LIFE-WRITING: REPRESENTING CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH RADICAL FORMS IN WOOLF, FAULKNER, AND BECKETT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis places work by Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Samuel Becket side-by-side. This is done more specifically in relation to texts which exemplify progressions toward radical experiments with narrative structure. To that end, *To the Lighthouse* will be compared to *The Waves*, and *The Sound and the Fury* to *Absalom, Absalom!* Finally, Beckett's trilogy will be brought in as a last challenge to conventional modes of signification and storytelling. Through these texts, this paper will argue that a truer representation of subjective experience is what these authors seek to attend to, each using the emotive logic of their radical structures in their own way.

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LIFE: OUR PRIMARY CONCERN

In an essay, Virginia Woolf claims that modern fiction should attempt to capture life's "luminous halo,"[1] the infinite ambiguity and variety of human experience. She claims that a writer's job is to "convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit."[2] What she seeks is a way to approach the ineffable, using the narrative as a means of representing conscious existence itself.

When William Faulkner writes of his own fiction in a letter to Malcolm Crowley, he states: "I'm telling the same story over and over which is myself and the world. That's all a writer ever does, he tells his own biography in a thousand different terms." While not identical to Woolf's statement, there is something strikingly similar in their claims. Faulkner's version of fiction is "protean,"[3] and is in a process of adapting the same self-reflexive story ad infinitum. Hence, he suggests that the author's ultimate job is that of the evolving auto-biographer, constantly finding new ways in which to convey or impart aspects of individual experience. This runs in parallel to the argument that the modern writer is one who conveys 'life' itself, who experiments in order to best express this, pushing the limits of written storytelling.

Beckett is known for his approach to writing, which embraces failure. He chose to write in French rather than his native language because it allowed him access to something which he felt inaccessible in English; he describes English as "like the veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it." This is akin to Woolf's assertion

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1 McNeille, Andrew, Ed. Woolf, Virginia The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.
2 Ibid.
3 FAULKNER, WILLIAM, WATSON, JAMES G. *William Faulkner, Letters & Fictions*.

in "Mrs. Bennett and Mr. Brown," that fiction is to access the "fragmentary and the failure."[4] In Beckett's context, the desire to "make language fail"[5] is a necessary part of his writing process, which manifests in his novels through form and voice in order to look beyond coherence to convey the experience of conscious existence.

The narrative approaches of these authors address the affective existences of the human subject, and, in certain cases, the lived reality of personal and shared history. Beckett, Woolf, and Faulkner share a task; this is reflected in similar progressions in the formalistic constitutions of their work. This thesis aims to uncover the ways in which these authors use narrative structure, time, and voice toward the simultaneously singular and encompassing endeavor of representing "life." This is not limited to individual life, but extends to include the paradoxes of history and language. To that end, I will consider Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, and how her writing evolved into something more radically experimental in her 1931 work, *The Waves.* Afterward, it will show how a similar metamorphosis can be found through the diptych of Faulkner's 1929 novel, *The Sound and The Fury,* and *Absalom, Absalom!,* published later in 1936. I will also consider Beckett's trilogy; though all three books are very experimental, there is a clear progression by which conventions are further challenged as the series continues.

Despite its temporal ambiguity, *To the Lighthouse* is character-driven. The reader is able to follow the Ramsay family through milestones, and there is an overarching narrative despite the text's many meanderings. *The Waves*, conversely, is a genre-defying work of prose-poetry

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[4] McNeille, Andrew, Ed. Woolf, Virginia The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984

[5] Beckett, S. in Coffey, M., 2021. *Samuel Beckett: Connoisseur of Artistic Failure*. [online] Literary Hub. Available at: <https://lithub.com/samuel-beckett-connoisseur-of-artistic-failure/>

which uses six soliloquies, all amalgamated into the intertwined narrative of childhood friends as they grow older. This pluralist form of narrative detracts from the reader's ability to properly and reliably decipher the 'story' which unfolds. The inscrutability of *The Waves* is much discussed by critics, who are perplexed by the sprawling structure, and the paradox of individuality. There is a similar gesture to be found in the move between Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury,* and *Absalom, Absalom!.* Though these are joined by a shared character, they differ greatly in narrative style. The former is simpler to follow, as it tracks the life of a family. In *Absalom, Absalom!,* Faulkner dissolves narrative by breaking away from that containment through a social-historical narrative that explodes the bounds between present and past. Lastly, Beckett's trilogy gives us a deconstructive vision of the individual, and of language as a whole, which has ramifications both on Woolf's and Faulkner's endeavors. Meaning is disparaged in the trilogy, calling into question our mechanisms of storytelling, and challenges our confidence in our ability to grasp the self through language.

CONSCIOUSNESS, ART, AND REALITY IN *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is an inward-looking literary project. Its autobiographical nature echoes Faulkner's assertion that the novel is a continual reworking of an author's own experiences.[6] The novel is separated into three parts, which relate fundamentally to Mrs. Ramsay: her life, her death, and the aftermath of devastating absence, which results from her demise. This portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay can be interpreted as an expression of Woolf's grief for her own mother;[7] an autobiographical reading renders this character into a literary expression of an idealized motherhood, which was lacking in Woolf's actual life. Then, there is Lily Briscoe, the spinster painter who is an analogue of the author herself. Lilienfeld argues, through an analysis of *Moments of Being*, that in addition to being the artist-figure, "Lily Briscoe is herself a surrogate for the daughter, angry at her mother's commitment to others, a daughter who sustains her mother's death."[8] As a consequence, the book can be interpreted both as a project of imagining, and one of connection with past and with lost loved ones.

At the same time, Lily Briscoe is an artist, as Woolf is. Briscoe's painting is concurrent to Woolf's novel, and these two things are in constant conversation; this brings together the self-reflexive motif of art, and the complexity of autobiography and of personal history. This works alongside the impossibility of full understanding between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, not for the latter's lack of trying, to undertake a complex reckoning of subjectivity and art, which

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[6] FAULKNER, WILLIAM, WATSON, JAMES G. *William Faulkner, Letters & Fictions*.
[7] Lilienfeld, Jane. ""The Deceptiveness of Beauty": Mother Love and Mother Hate in To the Lighthouse." *Twentieth Century Literature* 23, no. 3 (1977): 345-76.
[8] Ibid.

challenges the bounds of the novel genre, and meditates on the extent to which fiction and conscious reality—despite the limits it is subject to—are intermingled.

She achieves this through these characters; unlike *The Waves,* Woolf*'s To the Lighthouse* is written in third-person. Though she makes liberal use of diversion, introspection and distraction, narrative disruption is not enacted as radically through this text, because it is written largely in a unified voice. But, it is in conjunction with the evasive figure of Mrs. Ramsay, whose identity is central to the novel's story, that the image of the author-character Lily Briscoe can be enacted to give rise to metafictive implications surrounding the purpose of the novel. The relations between subjective experience and artmaking, as addressed in "Modern Fiction," are hence brought to light by character and motif.

To begin, the text can be read as a family novel, underpinned by the figure of Mrs. Ramsay. "Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration,"[9]; indeed, this relationship between mother and child is expressed in manifold capacities, limited not to the biological fact of Mrs. Ramsay's motherhood. In this regard, though, she is the ultimate caretaker, and the ultimate *woman,* within the context of a social reality which, in women, prizes the nurturing and mothering instinct above all else. The abundance of her fertility, having birthed eight children, notably the same number as Woolf's own mother Julia Stephens,[10] establishes her as the ideal image of femininity. This puts her in near perfect contrast against the unmarried Lily Briscoe, who enacts an alternate image of female existence.

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[9] Lilienfeld, Jane. ""The Deceptiveness of Beauty": Mother Love and Mother Hate in To the Lighthouse." *Twentieth Century Literature* 23, no. 3 (1977): 345-76.
[10] Ibid.

In Mrs. Ramsay's capacity as a mother, she is situated at the center of everything; all which takes place implicates her in some manner. She is the nexus of every relationship and the symbolic link between characters. Being the epitome of a motherly ideal, she is a mediator between her husband and their children. This is seen even in the exposition of the novel, where she tells James that they may be able to venture to the Lighthouse, softening the severity of Mr. Ramsay's refusal, his assertion that the weather would not permit a trip. This seemingly quotidian interaction is revealing of a tenuous family dynamic where her motherhood is worshipped. "Yes, of course, if it is fine to-morrow," said Mrs. Ramsay," the text begins. "To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy," it continues. Later, he "endowed the picture of a refrigerator as his mother spoke with heavenly bliss."[11] By contrast, Mr. Ramsay refuses his son's request. This refusal sparks a murderous sentiment in the boy: "Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then." The juxtaposition of the religious sentiment with which James views his mother, who speaks with "heavenly bliss," and who speaks in possibilities, against the hard and violent way he views his father, whose hyper-masculine realism is curt and dismissive, suggests an Oedipal dimension of the family dynamic. James' wish to remove his father places Mrs. Ramsay on the pedestal.

Mrs. Ramsay's relationship with Lily Briscoe, despite their lack of biological relation, further establishes the former as this ideal of motherhood. The surrogacy aspect of this relationship, wherein Mrs. Ramsay is a chosen mother rather than a real one, furthers the autobiographical interpretation of the text. Despite the adoption, so to speak, of Lily, she is

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[11] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 1.

essentially still an "orphan."[12] This layers Woolf's choice to write a vision of her absent mother with an awareness of its artifice; she is a fictional surrogate, in addition to an actual surrogate which brings light to the "great psychological alienation"[13] that she might have herself endured growing up. Here, there is a double-separation which distances both Woolf and Lily Briscoe from the figure of Mrs. Ramsay.

In this way, she occupies a parallel position to the Lighthouse, the "hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst; [..] which seemed to be running away into some moon country, uninhabited of men."[14] The moon is associated firmly with femininity, and distance, two things which are embodied by Mrs. Ramsay. Later in the text, "she praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light."[15] A parallel is distinctly drawn between the two central elements of the text, Mrs. Ramsay and the Lighthouse, through the notion of light and beauty. It must be noted that the light emitted by the structure is one characterized precisely by its distance, its presence as a guide from afar. The Lighthouse remains throughout the text as an aspirational symbol, ever-sought. Though it is on an island at sea, far away, it is paradoxically still ever present, its light infiltrating the windows of the family home.

Mrs. Ramsay is the same—ever-present, but distant. This is true in life, and in death. When she is alive, Lily Briscoe "imagined how mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing

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[12] Lilienfeld, Jane. ""The Deceptiveness of Beauty": Mother Love and Mother Hate in To the Lighthouse." *Twentieth Century Literature* 23, no. 3 (1977): 345-76.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 17.
[15] Ibid. 70.

sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything."[16] In a physical sense, they are as close as they possibly can be "touching," even. At the same time, Mrs. Ramsay is elsewhere entirely. The use of archaeological imagery is suggestive, evoking a sense of spatial, temporal and cultural distance. This recapitulates on the inaccessibility of Mrs. Ramsay's interiority, which is described as akin to unreachable tombs in labyrinthic pyramids, and incomprehensible runic script.

To the Lighthouse, composed in the early 1920s, coincides with the British Museum's acquisition of Egyptian artefacts,[17] and concerns about the 'curse of Ammun-Ra,' a series of misfortunes and associated with the act of entering and excavating tombs. Woolf's use of these images, "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions," "treasures in the tombs of kings," alludes to these endeavors, layering the issue of Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's relationship with broader problems of cross-national and cross-temporal understanding. The image of the museum is useful in decoding the dynamic between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. By extension, the image has implications on the reader's ability to 'know' the ghostly figure of Mrs. Ramsay. The museum is a paradox of 'knowing,' which brings artefacts close enough to examine, but still necessarily fails to fully encapsulate or reproduce the oftentimes dead cultures it hopes to represent. In essence, the museum places once-alive artefacts in front of white walls, allowing for examination, but also implies a certain epistemological difficulty, when it comes to comprehending or fully realizing an artefact's truth. In the same vein, Mrs. Ramsay is presented to us as a tablet of inscriptions. At

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[16] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 57.
[17] Rutherford, Brett. "Virginia Woolf's Egyptomania: Echoes of The Book of the Dead in To The Lighthouse." *Woolf Studies Annual* 24 (2018): 135-64.

some level, we are gaining access to her; she is dead, but carries a written message. She is made legible by this metaphor. Simultaneously, she is difficult to decode, and remains distant despite Lily's desire to know her.

This is a moment of contradiction which suggests the dual nature of her centrality, which arises from her being both asserted and negated throughout the text. At times, she is present—next to us, even—still, she is still far away. We do gain profound insight into her subjectivity, but she remains a protracted figure. She is held close through her connections, and the fact that her presence is felt long after her passing; but she is dead.

