to be possible," The Waves becomes an amalgamation of the outer narrative developed in Orlando and the inner narrative developed in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse (Diary III: 209). By using the sustained monologues of the three men, Bernard, Neville, and Louis, and the three women, Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda in The Waves, Woolf creates the exterior narrative through the synchronization of their experiences of the outside world, and the narrative "at any point at any moment . . . seems to have no single state of being" (A Room of One's Own 101). When Woolf "digs" behind each character to illuminate their streams-of-consciousness reflections on the outside world, she creates distinct poetic languages on the interior of these three men and three women. Woolf's combination of exterior and interior narratives in relation to these distinct poetic

language will highlight how she prefigures French feminists Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva and their respective views on modernism and language.

When we continue to examine Woolf's intentions when writing The Waves, we find that she uses this combination "to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity" by creating the outside world from her characters' streams-of-consciousness; at the same time, she uses their distinct, interior poetic languages "to give the moment whole" (Diary III: 209). When Woolf combines her experiments with outer and inner narrative, she moves beyond "the inclusion of things that don't belong" and resists, what she calls, "this appalling narrative business of the realist" in her novel (Diary III: 209). When Woolf combines the exterior and the interior of her characters to "give the moment whole," she prefigures Cixous's discussion of stream-of-consciousness narrative in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing : "the book unravels inside a character's body. Of course it is inside and outside but everything that happens outside, all the small events of outside life, are immediately caught and turned into feelings and relations to the body" (70-1). "All the small events of outside life"—early childhood, boarding school, early adulthood, a going away dinner party, a death of a mutual friend, and their final meeting at Hampton Court—are immediately perceived from a multiple sided point of view. By unraveling the narrative inside her characters' bodies, Woolf highlights their distinct relations to language. While Woolf develops the other characters' use of spoken language to create their attachment to the outside world, she contrasts their comfortability with Louis's and Rhoda's alienation from spoken language. As Woolf explores Louis' and Rhoda's alienation throughout the novel, she creates opposition between their silent interiors and the outside world which prefigures Kristeva's

conception of the semiotic and the symbolic in Revolution in Poetic Language . In each moment, as the sensations of the outside world are recorded in each character's stream-of-consciousness, Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny translate these sensations into a symbolic language, while Louis and Rhoda are remain in Kristeva's language-lacking choraic world, alienated from the acquisition of a symbolic language.

Bernard, Neville, Jinny, and Susan are comfortable with their physical bodies, the site of spoken utterances. This comfort is shown through the sequence of soliloquies which describe the moment when Jinny kisses Louis in the bush. When Jinny retells her investigation of the "leaves moving in a hole in the hedge," she emphasizes her physical sight and body as she finds and kisses Louis (13). Susan, who is upset by Jinny's kiss, emphasizes her human body as well, when she imagines herself alone where she "shall eat nuts and peer for eggs through the brambles and my hair will be matted" (14). Bernard, who sees Susan retreat from Jinny and Louis, decides "to comfort her when she bursts out in a rage" and sets his body in juxtaposition with Susan's (14). Neville, who plays alone after "Bernard dropped his boat and went after her," emphasizes his physical sight and juxtaposes his body in relation to the others (19). As Woolf unfolds their constant awareness of their physical bodies, Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny create the separation between two objects which is emblematic of their entrance into symbolic language and self-expression.

In the series of events which follow Jinny's kiss of Louis, Louis highlights his detachment from the others: "Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan (but not Rhoda) . . . brush the surface of the world. . . . "Louis! Louis! Louis!" they shout.