Mrs. Ramsay represents a conflict between the proximity we seek with our dead loved ones, and the reality of their passing. This tension is expressed through the contrast between her omnipresence within the text's reality, and the fact of her physical absence following her death. In this regard, her physical absence is at odds with the continual recurrence of her image, as a necessary feature of the text's narrative fabric and time, and the symbolic and structural recurrence of her character's presence through objects and setting.

In 'Time Passes,' the reader learns of Mrs. Ramsay's death, but through emptiness; "nothing stirred in the drawing-room or in the dining-room or on the staircase;" "house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs."[18] Lily Briscoe remarks: "how could one express in words the emotions of the body? express the emptiness there?"[19] The fact that Lily Briscoe is the one to give voice to this absence further supports the postulation that Woolf is the one marked by her mother's death, despite having felt alienated in her young life.

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[18] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 138.
[19] Ibid.

This nothingness, however, is pregnant; everywhere, there are textually-imbued traces of Mrs. Ramsay. For instance, there is the choice to specify "drawing room" and the "dining room," which are both seen as the woman's domain. Bringing attention to these instances of emptiness, and the uncanny of these empty spaces, draws us necessarily back to the figure of the mother, who is missing but still somehow there, "wearily," and, most pertinently: "ghostlily."[20]

The ghost of Mrs. Ramsay persists in many forms. Structurally, she is embedded in the novel. Her positionality is most markedly established through the text's temporal delineations. The three sections, "The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse" are all related in some way to the life and death of this character. The choice of grounding one person, as not only a nexus of all the text's relationships, but also as the center of its chronology, is significant. Woolf supplants linear narrative time with a more humanistic temporality, which establishes her as an unmovable entity in the novel; she is a textual landmark, again, the way the Lighthouse is a physical one. Relatedly, there is also the cyclical movement of the text, which begins with her allowing her son the possibility of visiting the Lighthouse, and ends with a fulfilment of that promise, though she is not there. This belated 'answering' is an aspect of the hauntology[21] created by Woolf, which is in dialogue both with the structural composition of the text and its many symbols, which hark back to this absence.

From this, it is clear that *To the Lighthouse* is still in direct opposition with materialist conventions of structure, even if not in as extreme a manner as *The Waves*. Although the semblance of narrative continuity is preserved, owing to the single-narrator figure, it does

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[20] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 138.
[21] Fisher, Mark. "What Is Hauntology?" Film Quarterly 66, no. 1 (2012): 16-24. Accessed October 17, 2020. doi:10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16.

present a more subjective temporality that aligns itself with its characters' emotional lives. This is particularly as it relates to Mrs. Ramsay's perpetual presence, and her effect on the other characters in the novel. The use of stream-of-consciousness, which is interlaced with the narration, also places weight on affect and experience, over conventions of chronological storytelling. Additionally, the descriptive matter of the text, the setting which surrounds the characters, is similarly interlinked with the affective realities of the novel, namely the absence, the loss. This consideration of Mrs. Ramsay's position in *To the Lighthouse*, with relation to this structure and temporality, allows for an understanding of its experimentalism, specifically as it is linked to its concern with autobiography.

The text works hard to present to readers both the centrality and obscurity of this figure. Mrs. Ramsay is both right in front of the reader, and far away. She is behind both the solipsistic barrier of her separate mind, and the veil of death. This carries the echo of Woolf's absent mother, and shows therefore how narrative is used to convey a subjective experience of loss. The question remains, though, of what is to be done, in the face of negative space left behind by Mrs. Ramsay's and Mrs. Stephen's overlapped shadows.

For the answer to this, we must turn our attention back to Lily Briscoe, through whom the text provides a literary commentary on art and the artmaking process, which is in perpetual conversation with this sense of emptiness and loss. It is ultimately her reaction to this fissure that forms the crux of the text's metafictional project. Briscoe's painting is a self-reflexive object which symbolically implicates the text in its own critique of art; it can be read as an analogue for all art-making, including writing. Woolf uses precisely this to hint at the objective of her own fiction, which is an endless grasping for things which are unreachable, or which are not there.

In this regard, one must return to Lily's thoughts as she sat at Mrs. Ramsay's chair, comparing the older woman to a locked tomb: "What art was there [..] by which one pressed through into those secret chambers?"[22] Here, Woolf shows us that art and consciousness are bound together. In this crucial moment, wherein Mrs. Ramsay is alienated through archeological imagery, art is evoked as a balm to the separation, a way in which one might have "pressed through" into another's subjective experience. Here, the use of the word "art," is intentional, as it calls readers' attentions back to Lily's painting, but also to art itself as a way to enter, to decipher. The desire to enter is further elaborated on; "it was not knowledge but unity that she [Lily] desired [..] intimacy itself, which is knowledge."[23] This is another formulation of Woolf's focus on subjectivity, as the epistemological priority of art, and of fiction. The project of art is to seek some form of "unity," to enter the secret tomb of another mind. It provides a momentary respite to the otherwise bleak sense of both psychological and fictive absence explored earlier in the paper. This view of the artist acts self-reflexively in the text, meta-fictionalizing it. Through this, the book proffers itself as some means by which we counteract the alienation. This relates to the autobiographical aspects of *To The Lighthouse*, as it allows the reader to view it as Woolf's response to her loss and the blank spaces of her life, and more generally as a thought on the project of such work.

However, this is only a temporary respite to the issue of subjective alienation. Lily continues: "it was a miserable machine, an inefficient machine, she thought, the human apparatus

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[22] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 57.
[23] Ibid.

for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment."[24] This establishes, more explicitly, a parallel between "feeling," and "painting," as they are described as functions of the same process. By using words like "machine," and "apparatus," both the acts of feeling and painting are mechanized, shown as man-made. This suggests that these impulses are just as constructed and prone to malfunction as machines. This blurs the line between semiotic and symbolic. The acts of abstract painting, and of feeling emotions, are both conventionally seen as semiotic, because they relate to the unstructured and undefined. Conversely, machination is aggressively symbolic, relating to rules, structure, and code. By interposing symbolic and semiotic aspects of reality, Woolf suggests that they are not as separate as they may seem. By erasing the clean divide between systematic processing and human feeling, Woolf frames the artist as the figure in between. Though a painting can be undefined to the general eye, the artist uses the abstract to create meaning.

This can be drawn back to Woolf's task at hand, of composing a novel. Like the painting, a novel might aim to give voice to the unstructured reality of consciousness, which draws upon nebulous aspects of one's experience. Yet, in writing or painting something nebulous, one necessarily gives it some structure. Thus, she writes, "heroically, one must force it [the machine] on."[25] There is a certain violence in this statement's tone, as it asserts that the painter, or the one who feels, must "force" themselves into their craft. The artist is not passive, but active and intentional in a paradoxical process of creation where the semiotic and the symbolic coexist.

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[24] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 209.
[25] Ibid.

Artmaking, seen as a response, an attempt to access *something* of somebody else, is an active process. It allows for the immaterial to somehow be materially recorded.

As Lily Briscoe finishes the painting, she thinks, "Yes, with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. [..] With a sudden intensity [..] she drew a line there, in the center. It was done; it was finished. Yes, [..] I have had my vision."[26] Woolf never details the actual appearance of the painting, instead only referring to "green and blues," and "lines." This has contradictory implications, as it suggests that the painting is shapeless and undefinable, but also reducible to specific, recognizable symbols like lines and colors. Despite the paradoxical and unknown nature of her creation, Lily thinks, "it is done; it is finished." These clauses reverberate through their anaphoric structure, and are followed by the word, "Yes." They serve as an affirmation of her "vision," denoting an ending. Yet, the painting is only an "attempt at something." The "something" in question remains undefined. This sentence reads as unfinished, and its abrupt end is symbolic of art's constraints. It is finished too soon, never truly complete, even if it is declared to be. Still, the attempt is the important part; the "risk must be run; the mark made."[27]

Lily contemplates the perpetuity of art:

> "She looked at her picture. That would have been his answer, presumably—how "you" and "I" and "she" pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa;"[28]

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[26] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 225..

[27] Ibid, 172.

[28] Ibid, 173.

Although there is some permanence in a painting or a poem, she realizes that all would be eventually swept aside, ignored if not destroyed entirely. The image of the art piece, one day irrelevant and concealed behind furniture, also implies a necessary sense of futility in the pursuit. Immediately afterward, she begins having an emotional reaction, crying for Mrs. Ramsay; art, here, is both affirmed and negated. Its constraint, of eventual irrelevance, is overtaken by this onset of intense emotion. Earlier, Lily stated that the risk "must" be taken. The use of the imperative in that instance is embodied in this moment, which comes to her as a surprise. She herself is too taken aback to realize that the liquid in her eyes is comprised of teardrops. This bodily reaction, shown to be inevitable, is her "forcing the machine on," as quoted earlier in the paper. Art, though imperfect, easily put aside and discarded when irrelevant, is still entirely necessary, as it is the only means we have of evoking affect.

The cinematic parallel between Lily Briscoe in the living-room painting while watching the boat, and James, Cam and Mr. Ramsay travelling to the Lighthouse, must also be considered. This scene can be described as cinematic due to the way it is divided between the 'action' of the boat sailing, and the artmaking process back in the house; it feels akin to montage, cutting between sequences. This suggests to readers a relation between the symbolic movement toward this Lighthouse, and the painting. Bearing in mind that the Lighthouse can be read as a motif relating Mrs. Ramsay herself, this extends the argument that art is a means by which we try to allow access to interiority, or to grasp the lived reality of another human being. More importantly, though, this parallel works to further Woolf's commentary on art's simultaneous necessity and incompleteness.

Of course, the painting is completely inscrutable. This ending leaves the reader wondering what exactly Lily's painting was meant to mean. How was the art piece so perfect, so

satisfactory, while also so sparse and lacking to the reader? This question is a loaded one, because it is not limited to the implications of the fictional piece of visual art. Rather, it applies to art in general, and the novel as a whole. Woolf builds up to this specific moment, one cinematically amalgamated with the final voyage to the Lighthouse, the fulfilment of Mrs. Ramsay's novel-opening promise, except in her absence. This cyclicality of this suggests that the whole process embodied by *To the Lighthouse* is something which ends where it begins; it ends with a fulfilment which is not complete. Just as James is satisfied by his mother's openness to the possibility of the Lighthouse, readers must be satisfied with the possibility that Lily's painting, which they never see, is perfect in its own way.

In the context of *To the Lighthouse*'s own structure and characters, several more assertions can be made. The act of fictionalizing biographical fact is itself symbolic, layering the 'truth' with interpretation and subjectivization. The metafictive dimension of the novel, enacted through the figure of Lily Briscoe, similarly makes ambiguous our understanding of Woolf's intentions, leading us to an understanding of authorial intent which is similarly murky and uncertain. Lastly, the character of Mrs. Ramsay, who is at once present and absent, embodies a sense of psychological distance that Lily tries to close through art. Though the text itself is more comprehensible than Briscoe's painting, being relatively sequential in its composition, and character-driven, its commentary on subjectivity and art gives readers insight as to Woolf's novelistic intent. The autobiographical elements of the text, then, have come together with its self-critical motif of artmaking, in order to form a picture of the project of fiction she envisions.

Lily Briscoe claims definitively, at the very end, that her painting is complete. This is spoken in a sure, affirmative voice, all while readers are left with an incomplete understanding of the painting. It is impossible to visualize. In the book, something similar is manifest in the reality

of the distance between people, particularly as it is shown through Mrs. Ramsay's negated presence. Then, and finally, there is the implication that artmaking is the sole, albeit fallible, means by which we negotiate this distance.

It is important that, when Lily finishes her artwork, nobody but she is able to understand it. To the reader, it is both complete and incomplete. What, exactly, does she achieve? We do not know; as a result, art is a way by which "life" is sought, but never fully realized. It is as Woolf writes earlier in the text: "There it was before her [Mrs. Ramsay] —life. Life: she thought but she did not finish her thought."[29]

[29] Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Melbourne: Penguin Classics (Penguin Random House,) 2018. 66.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY IMPRESSIONISM OF *THE WAVES*

The Waves was written as a new kind of fiction, to the extent that Virginia Woolf herself was reluctant to refer to it as a novel.[30] She was right to claim that this is not akin to any novel we are used to. Certainly, it differs from the Victorian novel. But, it also stands out against the 20th century experimental work which surrounded it.[31] This is, in part, because of the unusual narrative form which governs the text, a perplexing but lyrical and rhythmic account of six lives, interspersed with an ecological framing narrative detailing the movement of the sea. It is abstract, impressionistic, and lacking the shape and form of a conventional novel. It moves by its own logic, its own language. The book speaks enigmatically, conveying what could not have been conveyed in any other manner, about human experience and the place of the person in a larger material world. *The Waves* carries through, from *To the Lighthouse,* Mrs. Ramsay's quiet nihilism; still, it is formally constructed to reach toward Briscoe's sense of artistic purpose, toward an abstract and unconventional depiction of "life."

Formalistically, *The Waves* is varied and interdisciplinary. Woolf borrows from theatre and poetry through her narrative style. J.W. Graham uses the word "soliloquy," as opposed to inner monologue[32] to describe how the characters share their impressions and observations. This is a striking term, especially in this context, as it is applied to a dominant narrative force in the text. As Graham writes, "these soliloquies are the plot and action of The Waves, and if they

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[30] Graham, J. W. "Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style." University of Toronto Quarterly 39, no. 3 (1970): 193-95.
[31] Balossi, Giuseppina. *A Corpus Linguistic Approach to Literary Language and Characterization: Virginia Woolf's The Waves.* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014), 1-2.
[32] Graham, J. W. "Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style." University of Toronto Quarterly 39, no. 3 (1970): 193-95.

render anything, it is surely the psychic life of the speakers."[33] Soliloquy is a form which is somewhere between the verbalized and the internal; in theatre, the soliloquy exists within a seemingly contradictory interplay between public and private. This term, then, as applied to this text, implies that the human psyche occupies similar between-spaces.

To this end, Woolf "rigorously follows two conventions for rendering direct speech,"[34] in her use of the word "said," and of quotation marks throughout. These conventions imply that character's observations are verbally expressed rather than solely internal. Contradictorily, readers are faced with unusual and unnatural ways in which each character verbalizes their inner life, as well as their perceptions of the external world. Characters speak in highly literary, symbolic language, which "even the most precocious children"[35] would not mimic. The simultaneous presence of direct speech, and of unusual diction, is contradictory; the words of Woolf's soliloquizing speakers are, at the same time, spoken, and unspeakable.[36] Just as soliloquy evokes a middle ground between private and verbalized thoughts, the narrators of the text occupy a similarly complex liminality. "The language of these friends defines both individual consciousness and membership within a community," writes Hild.[37] The dichotomy between private and public defines soliloquy as a genre, just as it does *The Waves* as a text which moves, as it does, through its many speakers.

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[33] Graham, J. W. "Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style." University of Toronto Quarterly 39, no. 3 (1970): 193-95.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Chun, Maureen. "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of The Waves." *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53-56.
[37] Hild, Allison. "Community/Communication in Woolf's 'The Waves': The Language of Motion." The Journal of Narrative Technique, vol. 24, no. 1, (1994): 69-89.

Accompanying this contrast between the internal and the verbalized is that between individuation and amalgamation. The denotation, "said," followed by a character's name, delineates each character's own moments, separating one voice from another. For instance, "said Rhoda" is different from "said Louis," and each impression, or series of many impressions, is given an owner amongst the text's many protagonists. Demarcation of this nature takes place throughout the text, which shuffles between several voices, each creating "worlds that proliferate and interpenetrate."[38] At the same time, this format encourages a more communally-sourced and collectivized sense of understanding. While, as shown, characters' observations are separated by names, readers nonetheless receive an amalgamated perspective of setting, which is derived not from any individual character alone, but from the synthesis of different observations proffered by each character. Characters' perceptions must come together to allow for a more large-scale understanding of their surroundings and the events which take place over the course of the novel. *The Waves* has a symphonic structure, with components that come together narratively as musical instruments do, to produce its whole. Woolf writes: "Each played his own tune, fiddle […] whatever the instrument might be."[39]

To this end, different characters' observations interact[40] with each other. An example of this is as follows:

> "'The grey-shelled snail draws across the path and flattens the blade behind him,' said Rhoda,
> 'And burning lights from the window panes flash in and out on the grasses,' said Louis."[41]

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[38] Richardson, Robert O. "Point of View in Virginia Woolf's The Waves." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 14, no. 4 (1973): 692.
[39] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 184.
[40] Miko, Stephen J. "Reflections on The Waves: Virginia Woolf at the Limits of her Art." Criticism 30 (1998): 66.
[41] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 5.

This reads both as individuated observation, and a form of unconventional dialogue. The conjunction, "And," which begins Louis' statement links his line to Rhoda's before it. These interlinked clauses suggest a continuity between their observations. Each completes the other's view, despite the fact that the sentences are supposedly individuated by the fact that they were spoken by different characters.

Other times, the voices' come together to offer a fuller sensory impression:

> "'I see a ring,' said Bernard […]
> 'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, […]
> 'I hear a sound,' said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp; […]'
> 'I see a globe,' said Neville […]
> 'I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny […]
> 'I hear something stamping,' said Louis." [42]

In this progression, readers view and experience the sunrise by proxy of the characters' perceptions. Notably, though most characters "see," evoking visual descriptions, Louis and Rhoda "hear." Readers are, quite literally, given a fuller and more picture of the material world by virtue of the polyphonic structure. The fact that each character contributes, in this case explicitly, a different descriptive dimension, furthers the argument that there is a certain sense of collectivity to be read from the novel, despite the individuation of the characters. Additionally, as Harker describes, "by starting with sensory experience, rather than biographical details, Woolf presents "characters" that are initially virtually indistinguishable."[43] The sensory nature of these descriptions also anonymizes the narrators, making the issue of individuation versus collectivity yet more perplexing.

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[42] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933., 5.
[43] Harker, James. "Misperceiving Virginia Woolf." Journal of Modern Literature 34, no. 2 (2011): 16.

The anonymizing and character-blending effects of this series of sensory perceptions falls in line with Bernard's initial view of himself and his friends as "edged with mist," each person an "unsubstantial territory" coming together as one whole. "We melt into each other with phrases," he says. Though he is individuated from them by virtue of his thoughts being formalistically separate from theirs, he insists that "phrases" are a passageway between them, and a glue which binds them. Language, as represented by "phrases," is the way experience and personhood are shared between many. Bernard's initial outlook on life suggests that collectivity can be achieved through language. This is in line with the amalgamated organization of the text, whose shape allows for descriptions to melt into one another, and for characters' impressions to be melded together by virtue of "phrases." It can be surmised, then, that the individuation and collectivity of the text exist simultaneously through language.

The characters' descriptions of the sunrise follow in the vein of the text's opening segment, which is a naturalistic account of the sun rising over the sea. The structure of *The Waves* can thus be seen as follows: interspersed soliloquy against a larger naturalistic backdrop. The conceptual similarity between the descriptions in the overarching narration, and the human narrative, is obvious. Bernard's "ring," and "hoop of light" corresponds to the "*arc of fire*," Jinny's "tassel […] twisted with gold threads" to the "*sea blazed gold,"* and Rhoda's onomatopoeic "cheep-chirp" to the bird that "*chirped high up.*"[44] Another layer, then, is embedded in the individual-collective dichotomy: the all-encompassing materiality of the world around the characters. The repetition of certain motifs between the human discourse of the text and the eco-poetic plane of the natural world implies a necessary existential connection between

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[44] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 3-5.

these features, not only within Woolf's world, but in our own. Mental phenomena are therefore cast as things that exist within the material world, rather than external to and independent of it. This depersonalizes[45] the voices, again casting doubt upon the possibility of individuation.

The ecological segments of the text are narrated in third person omniscient, which gives them more stable footing than the characters' ever-mingling voices. The italicized perspectives of the natural world are externally, rather than internally narrated; this gives readers the impression that these are the most "objective" part of the novel, as opposed to the polyphonically-structured narration proffered by multiple internal first-person narrators. This is because, to the reader, external omniscient narration comes across as more authoritative. This overlooking naturalistic and post-human description also opens and closes the text; this structure further emphasizes its relative objectivity, as it suggests that the ecological forms the text's overall framing reality. The affective realities of her characters are thus shown to be swallowed by the circumambient material forces of the world and universe. This interpretation is strengthened by the granular parallels between the framing narrative, and the individualized narratives voiced through the characters, which first appears with the text's opening sunrise, but repeats throughout. The opening sunrise has a causal effect on the internal narrators' observations and impressions, as shown earlier by the similarity in imagery between the ecological segment, and the words of the characters. The internal narrators often belatedly report the natural events depicted by the external narrator, implying that the human perspective is epistemologically reliant on this larger ecological framework.

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[45] Chun, Maureen. "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of The Waves." *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53-56.

In this vein, Bernard himself, toward the end of the text, begins to merge with the overarching voice; he states, "The stars draw back and are extinguished, the bars deepen themselves between the waves." [46]This sentence carries the same tonal register as the "objective" voice which has described the sea consistently throughout the text. He continues that "And in me too the wave rises." In this moment, a micro-macro analogy is explicitly made between the sea and the individual person. Here, as Chun writes, "all aspects of life are essentially physical phenomena in the world of sounds and things, words, and waves."[47] This conclusion follows logically from *To the Lighthouse,* where these concerns manifest themselves similarly in the entropic power of nature that surrounds the human narration of the text, as the sea beats at the rocks surrounding the structure. *The Waves* ends on this note: "The waves broke on the shore."[48] Its conclusion leads readers back to the reality of humanity's smallness in the face of the world around it, as represented so often in Woolf's fiction through the motif of the sea.

A purely physicalist reading lends itself naturally to this nihilist take on the text. As Bernard dies, Chun notes that "the elements of language are returned to sensation and thus reinvested in the material world."[49] The human drama, ultimately miniscule and subsumed by physical forces, rises and falls undetected, as waves do in open ocean. Late in the text, Bernard says: "It is not age; it is that a drop has fallen; another drop. Time has given the arrangement another shake. Out we creep from the arch of the currant leaves, out into a wider world."[50] Age is

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[46] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 214.
[47] Chun, Maureen. "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of The Waves." *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53-56.
[48] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 214.
[49] Chun, Maureen. "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of The Waves." *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53-56.
[50] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 195.

a means by which time is quantified in accordance with the human body. In this moment, Woolf removes "age," replaces it with the motion of falling droplets, in order to contextualize time as a feature of the natural and physical, rather than human world of assigned meanings. Furthermore, the word "arrangement" implies a certain external organization, an order and balance outside of human control. Lastly, the motif of currant leaves returns, familiar from the friends' childhood; the notion that they are exiting the "currant leaves" into a "wider world," signifies the motion between the small experiential scale, and the much larger naturalistic one. This reading is consistent with Mrs. Ramsay's fatalistic outlook in *To the Lighthouse*, which yields to the universe and its entropic forces.

However, there is reason to believe something more complex is attempted through the dichotomy between the human and the natural in *The Waves.* The text asserts a naturalist and post-humanist framework of reality, but also problematizes it. The perspectives of the various internal narrators do have some power on the overarching depictions of natural phenomena, despite humanity's smallness in the face of nature. Simultaneously, and seemingly paradoxically, she suggests that the human perspective is miniscule and all-encompassing at the same time. Bernard continues: "Thus in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of day across the sky."[51] The juxtaposition between the domestic setting, the "drawing room" and the more cosmological image of the "march of day across the sky," signifies the coexistence between the human perspective and the movement of the universe, of time and nature. Though human life continually and necessarily "adjusts itself" to the larger forces at play, it cannot be swallowed entirely.

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[51] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 48.

Structurally, the text maintains the importance of human perception. Aside from the text's framing ecological narrative, all elements of description take place, explicitly, within the realm of observation and perception. All things are "said"[52] by somebody, mediated through a human observer. Most things are told to readers by virtue of an internal narrator's subjective experience of it, observed and noted in the first-person.

Even the more macroscopic and externally narrated segments of the novel, which are separated from the rest of the text through italics, are never entirely devoid of humanity. Though they provide an overview, and lend themselves to some large philosophical assertions about the place of the person, these moments do not detract from the granular urgency of characters' expressions and their individual moments of thought and observation. Sometimes, they even act to further the human action of the text. This is true of the sunrise, which is compared to something lifted by a woman's arm[53], the waves, which are like "turbaned warriors."[54]These forces of nature are personified and compared to human bodies. This use of metaphor implies that nature, too, must be viewed through a human, anthropomorphic lens. As a result, the text's naturalist and post-human imagery must coexist with an acknowledgement of the importance of human experience. Nature, as we know and understand it, is only available to us through our senses. Certainly, any written account of nature relies heavily on human sensory perception, including *The Waves*. Even as the natural world seems to engulf us entirely, we are in the act of observing it, feeling it. In our observation, we alter and distort the world. Any account of the world relies upon this kind of apperception: it makes perfect sense that the sunrise is compared to

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[52] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 24.
[53] Ibid, 4.
[54] Ibid, 56.

an arm, and the waves to an army. In this vein, *The Waves* blends pragmatism with a deep idealism; its reverence for the natural world is accompanied by the realization that even those forces greater than us are only accessible through our flawed and subjective human impressions.