But they cannot see me" (12). Hidden in the hedge, Louis disconnects from their physical gestures and voices. Rhoda also disconnects from the others when she chooses to play away from them: "I have a short time alone. . . . I have a short space of freedom" (18). Moving away from the others in their soliloquies, Louis and Rhoda create imaginary identities which detach them from their human forms. When Louis withdraws from others, he becomes the hedge which hides him:

But let me be unseen. I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk. I press the stalk. . . . Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. [Jinny] has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered. (12-3)

As the stalk, his imaginary green body has no enunciation; with his hair made of leaves, Louis no longer retains his human shape, and no boundaries exist between himself and the hedge. "Rooted to the middle of the earth," Louis renounces his physical body and descends "into the earth" and into a chora-like relation to the outside world (Three Steps 5). When Jinny's kiss shatters Louis' isolation, she also shatters his imaginary identity. Her kiss produces the boundary between the hedge and the "boy in a grey flannel suit." Louis is no longer the stalk when Jinny's eyebeam illuminates his symbolic identity. Her intrusive physical body shatters his boundlessness and returns him to the surface of the world. In her moment of solitude, Rhoda explores her imaginary identity as the ship:

And I will now rock the brown basin from side to side so that my ships may ride the waves. Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sails alone. That is my ship. . . . They have scattered, they have foundered, all except my ship which mounts the wave and sweeps before the gale and reaches the islands. (18-9)

Rhoda creates a miniature world to escape her physical body. As her ship "sails alone," she continues to emphasize her isolation from the others. Her ship "mounts the waves and sweeps before the gale and reaches the islands" in the world of unreality, while the others "dash themselves against the cliffs." As Rhoda's ship reaches islands onto and into which the others cannot intrude, she relishes her view that she, alone, survives this sea and has not been scattered by its waves. She privileges her journey away from the confines of the outside world. Withdrawing from the others, Louis and Rhoda "are able to complete their divorce from reality even to the extent of escaping the burden of personality" (Troy 326). Their imaginary identities return them to the chora and its forces which threaten to collapse symbolic language. When Louis and Rhoda imagine their bodies as the hedge and the ship, their temporary suspension of the boundaries of the surface world also threatens to collapse their symbolic identities.

This suspension of boundaries also highlights their collapse of the boundaries of spoken language in the classroom itself. To understand Louis's and Rhoda's collapse of symbolic language, we must first examine the ease with which Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny use symbolic language in the classroom. Woolf highlights this ease through their inspection of words, themselves, as they perform their morning lessons:

"Those are white words," said Susan, "like stones one picks up by the seashore."

"They flick their tails right and left as I speak them," said Bernard.

"They wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks, now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together."

"Those are yellow words, those are fiery words," said Jinny. "I should like a fiery dress, a yellow dress, a fulvous dress to wear in the evening."



"Each tense," said Neville, "means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step." (20-1)

Susan's simile, a likeness between words and stones, emphasizes the pieces of the speech-act which a subject "picks up" in the educational setting. Bernard, marking the fluctuating rhythm of language, perceives how words can be "moving all together, now dividing, now coming together" in the oral experience, the verbal motion of the sentence itself. Jinny casts words as "a fiery dress, a yellow dress," dressing herself in language as a human subject. Neville's inspection of words reinforces the contingency between grammar and meaning. Focusing on the "distinctions" and the "differences," Neville highlights the ordering of symbolic language created by these four introspections.

In the classroom, Louis's estrangement from language comes not from a lack of understanding but from the distinctions in his pronunciation: "Jinny and Susan, Bernard and Neville bind themselves into a thong with which to lash me. They laugh at my neatness, at my Australian accent" (20). Because of his accent, Louis is cast as an ineffectual speaker. Louis attempts to escape the distinctions of his accent by trying "to imitate Bernard softly lisping Latin" (20). While Louis can momentarily escape his surface alterity, he loses the sound of his own voice. Perceiving his estrangement from spoken language, Louis reflects, "I do not wish to come to the top and say my lesson. My roots are threaded, like fibers in a flower-pot, round and round about the world" (20). In silence, Louis escapes his alienation by retreating to a space which is not governed by the rules of pronunciation. His imaginary identity as the hedge returns, and his poetic language again is "threaded, like fibers . . . round and round about" the unseen and, thus, unheard world.

Rhoda, who does not laugh at Louis's Australian accent, also fails to produce her own language in the classroom. As the children perform their math lessons, Rhoda's disparate relation to symbolic language comes to the forefront: "the others look; they look with understanding. . . . But I cannot write. I only see figures. The others are handing in their answers, one by one. Now it is my turn but I have no answer" (21). While the other characters access the internal logic of mathematics, Rhoda perceives the numbers without a content, "the figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone" (21). As the others answer, their acquisition of symbolic language is emphasized. Ostracized from the surface world, the boundlessness of the figures and of their potential meanings overwhelms her: "The clock ticks. . . . Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it . . . and I am outside of it, crying, 'Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time'" (21-2). As "the clock ticks," her isolation from language becomes more pronounced. When she begins "to draw a figure and the world is looped in it" and she is "outside of it," "Rhoda's consciousness thus trespasses upon a void she can only succumb to, not manipulate" (Stewart 434). Rhoda's use of time as a metaphor for her estrangement connects with Louis's use of time to explore his own estrangement in the classroom: "I do not wish to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks" (20). As Woolf creates a shared metaphor between Louis and Rhoda, we are reminded of Kristeva's "Women's Time": "linear time is . . . considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of enunciation—death" (192). Louis's "great clock,

yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks" amplifies the rigidity of pronunciation as his stumbling block; Rhoda's fear of "being blown for ever outside the loop of time" amplifies the rigidity of symbolic representation as her stumbling block. Unable to bring themselves to "top of the world," into the "loop of the world," the "ticks," the incremental divisions of time, produce the surface uniformity which Louis and Rhoda are unable to replicate.

Louis and Rhoda continue to remain uncomfortable with the necessary components for the entrance into symbolic language in boarding-school. While Woolf creates two school worlds, one for the men and one for the women, Louis and Rhoda develop as companions precariously balanced between their asymbolic and symbolic identities. Initially, the distinctions between the six characters are tempered with the uniformity of the dress code in boarding school; however, in their moments of isolation, Louis and Rhoda continue to return to the sensations and suspensions of a choric, "I"-less existence. A shared poetic language reiterates the connection between their respective struggles to obtain some integration in the physical world.

For Louis, the boarding school's dress code, which allows the students to "put off our distinction," is a welcomed release (34). As he sits with the other students in the chapel, he can "become a figure in the procession, a spoke in the huge wheel turning" (35). In this moment, while Louis attains a surface uniformity with the others, his escape from his accent returns him to his asymbolic identity: "I feel come over me the sense of the earth under me, and my roots going down and down till they wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre" (35). Louis returns to the roots of his imaginary self as the hedge. Underneath the surface reality, his hardness at the center remains "in the dark; I

have been hidden" (35). While there is no longer the forceful intrusion of Jinny, "no sudden kisses" (35), his interior self, his "shattered mind is pieced together by some sudden perception. . . . I, Louis, I . . . am born entire, out of hatred, out of discord" (39). This discord intensifies his estrangement from symbolic language and a spoken identity. While Louis seemingly creates an interior "I" in his stream-of-consciousness, this "I" lacks a physical body: "when darkness comes I put off this unenviable body . . . and inhabit space" (52-3). A conflict between his inner and outer identities remains, and, thus, Louis attempts to "achieve in my life . . . some gigantic amalgamation between two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me" (53). To achieve this amalgamation, Louis must struggle to bring his "I" to the surface and within the confines of his physical body.

Rhoda resents the boarding school uniformity. She is all too familiar with the anonymity that her estrangement from language produces. She notes: "here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity" (33). The brown serge dress robs Rhoda of her identity and accentuates her inability to create symbolic distinctions between herself and the others. Her estrangement from the physical body continues as the three women look into the boarding school mirror. Rhoda notes that "other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world . . . whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second" (43). The shifting and changing nature of her semiotic interior keeps her from physicalizing her identity. To form some sense of self-representation in her imaginary world, Rhoda proclaims: "I will seek out a face, a composed, a monumental face, and will endow it with omniscience, and wear

it under my dress. . . . I will find some dingle in a wood where I can display my assortment of curious treasures" (33). This composed and monumental face highlights the integrated self of her stream-of-consciousness; however, Rhoda's omniscience remains underneath the physical world, under her dress of anonymity. In this dingle, Rhoda's curious treasures continue to be hidden from human figures. Rhoda remains caught between her outer anonymity in the real world and her inner distinctions in the imaginary world. Isolated in her inner world, Rhoda notes, "alone, I often fall down into nothingness" (44). Rhoda, devoid of the physical boundaries necessary for sustaining her entrance into spoken language, finds that she has "to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to the body" (44). Thus, Rhoda is set in a constant struggle to establish the boundaries between her body and the real world.