The moment of Percival's death is an example which brings closest together Woolf's naturalistic and anthropocentric impulses; the waves' rising and falling are compared to "a great beast stamping,"[55] just as readers learn that he was trampled to death under his horse. This ending to his arc also implies the collapse of empire. His character is "clearly allied with imperial Great Britain,"[56] his journey to India a symbol of British imperialism. His significance, as a stand-in for a greater nationalistic idea, can also be inferred from the fact that *The Waves* was published in 1931, which was "a time when Great Britain's glorious imperial identity seemed to be slipping away."[57] Despite his prior characterization as a strong and masculine figure, Percival has an embarrassing end, an undignified one. Percival's death minimizes him, drawing us back to the unforgiving natural world, signified also by his death underneath an animal; this serves as a reminder of how human lives are easily subsumed by nature. At its hands, he dies a fool's death, and with him dies what that he represents. Here, the human being and what he stands for, in this case a national identity, is trampled, minimized, and rendered insignificant in the grander scheme.

Of course, the political symbolism associated with Percival is difficult to read; in a text so abstract, moments of grounded historical engagement are jarring and sudden. Given that the rest of the novel deals in broader strokes with more universalized philosophical concerns, it is

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[55] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 106.
[56] Purifoy, Christie. "Melancholic Patriotism and "The Waves"." *Twentieth Century Literature* 56, no. 1 (2010): 25.
[57] Ibid.

surprising that British imperialism should take such a strong hold of the narrative through Percival. Still, it is important to note this moment of social engagement, as it adds to our reading of the text as an attempt to contextualize the physical, as well as the political, world through the human psyche; this is why reality itself still seems altered by his death, both in the perspectives of his old classmates and in the overview-voice of the novel. Woolf writes, "The waves were steeped a deep-blue but for a pattern of diamond-pointed lights on their backs which rippled as the backs of great horses ripple as they move […] the thud of a great beast stamping."[58] In this sequence, the waves become proxies for the horse's stomps, which killed Percival. In an earlier segment, this is also foreshadowed through the waves: "They fell with the concussion of horse's hooves on the turf."[59] Through this zoomorphic depiction of the waves, Woolf forms a visual, auditory and kinesthetic parallel between this naturalistic scene, and the scene of Percival's death. This parallelism blurs the lines between the external narration and reality lived by the friends, suggesting that even the more "objective" perspective of the novel is not immune to the influence of its characters' psychic states and experiential realities. Moreover, Woolf points toward the importance of social and political realities, which also affect our relationship with the world around us.

Woolf thus asserts the primacy of human observation and experience through these choices, which either depict the world through anthropomorphic terms, or change the natural world in accordance with the psychological states of the text's internal narrators. In *The Waves,* naturalism and post-humanism blends with a more idealistic and solipsistic outlook, demonstrating that human perception is a mediator between ourselves and the world, which has

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[58] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 106.
[59] Ibid, 76.

the power to alter reality as we know it. The death is an example of this, as ripples of this event are felt by each character, and by the text's depiction of the natural world. The text's character-narrators' individual reactions to the death also evoke images that blur lines between the natural and the human. "'Summer passes, and then winter,' said Susan,"[60] whose reference to seasons suggest the cyclicality of life. This image also ties this cyclicality back to humans, as the names of seasons are human-constructed means to make sense of nature's regular cycles. Bernard says: "my son is born, Percival is dead,"[61] tying the death to, again, a wave-like cycle of life; this, too, is self-referential and anthropocentric. As Susan measures time by seasonal changes, Bernard does by an even more explicitly human metric, the birth of a child. Neville, who is the first to report the death, states that "the lights of the world have gone out."[62] Here, the phrase, "lights gone out" takes on multiple meanings. First, and most obviously, it connotes death. Additionally, the words "lights gone out" are used conversationally in reference to artificial light, rather than natural light. The wording of his emotional reaction can also be linked to the human, not solely the natural and external.

Rhoda's contemplation of Percival's death is of particular interest to this essay's analysis. Neville says: "She looks far away over our heads, beyond India."[63] Rhoda's thoughts have, throughout the text, been more symbolic and abstracted than her peers'. She is "beyond India" in a way that the others are not, thinking of Percival in a more symbolic sense. She has always expressed herself in coded, figurative language, which applies also in her reaction to this death: "What, then can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf

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[60] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 121.
[61] Ibid, 108.
[62] Ibid, 106.
[63] Ibid, 98.

into my body safely? […] I will go to Oxford Street and buy stockings for a party. I will do the usual things under a lightning flash […] I am alone in a hostile world."[64] Rhoda draws attention to the existential instability that Percival's death causes. Her questioning statements appeal to a tactile way of knowing physical objects: a "brick," a "stone." These, in addition to being representative of physicality in general, have significant shared properties. They are both building-blocks, simple compounds which, when put together, can form large man-made structures. They are also heavy objects, which could weigh things down. Rhoda's inability to interact with these objects stands symbolically for a loss of touch with even the foundational components of human design, but also implies her unembodied weightlessness. She has become flotsam, detached from her own physicality, "across a gulf" from her own body. Her psychological state, at this moment, is detached from physical form. Similarly, she is "alone in a hostile world," distinguishing her internality from all that is around it. Rhoda's isolation conveys a solipsistic notion of subjectivity, which separates her from all else.

Still, she is geographically positioned in Oxford Street, a dense and metropolitan area, and participating in the mundanities of social existence. Surrounded by people, she "will buy stockings for a party."[65] The juxtaposition between this instance of normal social behaviour (preparing for a party) and the reality of Rhoda's psychological isolation draws attention to the gap between internality and external appearances, once again reemphasising a solipsistic view of the individual mind. She will "do the usual things under a lightning flash."[66] This statement sets the domestic against the naturalistic, which has a similar thematic effect as the "drawing room"

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[64] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933, 112-113
[65] Ibid, 113.
[66] Ibid.

set against the sky. This contrast reflects the quotidian facets of human life which preoccupy us, despite the ongoing movements of the larger natural world. The lightning flash is a naturalistic image linked to Percival's death; it is sudden, immediate, and inevitable. Rhoda's perspective, and her movements, are evidence that human life *also* carries on, even as the cycle of life takes its victims and as natural forces rage. The "usual things" are taking place "under" the flash of lightning; the fact that nature is above humanity, as a larger and more authoritative force, does not detract from the continuation of human activity. There is, in this instance, a sense of disjunction between the realities of the natural world, and the living reality that we experience and take part in.

Despite the fact that nature precedes and outlasts all our human affairs, Woolf expends tremendous effort to draw attention to the affective experiences of her characters, and, by extension, the experience of human life in general. After all, the subtitle which Woolf had earlier conceived for this book was "The Life of Anybody,"[67] which implies that her concern was not limited in scope to a certain cast of characters, but a more broad and philosophical examination of life and experience. This "life," which is her primary concern, and indeed what she believed to be the primary concern of the modern novel,[68] is one set against a backdrop of the turning earth, and the waves which beat against the shore regardless of the cyclical motions of human life and death. *The Waves* struggles with the question of what it means to be human, and to exist in the liminal space between internal, conscious reality, and the inescapable physicality of the world. It is tempting to claim that the text, as a whole, relegates all psychological experience to the

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[67] Harker, James. "Misperceiving Virginia Woolf." Journal of Modern Literature 34, no. 2 (2011): 17.

[68] McNeille, Andrew, Ed. Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.)

physical world, given the recurrence of the wave motif, and the life and death cycle which governs its characters' lives, as it does all life. Rather, *The Waves* suggests that the forces of nature and the power of the human gaze are bound to one another. Woolf affirms both the subjectivity of human existence and the presence of the external and seemingly all-encompassing natural world, suggesting that neither one subsumes the other completely. They exist, instead, in dynamic tension and perpetual flux, each one altering the other.

There is a reason that "the usual things" can carry on despite the figuratively and perhaps literally thunderous sky, that Susan notes that the seasons will continue to change despite Percival's death, and that Bernard's child will still be born into this changing ecological landscape. This reason is what Woolf refers to as "life,"[69] and what we may call 'subjective experience; the smallness of our being does not detract from the potency of human feeling and the vastness of our internalities, even within our limited scopes. The ocean is a naturalist image, but also a metaphor for a "cyclical model of subjectivity."[70] The waves break on the shore again and again. This, however, does not detract from the drama of their rising and falling; the experience of human life is not diminished by their smallness in a grander cosmological scale.

As stated earlier, the novel is half-play, dealing in soliloquy. It is also part poem, its structure corresponding with this ebb-and-flow, rise-and-fall motion, guiding both the vast natural landscape and the individual life. Through the soliloquies, and the overarching omniscient voice, Woolf constructs a world of observed phenomena, wherein the bounds between private and collective are blurred, and the individuation of the characters manages to

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[69] McNeille, Andrew, Ed. Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.)
[70] Monson, Tamlyn. ""A Trick of The Mind: Alterity, Ontology, and Representation in Virginia Woolf's "The Waves"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50, no. 1 (2004): 173.

coexist with their synthesis. Through this structure, Woolf writes the coexistence and co-dependency between the individual and the collective, as well as the human and the post-human. These contradictory forces govern the human experience. *The Waves* puts nature side-by-side with the perspectives of its human subjects not to diminish the weight of either view of reality, but to show how the internal life of a conscious subject interacts with the world it is situated in. This intersects with Woolf's larger scale commentary on art and language. At the center of the text lies a metafictional discourse in the very nature of perception, understanding and reality. This is largely mediated through the eyes of Bernard, who is the artist-figure amongst his friends. Much of his perspective is centered around the dichotomies which define the text: individuation and unity, the external and the self. Art is the missing piece of the puzzle, by which Woolf is able to address these contradictory aspects of being.

Bernard, as the persistently unifying voice of the novel, imagines that he and his friends are connected: "I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am — Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs."[71] This, to him, is an effect of language. He says that his "words at once make smoke rings," encircling others. As a child, he views words and phrases as a means by which to discredit "separation," and to show that the "wall" between the self and others does not truly exist. The same can be said of literature, which is a worded art form, and one to which he refers constantly. Literature, under this framework, is similarly assimilating. This representation of language, however, envisions human verbal communication through smoke, which is an image usually associated with obfuscation and a lack of clarity. Smoke normally is what obstructs the view, what makes a

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[71] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 199.

situation murky and difficult to read. Yet, Bernard has reframed it as something unifying, which brings together and assimilates: it "circles him [the old man] and brings him to contact."[72] Through this image, she implies the dual-nature of verbal communication, showing that the way it functions is mysterious and unknowable, as smoke is, even as it brings people into unity. It follows then, that Bernard's confused identity, which makes him unable to know who he is, is linked to his proclivity for "phrases," which are such shadowy, uncertain things.

Bernard's impulse to write things down, to use words continually to document and categorize people and events, is thus a difficult and ultimately vain task. As a young boy, he ambitiously claims that his "book will certainly run to many volumes, embracing every known variety of men and women."[73] His passion for the written word is obsessive, and is a substitute for intimacy. For instance, his book is what will be "embracing" his subjects of study, rather than him. The mechanisms of his connections to others are all linked to language, rather than real interaction. Beyond phrases, he constructs stories, and leads much of his young life on the basis of these, being "eternally engaged of finding some perfect phrase that fits this very moment exactly."[74] The continuousness of Bernard's pursuit is symbolic of human language and its endeavour to assign meaningful signifiers to moments and experiences. Verbal communication is not unlike what is described in this sequence, a continuous and active attempt to assign a phrase to a feeling.

Woolf begins to cast doubt on the efficiency of this process as Bernard grows older, shedding his childish idealism and realizing the insufficiency of language to properly and

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[72] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 47.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

entirely represent experiences. He admits: "I shall never succeed, even in talk, at making the perfect phrase."[75] The slow decline in Bernard's confidence in phrases poses a challenge to language, and more broadly, to his notions of unity. Phrases, as what once allowed for him to bind himself to others, and to assimilate others into his "book," his internal world. The failure of language and the impossibility of finding the "perfect phrase" implies that all words are ultimately insufficient in communicating the full extent of experience. This is true of all things which require words, including description, conversation, and on, and on.

At the end of the novel, Bernard changes his mind on the issue of phrases:

> "How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases which come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life […] I begin to long for some little language which lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement."[76]

His desire for this "little language," built of imperfect and inarticulate wording, discards conventions of language and art, in exchange for simpler realities built of compounds corresponding to the realities of life. Toward the end, Woolf argues that we require the small sounds, the quiet signs of humanity, because perfect representation cannot possibly exist. "Mrs. Woolf does not believe that life or spirit or reality are made up of a form of fiction which has its plot, […] so that the elements of plot are neatly tied in bowstrings at the end. She believes that life is very far from being like this," writes Bevis.[77] In Woolf's words, this suggests that in life there is "nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor."[78] As Bernard says, "none" of our stories (of "love," "childhood," "school," marriage," "death,") are real.