As Louis and Rhoda struggle to create boundaries between themselves and the real world, this attempt at boundary-making suggests Kristeva's process of language acquisition. Kristeva writes, "language-learning can therefore be thought of as an acute and dramatic confrontation between positing-separating-identifying and the motility of the semiotic chora" (Revolution 100). The nothingness and space of their imaginary identities reflects the motility of the chora that keeps Louis and Rhoda from positing, separating, and identifying their physical bodies as they depart from boarding school. Rhoda continues to exist between the semiotic and the symbolic, and the inventions and failures of symbolic language dominate her soliloquy: "Identity failed me. . . . With intermittent shocks . . . life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached. . . . And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures" (64). As "intermittent shocks" usher in

the physical sensations of the real world, the physical boundaries between objects become the "invented devices" of symbolic language. With the loss of these boundaries, identity fails Rhoda. She characterizes spoken communication as a manipulated attachment which produces a false continuity between the individual and the real world. She delineates the speech-act further when she points to the crevices and fissures, which a communication with words fails to translate. Rhoda also points out the silence of the chora which overwhelms spoken utterances: "I can see silence already closing and the shadows of clouds chasing each other over the empty moor; silence closes over our transient passage. This I say is the present moment. . . . This is part of the emerging monster to whom we are attached" (65). In her creation of the transient passage between a semiotic and a symbolic identity, the all-consuming silence becomes the emerging monster which dismantles the attachment between individuals through their use of spoken language. Here, Rhoda creates the semiotic destruction of the symbolic by "introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language" to which speaking subjects, such as Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny, have attached themselves (Kristeva, "Oscillation Between Power and Denial" 165). As silence "closes over" symbolic language for Rhoda, Louis also understands how silence points to symbolic language's fallible translation of the real world. As he moves between the semiotic and the symbolic, Louis is also an individual who hangs "suspended without attachments" (65). Within his choraic interior, symbolic language becomes as "transient as the shadow on the meadow, soon fading, soon darkening and dying" (66). He also notes that his interior boundlessness would undermine the connection between objects and the symbolic language

"were it not that I coerce my brain to form in my forehead" (66). However, even his coerced self-expression which forms in his forehead has the potential to be undermined by the motility of the chora: "if I shut my eyes, if I fail to realize a meeting-place of past and present . . . human history is defrauded of a moment's vision" (66). In shutting eyes, Louis displaces the visual boundaries between subjects and objects. Thus, Louis's collapse of the seeing and speaking subject in this present moment becomes the semiotic displacement of the "meeting-place" between the individual and symbolic language.

Woolf moves Louis and Rhoda beyond their mutual isolation when she brings them together at the going-away party, in their romantic relationship and at Hampton Court. While Woolf has previously connected Louis and Rhoda through the poetic language of their monologues, in these three events, a sustained and undivided communication develops as dialogues between them. In these shared physical setting as they respond to the same sights, sounds, and gestures, Louis and Rhoda incorporate both a semiotic and symbolic relation to language. The parentheses, which Woolf uses to highlight the connection between Louis and Rhoda, extend the continuity of their poetic language at the dinner party and at Hampton Court. In both instances, Louis and Rhoda collapse the restrictions and limitations of their physical bodies, and as their inner and outer thoughts are held together by parentheses, they become "man-womanly and woman-manly" narrators creating together their vision of the present moment (*A Room of One's Own* 108). Here, we are reminded of the bisexuality which Kristeva and Cixous discuss. In "Oscillation Between Power and Denial," Kristeva notes, "all speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all

the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverizes, and finally revives it" (165). The shared poetic language, which Woolf creates for Louis and Rhoda in the parenthetical dialogues, not only reflects the sources of signification but also serves to multiply, pulverize and finally revive symbolic language. As the parenthetical dialogues between Louis and Rhoda set them outside the other characters, we can see how Woolf anticipates Cixous's discussion of speaking and writing subjects "working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other . . . not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion . . . but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 254). In the dialogues between Louis and Rhoda, we see this incessant process of exchange, and, as they are joined together by parentheses, we can see how Woolf transforms the categories of the same and of the other to distinguish Louis and Rhoda from Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny.

At the going-away party, their parenthetical dialogue focuses on the others' vainglorious celebration of the physical body as they sit around the table and chatter about their lives. In their dialogue, Louis and Rhoda transform the social rituals of the dinner party into the rituals of a dionysiac sacrifice; while the others remain attached to the confines of the real world, Louis and Rhoda translate the present moment into an imaginary setting. By creating this imaginary setting Louis and Rhoda dissect the symbolic language which seemingly restricts the other characters in the present moment. The parentheses which emphasize the communication between Louis and Rhoda



also illuminate how Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny remain outside, estranged from the imaginary language which Louis and Rhoda produce. While the others "become nocturnal, rapt" sleepwalkers of the symbolic, failing to recognize its limitations, Louis and Rhoda use all of their faculties to produce the seen and unseen, the spoken and muted present moment (140). Viewing this celebration from the outside, without attachment or collusion with the other characters' rituals, they highlight the accepted patterns and rhythms of symbolic language. When Rhoda describes how "a dancing and a drumming" connects the other characters, Louis extends this connection to highlight their interaction at the party as "the dance of savages" (140). Thus, Louis and Rhoda view their social and symbolic utterances as a performative dance. The symbolic language of the others "is stripped down to its basic structure: rhythm, the conjunction of body and music, which is precisely what is put into play when the linguistic" creation of Louis and Rhoda dissects the utterances of the other characters (Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual Dissident" 295). When Louis and Rhoda note the savage rituals of the others around the dinner table, the scene is stripped down to the bodies of their characters. Louis notes how the "flames leap over their painted faces, over the leopards and the bleeding limbs which they have torn from the living body" while Rhoda remarks how "their skins are dappled red and yellow in the torchlight" (140). For Louis and Rhoda, the others' faces and skins point to their living bodies which serve as the centerpiece for their conception of the real world.

A shift occurs in this dialogue when "the great procession passes" Louis and Rhoda (140). Louis and Rhoda begin to single out their difference from the others and their rituals. While the other "throw violets" (140) in celebration,

Louis and Rhoda undermine this celebration when they recognize that "death is woven in with the violets" (141). Louis and Rhoda "are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay" (141). In their awareness of this downfalling, this decay of symbolic language, "as a consequence, any disturbance of the 'social censorship' . . . attests . . . to the influx of the death drive, which no signifier, no mirror, no other and no mother could ever contain" (Revolution 49-50). As the "procession passes" them, they become "conspirators, withdrawn together" and recognize the motility of the chora which they introduce into the present moment (141). Their continual admission of semiotic forces affords them the power to collapse the surface, symbolic meaning that has previously estranged them. The motility of their imaginary communication undermines the social censorship which the others have enacted in their celebration of the physical, living body. Ironically, in this present moment, Louis and Rhoda are the ones producing symbolic utterances, formulating a language; however, they examine the choraic sounds, sights and gestures of the characters, not their words. As Woolf creates a vision of language which transcends symbolic utterances, the parenthetical dialogue between Louis and Rhoda emphasizes their choraic unity at the dinner party.