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[75] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 47.
[76] Ibid, 171.
[77] Bevis, Dorothy. "The Waves: A Fusion of Symbol, Style and Thought in Virginia Woolf." *Twentieth Century Literature* 2, no. 1 (1956): 6.
[78] Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. London: Vintage, 1933. 213.

Woolf, in a prolonged moment of irony, exposes the failure of language, and of storytelling, through language. Bernard's contemplations are metatextual; each of the things he discards in his disavowal of untrue stories is present in the novel, which tells of childhood, school, love, marriage and death. More broadly, these themes are present in most stories, because they are the themes most present in life. What does it mean then, for *The Waves* to carry within it everything that it so explicitly rejects?

The answer to this question is bound to our discussion of contradiction and coexistence in the text. *The Waves* is a book of simultaneity; its soliloquies are written in pure present,[79] a continual now. It puts the temporary human in contrast against everlasting nature, while maintaining the expansiveness of subjective reality. It writes nature as powerful and inevitable, a force which persists and subsumes, while showing that it is not immune to the follies of human perception. Everything is contained within nature, and yet nature itself is also contained within the physically small but psychically grand scope of our human perspective. A similar tension is to be found in this discourse of art, whereby the insufficiency of language does not preclude Woolf's ambitious attempt to convey 'life' through its means. Miko rightly claims that the book attempts to construct "an honest exploration of an unresolvable condition."[80]

The Waves is such a confusing and difficult text, owing to its boldness in confronting the unresolvable. In using a structure so detached from conventions of linearity, Woolf is choosing to prioritize the text's emotive logic over narrative coherence. Whether this is successful or not, to an extent, depends on the reader. As I stated, *The Waves* is an impressionistic text; whether it

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[79] Graham, J. W. "Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style." University of Toronto Quarterly 39, no. 3 (1970): 193-95.
[80] Miko, Stephen J. "Reflections on The Waves: Virginia Woolf at the Limits of her Art." Criticism 30 (1998): 66.86.

achieves its end is reliant upon the particular impressions it leaves behind, which varies from person to person.

The Waves is mosaic-like in its approach to the world, which is both individuated and collective. It speaks in an impressionistic register, which relies on "intermedial exchange,"[81] as well as images, fleeting observations. The text concerns itself with "moments of being,"[82] in their purest form. The text inherits symbolically from *Lighthouse*. Lily Briscoe's painting conveys a sense of completion; despite its incomprehensibility to everybody but the artist herself, the piece is perhaps the only complete whole in the novel's portrayal of that incomplete family. This later, more experimental novel bears parallels to Briscoe's painting. It is a representation of life which speaks through feeling. It has shapes and forms, but no definite and concrete image, no unified and singular story. The book, in other words, is a Woolfian response to Bernard's internal conflict, and more broadly to the fact of language's failure in capturing the complexities and impossibilities of experience. *The Waves*, in its strange structure, is able to accommodate these perplexing facets of our human lives.

In her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf imagines a fiction which would "tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure."[83] The new form of novel she creates with *The Waves* is this. As Lily Briscoe sets down her brush, having created something which captured, to the best of her capacities, "life" itself, she thinks: "I have had my vision."[84] *The*

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[81] Clements, Elicia. "Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf's "The Waves"." *Narrative* 13, no. 2 (2005): 173.
[82] Utell, Janine. "Meals and Mourning in Woolf's "The Waves"."*College Literature* 35, no.2(2008): 2.
[83] Woolf, Virginia. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. London: Hogarth Press.
[84] Woolf, Virginia. *To The Lighthouse.* (London: Penguin Classics, 1927).

Waves is a vision too, but it is Virginia Woolf's own. Was it one that she succeeded in sharing? That depends on who you ask.

TIME, LOVE AND LOSS IN *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

The Sound and the Fury follows the narrative of the Compson family, and does so through many pairs of eyes. The first three parts of the novel each follow one of the brothers, Benjy, Quentin and Jason. These are written in a first-person stream-of-consciousness style. The last part is written, on the other hand, in third person; it reflects the perspective of Dilsey, the servant who has witnessed the implosion of this family. The interlaced and multi-perspective, "telescopic"[85] structure of the novel lends itself to non-linearity, through repetition, prolepsis and analepsis. This works in conjunction with the cacophony of voices which we are exposed to within the stream-of-consciousness moments. However, there is a certain emotive logic to the text. As Weinstein writes, Faulkner "starts out dark, ends luminous."[86] Unlike Woolf, Faulkner's concerns are violent, explosive. Both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* concerned themselves with family, life, and death; yet, Woolf does this through smooth motions; her books ebb and flow, in communion with nature and time. Faulkner's text is more disjunctive, sudden, and distortive. It reflects upon life in acknowledgement of violence, especially in the backward-facing fictional landscape of a bygone American South. The text examines one shared, albeit differently experienced, family life. Benjy, Quentin and Jason, are from the same tree. Still, each has a different view of reality.

This is most obvious in the first part, seen through the eyes of Benjy, who is intellectually challenged. The segment of the book, written in first person, attempts to be stylistically representative of his internal reality. Interestingly, Benjy's thoughts begin largely as a mixture of

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[85] Weinstein, Arnold L. *Recovering your story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2006. 313.
[86] Ibid.

his observations, which are basic and devoid of normal logic and social ability, and transcribed dialogue. These are punctuated by moments of memory, mostly in italics. Here, Faulkner implies a divide between the external and internal. Benjy's inner life is temporally distinct from his physical observation, and his motion. This is linked to the notion of involuntary memory, as these recollections are often brought about by a symbol or object. ""You snagged on that nail again. Can't you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail" *Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through*."[87] The garden fence is what first draws Benjy's mind to Caddy. In addition to the temporal distance between these events, there is also a somewhat philosophical difference between the two moments that Faulkner has drawn together. While Luster says, in no uncertain terms, that Benjy can "never" not get caught in the fence, Benjy remembers a time of being "uncaught," through her presence. The past, in this instance, seems a different reality entirely, with a different set of possibilities; these realities, however, are linked through the image of the fence, and the mind of Benjy, which relates these different realities with his memory.

The use of involuntary memory defines much of Benjy's experience, as Faulkner has written it. There is a lack of agency associated with it, a certain passivity. Just as he is "caught" in the nail, he is stuck in his mind and body. These memories are very vivid in describing scenes and events. Again, the fact that they are italicized becomes important, as it reflects that they are internal. This, in comparison to the reality of Benjy's muteness further suggests his entrapment arising from his psychological predicament; there is a large difference between his outward reality and internal reality. His inability to form words does not preclude him from these

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[87] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 4.

episodes of memory, triggered through sensory stimuli, or particular interactions. Rather, he is unable to express what thoughts he has; his subjective experience is "hopelessly hidden,"[88] writes Cecil. Benjy is "trying to say and trying."[89] This further draws attention to his predicament, in that it shows that there is vain desire to communicate. This dichotomy, then, between what is happening internally, and what can be externally expressed, is further exemplified by the difference between our perception of Benjy after having read his perspective, and that after we have read how he is described in Dilsey's segment. There, his eyes are described as "clear," and his mouth is hanging open.[90] As noted by Cecil, this visual description of Benjy serves to remind us of his physical state, as it looks to anybody without this access to his mind.

The sense of helplessness that Cecil noted is exacerbated in descriptions of actions. For instance, in the moment that Luster removes the flowers: "I tried to pick up the flowers. Luster picked them up, and they went away. I began to cry."[91] Again, the idea of "trying" is important; this implies the attempt, and the same sense of helplessness shown through the difference between his internal and external realities. Likewise, the flowers "went away," as Luster takes them, and "came back" when they are returned. Later, the fire "went away," and so did Dilsey and the cushion. This shows his passivity in relation to the world around him, which is out of his control to the extent that his perceptions of it barely acknowledge human activity and volition,

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[88] Cecil, L. Moffitt. "A Rhetoric for Benjy." The Southern Literary Journal 3, no. 1 (1970): 32-46.
[89] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 53.
[90] Ibid, 274.
[91] Ibid, 55.

suggesting rather that things simply move, as though on their own accord, and despite his ever-failing efforts.

While this is happening, he is antagonized by Luster: ""Beller." Luster said "Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy," he whispered. "Beller now. Caddy."[92] In this instance Luster's whispers reference Caddy, in an attempt to purposefully trigger a reaction. This further implies how difficult communication is with Benjy, as it shows that the only way to get to him is through eliciting obvious emotional reactions. As a result, things are constantly happening to him, done to him. Dilsey later asks Luster: "What you done to him now,"[93] when Benjy is crying. His crying is also suggested, by this, to be externally-imposed by Luster. In a sense, he reads as a perpetual victim to surrounding and circumstance.

This ties in to the fact that Benjy also has a profound inability to make sense of things beyond very literal sensory perception. For instance, the book begins: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting."[94] This depiction of a golf game is rendered through its components, rather than its social significance. Benjy's overall inability to articulate in more composite terms also traps him in certain particulars. Without the power of interpretation, he is encased in a very bare version of reality. Through phrasing and scene-setting, readers are shown, from the instant they begin the book, how Benjy's mind functions, and why he is in this permanent state of "trying." This sets the scene for the rest of the segment; rather than clear easy-to-follow descriptors, the reader must put pieces together, and make up for, in some ways, Benjy's lacking vocabulary. Through this, Faulkner goes further than to explain to

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 55.
[94] Ibid, 3.

readers what Benjy's condition is. He attempts to emulate, through stylistic choices, that experience. Here, a narrativistic choice is shown to share, in lieu of a simple list of facts, an emotive experience.

Hence, it is clear that the structure and style of *The Sound and the Fury* is a vessel for this kind of subjective knowledge. At a granular level, this is exemplified by Benjy's part, in which language is bent toward emulating his neurodivergence, and his helplessness. Lastly, these facets of his experience are underscored with trauma. Benjy's castration, which readers are made aware of at the end of his part, elucidates many subtle symbols throughout his section. Even the starting lines, which mention "hitting" and describe golf balls being swept off the ground, read differently given the fact of his mutilation. This also reflects the helplessness of his character, as another thing which has been done to him and without his choice. Lastly, it invalidates him in a different way. His inability to procreate as a result has a temporal effect on not only him, but the family; the possibility of future is cut off at his loins. This bears conceptual similarity to Quentin's suicide, which also snaps off a branch of the family tree by eliminating the possibility of propagation. The trauma is not solely physical and psychological, but familial, and it relates heavily to notions of future time. This is linked to Benjy's hyper-fixation on the past, as expressed through the frequent temporal switching, and the moments of involuntary memory.

It indeed seems that he is unable to distinguish not only between actions, words, and concepts, but also between past and present. "The problem is to discover by what means the story is suddenly shifted from Benjy and Luster on April 7, 1928, to Benjy and Caddy in the Christmas season of some other year, and just as suddenly shifted again to Benjy, Versh, and

Mother,"[95] writes Bowling. Much of his segment is backward-looking, and indeed, prolepsis and analepsis are the ways by which his story is communicated. Small hints lead to larger diversions, confusing the timelines of the story. The frequent back-and-forth between current-day observations, and triggered bouts of memory, also furnishes readers' understanding of Benjy's lived reality; his predicament leaves him vulnerable physically and mentally, as well as temporally. This strange kind of vulnerability, which has to do with his place in time, renders him unable to remain firmly planted in the present. As shown through his memories, recollections of the past, as well as of trauma, are constantly tugging him into different times, different parts of his life.

This temporal vulnerability is shared with Quentin, whose chapter begins as such: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains I was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch."[96] The idea of being "in time again" is particularly significant because it characterizes time in a few different ways. Firstly, it shows time to be non-compulsory; if one can be "in" time, they can surely also be outside of it. The fact that he is in it "again," as here Faulkner uses the language of repetition, implies that Quentin had left time for some period, or regularly is outside of it. Also, this sentence characterizes time as something substantive, that can physically envelop or encase somebody. These characterizations shed light on Faulkner's sense of literary time, as it relates to the Compsons.

Being in the present moment, or aware of the present moment, is the state of being "in time." Yet, Quentin begins outside of time, so to speak. This implies that he, rather than in the

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[95] Bowling, Lawrence Edward. "Faulkner: Technique of "The Sound and the Fury"." *The Kenyon Review* 10, no. 4 (1948): 552-66.

[96] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 76.

present, is trapped in some past, or otherwise temporally ambiguous space. This links Quentin's narrative to Benjy's, and is a basis of similarity between them; they share this experience of being outside of present time, and unable to hold on to the reality surrounding them. In Quentin's case, it is a physical reminder of time's passage that returns him to the state of being "in time."