While Woolf creates the present moment of the romance between them with only a brief mention by Louis: "Rhoda sometimes comes. For we are lovers," she focuses on their unique intimacy through their concurrent soliloquies as they go about their lives in London as Louis and Rhoda examine the failure of their romance (170). By infusing partial lines of an anonymous lyric from the fifteenth century, Louis highlights the semiotic forces of Rhoda in his description of their intimacy; she becomes "the restless wind . . . breaking

the glassy surface of the mirror," breaking the surface of a symbolic language which cannot contain her (Burgum 133). When Louis juxtaposes the romance he has lost with Rhoda and the romance he maintains with a new lover, he sets apart his connection with the actress through communication with words from his connection with Rhoda through communication without words. While his mistress, "with her cockney accent," allows Louis to escape his pronunciation (201), she cannot replace "Rhoda, with her intense abstraction, with her unseeing eyes" who allows Louis to escape his physical body (200). His longing for their imaginary world becomes the focal point of his soliloquy. Remembering their "shared silence while the others spoke," Louis alludes to their unspoken intimacy at the dinner party when they "turned aside when the herd assembled and galloped with orderly, sleek backs" (203). The semiotic, silent forces of their communication are highlighted as Louis describes the sounds, sights and gestures which spark his memory of her: "when the sun blisters the roofs of the city I think of her; when the dry leaves patter to the ground; when the old men and come with pointed sticks and pierce little bits of paper as we pierced her" (203). While Louis connects their wordless intimacy with a physical intimacy, Rhoda cannot be contained in this physical body. Her choraic identity is opposed to "little bits of paper," the hardness, the separation between their bodies.

For Rhoda, Louis, like confines of the real world, pierces her: "I left Louis; I feared embraces" (204-5). Rhoda's inspection of their failed romance centers on her retreat from the physical boundaries of the body that their embrace emphasized, "with fleeces, with vestments I have tried to cover the blue-black blade" (205). While Louis yearns for the embrace in his soliloquy, Rhoda

desires a release from the physical distinctions between them cut by the blue-black blade. By concealing this blade, Rhoda attempts to escape the physical distinctions created by their embrace: "I implored day to break into night. I have longed to see the cupboard dwindle, to feel the bed soften, to float suspended. . . . I desired always to stretch the night and fill it fuller and fuller with dreams" (205). Her soliloquy reverberates the semiotic identity explored during boarding school. As the bed softens, the objects of the physical world become obscured, and Rhoda returns to a suspended state. Rhoda's imploring day to break into night relates to Cixous' discussion of the School of Dreams in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing : "one must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self toward the dark" (65). Rhoda's journey into the night becomes her journey away from her physical identity, and her dreams return her to the flux of her asymbolic body. Rhoda's footnote to her lost romance with Louis displays its end as "two figures in distress saying good-bye" (205). This good-bye, this retreat from the blue-black blade of their embrace, is necessary for Rhoda if she is to suspend her physical body and maintain her semiotic world.

Hampton Court is the final meeting-place of the six characters; there, older and wiser, they confront the decay and downfall of the real world and their own mortality. In a sustained moment of silence, the asymbolic, spastic bodies of Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny are set in relation to the semiotic world. Bernard contemplates: "as silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another" (224). This anonymity which collapses distinctions exposes Bernard to the "featureless" existence that Louis and Rhoda have long explored. Susan notes, "it seems as

if no leaf would ever fall, or bird fly" (225). Jinny reiterates this frozen feeling of time, as if, in the present moment, "life were stayed here and now" (225). In their loss of physical utterances, Neville recognizes how they begin to "oppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos . . . this formless imbecility" (226). As the others eagerly return to the physical world to escape this momentary collapse of symbolic language, Louis and Rhoda, in two parenthetical dialogues, stand together by the fountain relish the "illimitable" space of the chora. Their parenthetical dialogue recalls their communication at the party—where they watch the others participate in the rituals of symbolic language: "they are saying, 'My face shall be cut against the black of infinite space'" (226). This utterance highlights how symbolic language provides them with the distinctions of their physical bodies, and their repeated chorus, "it is time," returns to this present moment the metaphor which Louis and Rhoda used in early childhood to represent symbolic language (226). As the other characters depart from Louis and Rhoda, Louis remarks, "they do not finish their sentences" (226). This orality returns the others to the confines of symbolic language.