Additionally, the watch is described as an auditory presence: it is heard. Being "in time" therefore relies on external signals like the ticking of a clock, or shadows on a wall. This implies that being "outside" of time is a more natural state, and that awareness of linear time is more unnatural. This very particular portrayal of time makes explicit what we know intuitively to be real; time, as experienced through human eyes, is not constant awareness of linear chronology. Rather it is experience "outside of time," punctuated by moments of awareness. The watch is one of many symbols relating to this experience of time. Quentin's father gives him the watch, saying: "I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you may forget it now and then."[97] This sentence subverts our understanding of the watch's function, and by extension, the nature of our relationship with time. Here, the watch is used to facilitate a forgetting of time, rather than the observance of it. Again, this places emphasis on being outside of time, as Benjy and Quentin are.

How Faulkner communicates through these symbols and images, relating to timekeeping devices and the passage of time, provides a framework by which to examine the temporal effects of the stream-of-conscious narration. "You can be oblivious to the sound [of a watch or clock] for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long

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[97] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 76.

diminishing parade of time you didn't hear,"[98] Quentin would posit shortly after being given the watch. This statement suggests, in line with time's portrayal throughout the novel, that there is no real sustained observance of linear time. Instead, there is a "second of ticking," or multiple, in which we realize it. For both Quentin and the reader, the watch, as an auditory motif, serves as a reminder that time is ticking by. In general, auditory indications of time's passing appear throughout his segment; there are minute noises of the watch ticking, as well as the sounds of chimes and bells. In the specific context of this novel, these sounds bring forth moments of cognizance that force confrontations of the vast and disappearing past, namely the Compson family's experience. These sounds trigger analepsis: "And after a while I had been hearing my watch (..) *Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard harvard.*"[99] The sounds of Quentin's watch interrupt a series of recollections of his life before that moment, and the familial and social tensions that haunt him, particularly relating to his place at Harvard, and his sister. His place at Harvard, and the sacrifices made in order to facilitate it, is a source of strife, pride and great cost. His memory also extends to thoughts about Caddy and his failed society-prescribed duty to protect her. All these tensions are the resounding notes of Quentin's life, and they are realized in these moments in time, these "seconds of ticking," which force a reckoning with past and present.

These moments are inescapable. "The chimes began as I stepped on my shadow (..) *think I would have should have*."[100] The italicized words "*think I would have should have*" actually function as an undertone for all of Quentin's struggles with the past, as he contemplates actions

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[98] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 76..
[99] Ibid, 92.
[100] Ibid, 96.

that already cannot be undone, and the consequences they created for himself and his family. Thus, Faulkner's use of motif gives readers insight into the traumatic nature of memory. This creates a poignant image of his struggles against a past which rises continuously. Chimes, denoting the quarter hour, have a similar power, of eliciting temporal confusion, over Quentin.

Though time is rearranged in *The Sound and the Fury*, the repeated use of auditory cues creates a certain pattern. The sounds of chimes and clocks ticking lend structure to an otherwise introspective and temporally meandering set of perspectives. Despite the messy stream-of-consciousness style which defines these two Compson brothers' chapters, these noises provide some structure and grounding in reality. All the same, it is possible to lose track of a clock's rhythms. Quentin loses track while entering a store to inquire about getting his watch fixed: "about a dozen watches in the window, a dozen different hours and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance that mine had."[101] This conveys a sense of universality and multiplicity in difference. Each watch ticks with its own "assurance," oblivious to the fact that other timepieces operate contradictorily, on different hours. This can be extended to human internality: "I could hear mine (…) even though nobody could see it, even though it could tell nothing if anyone could."[102] Nobody but Quentin could hear the ticking of his watch; one's own experience and perception of their past is truly accessible only to them. Even if "anyone could" see his watch, "it could tell nothing." The truth of an individualized experience cannot be shared. Just as there are multiple watches, each operating independently, each person in a crowd can

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[101]Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 85.
[102] Ibid.

only know their own time, their past, and their history, despite being surrounded by other people and other pasts.

Finally, there is the image of stepping over his own shadow, just as the chimes begin. Quentin's shadow recurs throughout the text; it symbolizes, in a sense, the inescapable. There is a great deal of fatalism in his section. He "stepped on" his shadow; here, shadow and flesh are interposed. The living figure is joined to his shadow. Martin writes that the image of the shadow dominates the section, noting that there is a constant attempt to "elude" or escape it. The shadow is a manifestation of time's passing; it is used to tell time, but it is also used in the specific context of legacy. Quentin's "shadow" is his family's; it is an outline imposed upon him that he cannot escape. Through this symbol, his past and present are again layered atop one another, impossible to separate.

Structurally, this is supported by the sustained use of analepsis and prolepsis, which picks up from Benjy's chapter. The stream-of-consciousness style in this first half of the text swivels constantly between recollection and present experience, throwing each of these perspectives into temporal disarray. Continual references to the past, particularly the moments which bear causal relation to their present state, imply inevitability and fatalism, and also show how these characters cannot outrun their past traumas, and can, as a result, never situate themselves fully in the present. In Benjy's and Quentin's chapters, Faulkner interrogates memory and time through narrative style, which seeks to replicate characters' experiences, as well as through his uses of watches and clocks, and particularly their sounds, to illustrate the tensions between external temporal reality, and the more subjective internal reality that each of these characters inhabit.

Though the use of time poses a "hurdle"[103] to the reader, Martin also suggests that there is a clear unity in the text, stemming from the repetition of certain words and phrases. He points out that Benjy's chapter places emphasis on "fire," and Quentin's on "shadow," two interrelated images. Quentin's chapter adds a different but necessary dimension to Benjy's distortive experience of the past. Faulkner's muddled chronology, which jumps from 1927 in Benjy's section to Quentin's experience preceding his suicide in 1910, mimics the mechanisms of memory and trauma.

This leaves us at April 6th, 1927. The text moves from April 7th in Benjy's chapter, to June 1910 in Quentin's, to April 6th, and finally to April 8th. The two middle sections of the text are automatically analeptic, though to different degrees. While Quentin's is the most temporally confounding, it being set seventeen years in the past, Jason's chapter describes events that also take place before Benjy's section. These chapters are lodged between two consecutive days, April 7th and 8th. They therefore read as extended memories; they read as explanatory, a kind of unearthing of the history hinted at in Benjy's section, and an explanation of what Dilsey witnesses and relays in her chapter. Ironically, despite the fact that temporal confusion is a large part of Faulkner's narrative technique, and it speaks to the nature of memory and trauma which is expressed through the text, *The Sound and the Fury* is still held together by a certain obvious chronology; it follows the lives of one family, and speaks from within this reality, with past events elucidating the reality of the present. Bowling suggested that uncovering the reasons for the novel being structured in this manner will allow for an overall understanding of what Faulkner is attempting to convey. This paper argues that the text is laid out in such a way that

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[103] Martin, Robert A. "The Words of "The Sound and the Fury"." *The Southern Literary Journal* 32, no. 1 (1999): 46-56.

expresses relationship between the Compsons' present state of disarray, its history, and all of its shared memories.

The questions remain: what is this history, and what are these memories? Lastly, why are they so traumatic, and how do these traumas relate to the structural aspects of the novel? The answers lie in the character of Caddy, who "dominates" the text,[104] and what her storyline reveals about each brother, and the family as a whole. "In fact, a main aim of the novel is to allow the reader to piece together information and derive for himself a true picture of Caddy,"[105] argues Baum.

Similarly, as in *To the Lighthouse*, *The Sound and The Fury* has at its center a female figure. The two figures are clearly different; Caddy subverts many of the traits that define Mrs. Ramsay. Yet, they share their position in their respective novels, as the "missing" piece, the empty space where life once was, and a trigger for memory and recollection. Caddy's first appearance is earlier on, in Benjy's memory. Her being sent away is a cause of great distress for him, though he cannot articulate it. His world, in essence, is fissured without her. As mentioned earlier, Luster weaponizes her name against Benjy, suggesting to the reader early on that she *is* a trigger. Likewise, many of Benjy's analeptic recollections begin with some reference to her, and concern her in some way. She is, to an extent, the lone source of kindness in his life, and a replacement mother-figure, who supersedes his biological mother, who is cold and spiteful toward him.

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[104] Baum, Catherine B. ""THE BEAUTIFUL ONE": CADDY COMPSON AS HEROINE OF "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 13, no. 1 (1967): 33-44.
[105] Ibid.

Since Caddy's exile from the family is so central to each of the brothers, the four narratively differentiated sections of the novel each give readers their own clues about this event, and its repercussions on the family structure. Caddy's "sin" opposes the traditional Southern family structure, and consequently her character is what tears the family apart. She also ascribes to a very different set of values to the rest of her family. This is made clear through naming. She chooses her name, Caddy, and to call her brother by the shortened "Benjy." The use of nicknames is scolded by her mother, who insists on them using their full first names, Candace and Benjamin. ""Candace." Mother said. "I told you not to call him that. It was bad enough when your father insisted on calling you by that silly nickname. Nicknames are vulgar. Only common people use them. Benjamin." she said."[106] In this seemingly simple dispute, a dichotomy is revealed between a value system which prioritizes a sense of propriety and an adherence to rigid rules, even in issues so fundamental and intimate such as self-identification. Caddy says: "*Your name is Benjy* […] *do you hear? Benjy."* This issue of naming is another in a string of events which suggest that her role "is that of creator and conveyor of language, and that she "attempts to create language for Benjy."[107]

Caddy is the only discernible source of warmth, and provides rare tenderness in an otherwise brutal life. "Because the Benjy section appears first, and was written first, the portrait Faulkner gives of Caddy is almost completely positive. With Benjy, Caddy is consistently gentle, loving, and teaching,"[108] posits Wagner.

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[106] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 62.
[107] Wagner, Linda W. "Language and Act: Caddy Compson." *The Southern Literary Journal* 14, no. 2 (1982): 49-61.
[108] Ibid.

The interaction with their mother continues:

> ""Benjamin," she said.
> "Take that cushion away, Candace."
> "He'll cry." Caddy said.
> "Take that cushion away, like I told you." Mother said. "He must learn to mind."
> The cushion went away."[109]

Caddy has an understanding of Benjy, in that she knows how he will react to certain events. Here, she also "translates correctly his non-verbal communication into meaningful language for the rest of the family, and for himself."[110] Her positionality as his unofficial translator suggests a closeness and intimacy between them, and a sense of good will. Unlike their mother, Caddy does not take harsh approach to raising Benjy, and tries to keep him happy, to the best of her abilities. Later, Caddy wants to, quite literally, carry him: ""*I can carry him*," Caddy said. "Let me carry him up, Dilsey.""[111] The desire to "carry" is a motherly one, and a symbolic one which falls in line with her other gestures, which carry Benjy in other ways.

Caddy lacks the image-defined view of the family which her mother holds. Caroline Compson's theory is that Benjy is God's punishment for the family's sins, and that he causes them shame through his deficiency: "what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough." Caddy is another reason for her mother's outlook, as the sinful child. She is the girl with the soiled nightclothes, who loses her virginity to Dalton Ames before marriage and becomes pregnant. As mentioned earlier, her values are diametrically opposed to those of the family, barring that of the more skeptical Mr. Compson. She takes a

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[109]Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 64.
[110] Wagner, Linda W. "Language and Act: Caddy Compson." *The Southern Literary Journal* 14, no. 2 (1982): 49-61.
[111] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 62.

more openly contrarian approach to life, which strives to contradict all notions of order imposed by her family name. Her insistence on trying to communicate with Benjy, and to help him, lacks the kind of stubborn convictions that Caroline Compson holds to certain ideals of pride and family name. Caddy is a character who "fights to assert the human bond,"[112] in all aspects of her life. This applies not solely to her relationship with Benjy, but also her outlook on love and her sex with Dalton Ames. Being less concerned with the family legacy, she is able to create solutions, and to view Benjy as a person rather than an artefact of doom, and a burden. As she says, "*I can carry him.*"[113] Consequently, the structure of Benjy's segment, which shifts constantly between past and present, does so due to the pain of her memory. His perspective is defined by her, and her eventual absence in his life is a tragedy which results in him looking ever backward, seeking her lost warmth.

For Quentin, the eldest brother, Caddy is also a vision of love in an otherwise bleak reality. His confused temporality stems ultimately from an internal struggle between the chaos and confusion of their world, and a desire to impose order and meaning onto everything. This is precisely why Caddy's sin is so difficult for him to accept. He tells her: "*we can go away you and Benjy and me and nobody knows us where*."[114] Caddy denies this offer, choosing instead to get married to Herbert out of a rare sense of duty. But this is not duty in the same sense as her mother defines it, as an obligation to uphold artifice and propriety. Rather, she sees it as a selfless duty to Benjy, and Quentin, whose Harvard education cost the pasture. "*On what money*

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[112] Baum, Catherine B. ""THE BEAUTIFUL ONE": CADDY COMPSON AS HEROINE OF "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 13, no. 1 (1967): 33-44.
[113] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 63
[114] Ibid, 124.

your school money they sold the pasture for you so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing."[115] She is concerned about Benjy and Quentin, and is again acting selflessly, in marrying somebody she feels nothing for, in order to ensure her brothers' sacrifices have payoffs. She also hopes that this marriage will "will enable her father to stop worrying about her and to stop drinking."[116]

Quentin's demise is linked to Caddy, and the family. In a very long segment recalling the aftermath of her affair, the reader is exposed to an unfinished suicide attempt, and a conversation they have in which Caddy says, "yes I'll do anything you want me to anything yes."[117] Her willingness, and sense of obligation to Quentin comes through very strongly in his segment of the novel; but this leads to tremendous inner conflict. Caddy's willingness to have sex with Quentin reveals the extreme nature of her self-sacrificing impulse, but also the harrowing extent of both of their turmoil. It also sheds light on the effect that Caddy's actions have on him and his outlook.

Quentin, in this instance, is the innocent one, having never had sex. His sense of fear, and his proclivity to overthinking, precludes him from the kind of emotions necessary for love. He is even described as "incapable of love", having to "hear the word to comprehend it."[118] This is made clear when he asks Caddy whether she loves Dalton. She responds somatically, holding

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[115] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990, 62.
[116] Baum, Catherine B. ""THE BEAUTIFUL ONE": CADDY COMPSON AS HEROINE OF "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 13, no. 1 (1967): 33-44.
[117] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 156.
[118] Baum, Catherine B. ""THE BEAUTIFUL ONE": CADDY COMPSON AS HEROINE OF "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 13, no. 1 (1967): 33-44.

Quentin's hand to her throat. Unable to understand, he still insists: "now say his name […] say it again."[119]

Through Benjy and Quentin, readers learn of Caddy's character through her love, and the beauty of this love, as contrasted against an unfeeling upbringing and empty pride. Similar to Benjy, Quentin's analeptic moments lead him back to Caddy and what she represented. Structurally, their chapters are built around her, and their relationships with her. But, "in addition to its structural significance, Caddy's life also thematically represents love, compassion, pity, and sacrifice in a family which is destroying itself through its lack of these qualities."

What then, of the two final segments, Jason's and then Dilsey's? Without the constancy of flashbacks, and the trauma linked to a love of Caddy, Jason's chapter is easier to follow. Still, it contains its ghosts. The name Quentin returns, but in the form of Caddy's daughter. The name has a dual purpose; firstly, it shows the continued love Caddy has for her brother despite his suicide, and secondly, it is its own kind of haunting. The reader, as well as the family, cannot rid the name "Quentin" from their minds, because it recurs here, in the form of a future generation. Jason is Caddy's opposite; this can be seen though a comparison of their treatments of Benjy. When they are young, he destroys Benjy's dolls, and she threatens to "slit his gizzle." Jason is spiteful and loveless, mercenary and uncaring. He is more aligned with Mrs. Compson, who refuses to allow Caddy back into the family after the birth of the child and the subsequent divorce from Herbert, despite Mr. Compson's desires. The transition between Quentin's section, which reveals his thoughts on the day he kills himself, and Jason's, which, years after, presents a cynical, cold view of reality, establishes that the second half of the novel reflects the aftermath of

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[119] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 164.

the irreparable fracturing experienced by this family. "Once a bitch, always a bitch,"[120] the section begins.

This is in reference to Quentin II, but also presumably to Caddy. Jason's outlook on women, which is generalist and demeaning, immediately undermines Caddy, and dehumanizes her. This sets the tone for the rest of his chapter, where her presence is minimal. The family continues, in a sense, without her. Unlike Benjy, who narrates just a day before Jason, the chapter is largely focused in the present. Additionally, his main concern is money. After Quentin II steals money and runs away, following in the footsteps of her mother, Jason says, "I just want an even chance to get my money back." This outlook on family is cold, and hard. This, in fact, seems to be the tragedy of the novel: that Jason, in some sense, wins, though this victory is small and underwhelming. He remains, where Caddy was exiled from. Cruelty wins out in this case, and in this family. His section is written in the present. He "says" rather than "said." This is a contrast against every other section in the book; he is the only one of the Compson brothers who does not speak in the anterior. This suggests that the reality in which he prevails is the ultimate one, the most to-date.

After Jason comes Dilsey's segment, which provides more of an overview. Unlike the brothers', her part is narrated entirely in the third-person. "The day dawned bleak and chill,"[121] it begins. This follows naturally from Jason's ending; through the setting, Faulkner suggests the loss of warmth in absence of Caddy. Furthermore, the word "dawned" suggests a new beginning, further implying that the family's world changed with her absence, and the absence of what she,

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[120] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text.* New York: Vintage International, 1990. 180.
[121] Ibid, 62.

as a character symbolized, which was love and human connection. Ultimately, then, "the final section of the novel comments on life without Caddy and the love she represents."[122]

The novel closes out in more conventional form, without as many of the ventures into interiority which populated its first half. It does, however, provide a semi-outsider perspective, that of Dilsey, which clarifies the scene. All culminates in the eventual absence of Caddy. As stated earlier, *The Sound and The Fury* is a novel which speaks through a strange, emotive logic, which comes together at the end, when the family's tragedy is complete. At the same time, the chaos is encapsulated and kept within the bounds of the Compson household. It is a cyclical story, which recounts over and over again the same events, which leads to one ultimate conclusion, which is the absence of love and the destruction of family. It is only natural that the novel should end as it began, with Benjy and his vacant eyes.

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[122] Baum, Catherine B. ""THE BEAUTIFUL ONE": CADDY COMPSON AS HEROINE OF "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 13, no. 1 (1967): 33-44.

THE WARZONE: NARRATIVE AND HAUNTING IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

Absalom, Absalom! picks up where Faulkner left off in his *The Sound and the Fury.* If the latter is a battle, the former is the entire warzone. This book, written later but still haunted by Quentin, delves deeper into the already fragmented existence of the Sutpen and Compton families, linking them into a larger landscape of Southern history and to greater moral and ethical disasters. It is, in a sense, an origin story. Likewise, the narrative techniques, though in some sense similar, are used in more extreme and confounding ways to reflect the stories of Sutpen, alongside that of Quentin and of the Compsons in general.

Absalom, Absalom! more ambitiously applies stream-of-consciousness, and the familiar use of analepsis and prolepsis. *The Sound and the Fury* focused very specifically on a generation of the Compson family, which grapples with a long and dark shadow cast over them by their cultural heritage and family values. *Absalom, Absalom!* is an exploration of this shadow; it goes further into the family history, to show readers exactly which ghosts are at play, doing their haunting. This extends the purview of Faulkner's earlier text, and it does so more radically through structure and style, but also through a bold exploration of the horrors of the reality wherein the characters lived. While the fallout of the Compson family was internal in *The Sound and the Fury*, external factors like racism and Civil War undertones which underlie the family's value system and the reality of a particular cultural and historical moment are explored in this later novel. It brings to the fore the cracks in society's foundations, and opens them up. It is a further act of uncovering and unearthing, and Faulkner's narrative choices reflect this grander scale.

Described Hurley as a "metaghost"[123] story, *Absalom, Absalom!* is "a novel about ghosts and haunting, how ghosts are made and how we come to be haunted,"[124] where there are two forms of ghostliness in the novel. The ghostliness is both "an engagement with history through narrative and a form of kinship."[125] Firstly, and most obviously, the text is intertextually haunted by Quentin. Having already written his suicide in The *Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner brings him back in this text, which functions as a prequel, so to speak, of his earlier novel. The recurrence of this character is paired with the existing knowledge that Quentin is dead. This imbues *Absalom, Absalom!* with a sense of fatalism and futility from the very start, as the outcome of its events, just like that of the war, has already been decided.

Ultimately, history, which was already alluded to in *The Sound and the Fury*, and linked to the civil war, is finally laid out in *Absalom, Absalom!.* The engagement with history,[126] as manifest in *Absalom, Absalom!,* centers Quentin. He is the "barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts,"[127] a character existing between the history and his present reality; this makes him the perfect vessel for these ideas. But he does not exist in a vacuum. Faulkner repeatedly merges together characters of the past and present, and draws increasingly complex family webs and linkages between characters.

This is done most notably with Shreve, Quentin, Charles Bon, and Henry. "First, two of them, then four, now two again."[128] Faulkner uses the language of multiplication and division to

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[123] Hurley, Jessica. "Ghostwritten: Kinship and History in "Absalom, Absalom!"" Faulkner Journal 26, no. 2 (2012): 61-79.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Hurley, Jessica. "Ghostwritten: Kinship and History in "Absalom, Absalom!"" Faulkner Journal 26, no. 2 (2012): 61-79.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 7.
[128] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 275.

imply a speculative, abstract fusion between figures of present and those of the past, thereby attaching Shreve and Quentin more explicitly to their historical counterparts. The notion of divisibility also comes into play; they are caught in this repetitive cycle (two, four, two again,) which suggests that the interplay between past and present is volatile and ever shifting. They are seen as divided, then undivided, slipping back and forth between the past and their present day. This, of course, is not real; it is spectral and conjectural, and attempts self-knowledge through storytelling, through these dead figures. He continues, "because now neither of them was there, they were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago."[129]

Shreve and Quentin's talk is an "overpass to love,"[130] which both displaces and locates them through these proxies. Though they are displaced in time, their personalities are located through history, and come out through the force of their obsession with uncovering the past. This has obvious effects on the reader's understanding of their experiences of consciousness, and their thought processes. When Faulkner writes "now two again,"[131] he refers to the compounded characters of "Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry."[132] The compounded names read as kennings, two words stuck together to create a new, conjoined meaning; these compound names inexorably join together past and present, as described earlier. Through Shreve and Quentin's self-insertions, the past is embedded in the present even psychologically. At the same time, this compounded identity becomes something else entirely; "compounded still further […] now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon […] each of both yet neither."[133] A new

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[129] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972, 280.
[130] Ibid, 253.
[131] Ibid, 275.
[132] Ibid, 267.
[133] Ibid, 280.

entity is formed through this compounding of names and personalities, which implicates all parties involved, but is still distinct from each individual it includes.

Though the past and present bleed into one another, Faulkner retains that there remains a sense of absence, as each character is "of both yet neither."[134] Despite the pervasive reach of the past, it remains somewhat nebulous. It is still protracted from the present, though, paradoxically, it still haunts the current time. Both characters, at a certain point, are taken into the historical narrative to the extent that they both attempt to blend themselves into a bygone time; this attempt at assimilation creates something new entirely, something more tied to the liminality between these realities.

This liminality exists between past and present, between the storyteller and the audience. A similar liminal effect is evoked through setting. As Quentin and Shreve talk about the Sutpen family story, we hear about "dead summer twilight – the wisteria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies – attenuated up from Mississippi into this strange room."[135] Here is the presence of the South, now both present and absent, seeping into the dorm room: "The wisteria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies."[136] These images are all recurring from earlier in the text, as well as from *The Sound and the Fury*, where they are first established as images of Mississippi's past. As such, the images are linked to memories, both recent and distant, of the South, an oversaturated landscape that preoccupies Quentin. This is the same South which comes up in the conversations he has with his father. Another repeated motif, of dust, is also relevant: "He could taste the dust […] and feel the dust of that breathless (rather, furnace breathed) Mississippi September night."[137]

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[134] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 280.
[135] Ibid, 141.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid, 290.

Here, the multisensory imagery brings Southern dust of a few months prior to the North; it follows Quentin, appearing his Harvard dorm, and experienced through his present-day senses. The past is forceful, as stated earlier. This time, it is no longer an abstract image or scent, but something tangibly felt, tasted. Lastly, the parenthetical used in this sentence, "breathless (rather, furnace breathed)"[138] characterizes the atmosphere of the South's hauntedness. There is an important contradiction in these parentheticals, which can be read as a correction. While "breathless" alone implies a sense of suffocation, which can be linked to the pressure placed on Quentin by his history, "furnace-breathed" suggests that this sense of suffocation comes from something toxic, poisonous. The night of his recollection is breathless by virtue of sullied air, filled with the smoke and soot of his and his family's history.

These choices in regard to naming and setting are indicative of Faulkner's intention to weave history constantly into the present day, showing us also the impossibility of fully achieving this outcome. But the structure of the text, through narrative style and the use of the subjunctive mode, goes further to this end. "The narrative experimentation in the novel (the insistence, the undermining and the self-reflection of the telling) does not exist apart from the tale; it depends on it as it creates it. In *Absalom, Absalom!* the story and the telling eat each other's tail," [139]writes McPherson.