When Louis and Rhoda "drop a little behind," they become again "conspirators who have something to whisper" as they dissect orality's failure to translate the infinite space of silence (227). Louis and Rhoda recognize the choraic silence as a "space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation" (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 249). Transforming again the communication between the other characters, they return to the subversive forces of the chora which dissolve the confines of the speech-act. Alone with Louis, Rhoda remarks of the others "ancient privilege—not to be disturbed," and this ancient privilege becomes the

rituals of symbolic language which the others maintain (229). The others retreat from Louis and Rhoda and the disturbances, the motility of the chora, where "no identity holds up" (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 179). When Louis and Rhoda return to their imaginary world, Rhoda implores, "not a sound, not a movement must escape us" if they are to give the moment whole in their dialogue (230). Under this demand, Louis wonders "how shall we put it together, the confused and composite message" of two worlds, the semiotic and the symbolic (230). For an answer, they use the landscape at Hampton Court to reflect the intersections between the silent and spoken communications:

"A weight has dropped into the night," said Rhoda, "dragging it down. Every tree is big with a shadow that is not the shadow of the tree behind it. We hear a drumming on the roofs of a fasting city when the Turks are hungry and uncertain tempered. We hear them crying with sharp, stag-like barks, 'Open, open.' Listen to the trams squealing and to the flashes from the electric rails. We hear the beech trees and the birch trees raise their branches as if the bride had let her silken night dress fall and come to the doorway saying, 'Open, open.'"

"All seems alive," said Louis. "I cannot hear death anywhere tonight. Stupidity, on that man's face, age, on that woman's would be strong enough, one would think, to resist the incantation, and bring in death. But where is death tonight? All the crudity, odds and ends, this and that, have been crushed like glass splinters into the blue, the red-fringed tide, which, drawing into the shore, fertile with innumerable fish, breaks at our feet." (230-1)

Here, the drumming of desperate Turks and their "sharp, stag-like barks" return Rhoda and Louis to their parenthetical dialogue at the dinner party. However, in this present moment, the incantation of the voice on the street, "open, open," acts a counterpart to the decay and downfalling that Louis and Rhoda noted at the dinner party. The landscape, alive with the sounds, sights and gestures of London, does not "bring in death" to their imaginary world. The "crudity," the symbolic distinctions which have estranged them from the others "have been

crushed like glass splinters" as they experience a connection between the physical bodies, the faces they see, and the caves behind them which, up to now, had been restricted to silence. Connecting the splintered landscape and their own utterances, their poetic language affirms the shared sounds, sights, and gestures, as if assuring them of their attachment to the real world.

As the dialogue between Louis and Rhoda continues, the symbolic language which has estranged them returns. The voices of the Bernard, Neville, Susan, and Jinny intrude into their imaginary world. Louis recognizes that the solitude between them has been "disturbed by faint clapping sounds of praise and laughter" of the others' spoken interactions (231), and Rhoda begins "resenting compromise and right and wrong on human lips" (231). They resent the modes of symbolic language which the other characters use, the sound of its pronunciation, and the structure of its internal logic. The physical bodies of the others mark the end of the conspiracy between Louis and Rhoda: "they regain their natural size. They are only men, only women . . . [and] as they emerge into the moonlight . . . they have faces. They become Susan and Bernard, Jinny and Neville" (231-2). Relegated again to the symbolic world of the friendship circle, the present moment is no longer in splinters, but now has distinct physical forms. Their faces accentuate the fact that "they have only to speak, and their first words, with the remembered tone" manifest the distinctions of the real world (232). The others' utterances—"What do I think of you—what do you think of me? Who are you? Who am I?"—dislocate Rhoda's and Louis's imaginary world with their physical bodies and their symbolic language (232). In this separation between subjects, Louis and Rhoda can no longer remain undivided. This differentiation proves fatal to their shared poetic language, and

Bernard notes, "we have destroyed something by our presence . . . a world perhaps" (232). Indeed, the return of the others has destroyed the shared poetic language, and the undivided communication between Louis and Rhoda disappears from the narrative. They no longer speak, and there are no more moments of retreat, where the caves behind them come to light.

Bernard's sustained soliloquy, which ends The Waves, provides a summary of all the characters' lives from early childhood to late adulthood. In Bernard's soliloquy, certain phrases, which Louis and Rhoda have used to describe their struggle with symbolic language and their "fantasy about a utopian linguistic structure," return (Gilbert 209). While his soliloquy notes how they are able "to see things without attachment from the outside" (263) and names "Louis and Rhoda, the conspirators" (276), the loss of their whispering poetic language is accentuated as Bernard proclaims, "I, I, I, return to the surface of things" (296). No longer figures seen from the interior, they are described from the outside, within the confines of Bernard's subjectivity. His surface subjectivity defeats their lack of boundaries, and Louis and Rhoda are once again estranged from symbolic language as they become objects of Bernard's sentences. Louis and Rhoda are attached to the distinctions which Bernard produces. Thus, their shared poetic language is lost and cannot survive in this surface world.

The resurfacing of the "I" in The Waves, as in A Room of One's Own, Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, posits the process of subjectivity of which the chora is merely one stage of three. While the return to their imaginary world offers up a momentary alleviation of their estrangement, this world faces destruction when their physical bodies come to light in the mirror-stage, their



days at boarding school. When the surface of the world posits them into a realm of the thetic, their conspiracies at the dinner party and at Hampton Court become the only moments where they can remain "without attachment, from the outside" world. Thus, when Woolf marks the end of their shared poetic language, she fixes Louis and Rhoda in a space where they are now described solely from the outside by Bernard, and thus, implicitly, Woolf herself.

As a culminating example of Woolf's l'écriture féminine, The Waves represents a merging of Woolf's modernism, such as her technical experiments with parenthetical dialogues, and her feminism, such as her exploration of an androgynous poetic language. This merging is exemplified in Woolf's exploration of a woman's sentence. In her essays and novels we find that Woolf anticipates the core discourses on l'écriture féminine. By revisioning the sentence from a woman's body, like Cixous, we find that Woolf explores her modernism and "undermines the linguistic, syntactical, and metaphysical conventions of Western narrative" and symbolic language (Showalter 9). Kristeva highlights the importance of the disruption of symbolic language through modernism in "Oscillation Between Power and Denial," where she dismisses Woolf's writing as being written from "an asymbolic, spastic body" (166). However, if we explore the disruption of symbolic language which occurs when the adult subject returns to the chora, as Kristeva describes in Revolution in Poetic Language, we can view how the asymbolic, spastic body, which appears in Woolf's essays and novels, follows Kristeva's framework of the acquisition of language. Through her feminism, we can see how in Woolf's

essays and novels, "'woman,' 'the feminine,' and so on have come to signify those process that disrupt symbolic structures" which have served as the foundation for patriarchal silencing of women (Jardine 42). In "The Laugh of the Medusa" and Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing , Cixous, despite her dismissal of Woolf's disruption of language, imagines l'écriture féminine as an "invention of a new insurgent writing" of symbolic language ("Laugh" 250). Woolf anticipates Cixous's "insurgent writing" in A Room of One's Own and her numerous essays on women and fiction which develop the feminine language as one where women explore new forms and new meanings for symbolic language in their writing.

Woolf also prefigures Kristeva and Cixous when she highlights the plurality of signifying systems. She creates a communication without words in her novels, as seen through the gestures and the stream-of-consciousness connections which connect characters in Mrs. Dalloway , in Lily Briscoe's painting and her investigation of the symbols of the social structure in To the Lighthouse , and in the development of Louis and Rhoda as conspirators against verbal language who move beyond the confines of spoken utterances through their continual return to a choraic sense of self in The Waves.

All of Woolf's characters "wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" which have restricted verbal language ("Laugh" 256). We find that Woolf, like Kristeva and Cixous, views a feminine writing practice, l'écriture féminine , as a movement beyond these restrictions by wrecking what has regulated and coded symbolic language in order to produce a new language which includes rather than excludes the plurality of signifying systems. By exploring both semiotic and symbolic within her characters'

streams-of-consciousness, Woolf introduces "ruptures, blank spaces and holes into language" of the symbolic enunciation and creates the semiotic transformations which undermine its linguistic, syntactical and linguistic conventions ("Oscillation" 165).

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