Readers gain access to Rosa's perspective of the story through her voice; the ubiquity of oral storytelling, both through her and Mr. Compson, adds yet another layer to the text's narrative engagement with history. This is reflected in moments of metafiction, for instance

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[138] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 290.
[139] McPherson, Karen. ""ABSALOM, ABSALOM!": TELLING SCRATCHES." Modern Fiction Studies 33, no. 3 (1987): 431-50.

when Rosa says "maybe some day you will remember this and write about it […] you can write this and submit it to the magazines."[140] These words are spoken in reference to the history she is getting ready to recount, which is her own, which involves Sutpen and the Hundred, and Quentin's family history. This moment reveals a tension between the spoken and the written, ironically given that readers themselves are to approach this spoken conversation through literary text. This forces us to become aware of the novel itself as a constructed, written document; it is degrees separated from reality. It also implies that written document has a motive of its own. Legitimacy is afforded to the written, conferred by Miss Rosa's desire to have her history put down, and by the simple fact that the novel itself is written material. This exists in perpetual conflict with the spoken word, as well as thought content; both these things dominate *Absalom, Absalom!,* making it a text at war with its own textuality. Spoken through the figure of Miss Rosa, who herself is a ghost trapped between the past and present, this history is once again situated in yet another liminal space.

Quentin then speculates that Miss Rosa only wants this to be documented so that "*people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor see her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War.*"[141] In addition to illustrating the perceived legitimacy of the written word, the statement confers upon Quentin a profound responsibility to reflect, in language meant for an academic and Northern audience, a Southern perspective that would otherwise be lost. In addition to laying the stakes of this conversation between the two characters, this also explains the immense pressure faced by Quentin, as he takes upon the role of a translator, a messenger. Additionally, the multiplicity of

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[140] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 5.
[141] Ibid, 6.

the narration, shown through the overlapped and conflicting voices of Miss Rosa, Quentin, and Mr. Compson is another common thread throughout. The opening conversation, which takes place during a "hot weary dead September afternoon,"[142] sets the stage for the novel's project, which is of unravelling, and of reanimating dead and tired things. Various dichotomies, not only between the written and the spoken, but also between past and present, are now brought to the fore. How does this "reanimation" of a violent inhumane history of war and familial conflict take place?

It is only accessed in its fullest available form through disarray, and through a challenge to our modes of storytelling. To this end, the text's methods are as much part of its storytelling force as its contents. As mentioned, Miss Rosa sets out to tell a story; she says that Quentin may "remember kindly the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening." Yet, Even the orality of her verbal storytelling is undermined: "in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of a man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality of almost solidity, permanence."[143] Miss Rosa's "vanishing voice" gives way to the fullness of an image, albeit a partially imagined image. This "inverse ratio" is something which defines the text as a whole, whose lack of verbal structure forms the basis of its storytelling praxis. In that same manner, Rosa's "vanishing" voice is repeated in the chapter. Earlier, her "voice would not just cease, it would vanish."[144] Though there is an aspect of verbal storytelling, it is made much more complex. From jumbled and incoherent verbal retelling comes something else entirely, something more akin to the sights and smells of the

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[142] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 3.
[143] Ibid, 8.
[144] Ibid, 4.

South which gather in Quentin's Harvard dorm. History, even as it is retold in a "vanishing" voice, gains "solidity, permanence."[145] Haunting seems intuitively like something which would lack a defined shape. But here, Faulkner posits that it is tangible in and of itself.

For this reason, a lot of emphasis is placed on the way this story is being told, internal to the text. The solidity of the figures conferred by Miss Rosa's vanishing voice is related to the very nature of her "talking" and "telling:"

> "It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the speaker knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete […] the quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity—horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale."[146]

Storytelling is, in this novel, given its own epistemological significance. It is tied to a kind of dream-knowledge, carrying the qualities of reverie, and relies on the same qualities of feeling that convince one of a dream's reality. This experience of reality is likely what we mean by the liminal space, which Shreve and Quentin exist in within their dorm room, and which the text as a whole exists in too. The way in which Rosa articulates her story thus points us toward a philosophical outlook on communication and storytelling which prioritizes a subconscious, instinctive knowledge elicited through a parallel between her brand of spoken language, and the felt quality of dream-states. The parenthesized word, "verisimilitude," implies realism and a certain sense of plausibility created through a mimetic relation between the dreamlike and the real, which destabilizes both the actual and the conjectural.

Through this moment, which reckons with the very act of telling, Faulkner also makes other philosophical assertions. Namely, he suggests that the reason history is able to manifest this

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[145] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 8.
[146] Ibid, 15.

way comes from a fatalistic notion of past and present, which once again ties the past to a "printed tale," such as the one readers are working their way through. In another vein, he also suggests "music," which shares with the "printed tale" an internal logic, a set of notes in sequence, a certain predictability. Thus, the weight of history is shown to be due in part to a view of past, present, and future as linked by an organized and fatalist causal chain.

This all comes together to present a view of retelling, and of historical knowledge, as entwined with one another, but also as things which are infinitely complex. Too complex, perhaps, to be articulated with simple chronologies and conventional and naturalist narrative strategies. The often intentionally contradictory and confounding narrative forces of Rosa and Quentin prove this. Through their back and forth, we are shown that the figures and images of past time do not come back as simple concrete fact; rather, and as Quentin learns, they emerge through a multisensory, psycholinguistic experience of memory, which we might define as "haunting." Rosa's voice, which is already phantasmal and difficult to decipher, is made yet more complex by the fact that it is so often interrupted.

While she begins to tell Quentin her story, which is actually their collective story, there is a parenthetical aside depicting a conversation between him and Mr. Compson: "But why tell me about it?" he said to his father that evening, when he returned home."[147] This insertion is the first of many moments of nonlinearity. We are diverted to a moment taking place later, "that evening," in order for some context on the interaction between Miss Rosa and Quentin. Mr. Compson tells him, "maybe she considers you partly responsible…"[148] After the brackets are closed, we return immediately to the house: "Whatever her reason for choosing him, […]

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[147] Faulkner, William. 1972. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books. 7.
[148] Ibid.

Quentin thought, it was taking a long time." This thought is irreverent, almost humorous, in the face of Miss Rosa's harrowing story. Proffered by a proleptic moment which brings the reader forward in time, as well as by Quentin's quick thought, this is a sudden and jarring interruption which sets a precedent for further back-and-forth between times, temporalities, and places. At the same time, the "responsibility," as noted here, ("partly responsible") implies a generational notion of culpability. Quentin is actively implicated in this conflict. His inherited history, and the broader history of the South is no longer latent; rather, it begins to bubble up, involving him. This means that what he learns goes beyond passive knowledge, words. This moment of interruption adds force to her interpretation of events, while also more explicitly linking Quentin and the Compson family into Rosa's narrative.

This is not a lone moment of interruption. In fact, all voices in this text are continually interrupted by one another, as part of the text's interplaying and continually overlapping narrative experience. There is a certain "multiplicity," to which I have previously referred, which is also brought about by this chain of interruptions. Yet, it becomes difficult to pinpoint specific moments of interruption, as the text as a whole works in the mode of interruption, with the voices it interweaves, who all speak of the same subject. Quentin hears the story of Sutpen and his Hundred both from Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson, on separate but related occasions; these interwoven narratives can be seen to be in the process of interrupting one another, and of being interrupted by Quentin and Shreve's dorm room dialectic.

Epistemologically prior to the dorm room, though, is Mr. Compson. He is another one of the text's unreliable narrators; the narratives presented by him and Miss Rosa are bound together by their imaginative quality, and the sense that events are not exactly presented as they happened, but altered by projection. Again, we see a focus on "the listening, the hearing," as

Quentin is hearing "even yet mostly that which he already knew."[149] The information which his father shares with him is characterized as a reverberation, a repetition. This is another way in which history is layered; it is spoken again and again. Mr. Compson outlines, firstly, Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson, which is filled with rumor and speculation:

> "man and beast looking as though they had been created out of thin air […] face and horse that none of them had ever seen before, name that none of them had ever heard, and origin and purpose which some of them were never to learn"[150]

Mr. Compson introduces Sutpen as a walking question mark, emerging out of "thin air," and unrecognizable in face and name, thereby beginning his retelling in an uncertain tone. "So they had to depend on inquiry to find out what they could about him,"[151] he continues. The ambiguity develops into obsession: "the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.* Though this is in reference to those living in Jefferson, it also applies to the reader, who must depend on the inquiries put forward by the many tellers of the story, and whose experience of the story is driven by this fixation.

Mr. Compson's account, though derived from General Compson, is as conjectural as Miss Rosa's. Miss Rosa's retelling of the story is reflective of her personal involvement in it, through her sister, and through her own marriage. Mr. Compson presents a similarly subjective viewpoint, which takes on the speculative qualities of the town's questioning, even though he is able to recount in some detail Sutpen's arrival, and the horror he inflicts upon the town. He recounts General Compson's computations using them as a way to provide some sort of

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[149] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books. 1972. 23.
[150] Ibid, 24.
[151] Ibid.

chronology: "the next five years—as General Compson computed it," he writes.[152] He also uses hinging language: "Apparently it was only by sheer geographical hap that Sutpen passed through town at all.[153]" Mr. Compson uses estimations and hearsay to pass the story down, suggesting that it is rumor and guesswork, rather than fact, guiding his, and by extension the reader's, understanding of this history.

Mr. Compson's account of the story is therefore in conversation with Miss Rosa's, through Quentin's mediation, and through Faulkner's textual mediation, which prioritizes the fragmentary and the speculative. *Absalom, Absalom!,* dissected, therefore reveals several "tellings" layered over one another, each feeding in to the whispery, uncertain atmosphere of the Sutpen saga. There is Quentin learning this history from Rosa and his father and grandfather; each of these conversations is a project of uncovering, and of examining conjectural evidence. Then, there is the other reality of the conversation happening in the Harvard dorm room, which is another, more overarching set of speculations. The conversation in the dorm room acts as an overlay which, in addition to externalizing Quentin's internal conflict as a Southerner away from home, complicates history once more by adding yet another lens by which it is interpreted and scrutinized. The text is laid out as retellings upon retellings; each of these accounts compounds with the last, so that every additional layer of uncertainty engulfs the one which precedes it. This cycle creates an affective reality of its own.

This reality is what constitutes the text's haunting, as a psycholinguistic state of being. The unreliability of the narrators, combined with the structural complexity of the text, means that the Sutpen saga is never told in full and in truth. It is constituted not only of fact but also

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[152] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books, 1972. 25.
[153] Ibid, 26.

projection, of different realities, with no indication of what the real story is. The haunting of the narrative as a whole is not constructed of tangible things; it is less about dates and facts, but about whispers and conjectures. A ghost, after all, does not take solid form; interacting with something phantasmal and liminal requires a filling-in of gaps. Thus, the haunting of *Absalom, Absalom!* is proffered by projection, and by the blurred bounds between the real and the phantasmal, the historical and the speculative.

In the context, though, of the Harvard dorm, Quentin tells Shreve about the South. This is the overlooking layer, it being situated in closest proximity to the present. As a Canadian, Shreve is fascinated by what he hears, as Reichardt writes, and "articulates the outsider's perspective of the South as a grotesque pageant of historical characters," owing to the issue of slavery which is, in the North, no longer as divisive and immediate of a conflict, having been "dealt with once and for all."[154] There is a "cultural distance" between the two characters which is not only spatial but also temporal, as Shreve sees the South as far away from his present-day reality not only in terms of geographical separateness, but also as a product of how it remains so troubled by slavery and racial difference. At the same time, Shreve's morbid fascination with the South, and his comparison of it to theatre, is also troublingly racist.

Shreve is layers separate from the story, being an observer not to history but to Quentin's struggle with it. His observer status seems to vindicate him from the moral disasters of the text, but, as Puxtan notes, his involvement and power over the narrative is often overlooked.[155] He

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[154] Reichardt, Ulfried. "Perceiving and Representing Slavery and "Race" "Through" Time: William Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!"" Amerikastudien / American Studies 42, no. 4 (1997): 613-24. Accessed March 31, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41157336.

[155] PUXAN, MARTA. "Narrative Strategies on the Color Line: The Unreliable Narrator Shreve and Racial Ambiguity in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!" The Mississippi Quarterly 60, no. 3 (2007): 529-60.

often demonstrates a "manipulative"[156] will over the story being told, by subjecting what has been presented by the story's other tellers as true to his own "internal logic."[157] At the end of the day, Shreve appropriates Quentin's struggle, and his rapt fascination is a product of his whiteness, which also affords him the liberty of picking and choosing which aspects of the narrative he likes, what parts he wants to follow, and what he wants to project upon it; "when Quentin disagrees with aspects of Shreve's story, Shreve tries to persuade him to approve his version," as is the case with the feelings between Judith and Bon. He is able to reduce historical figures to players in his personal theatre, and to reduce their ethical conflicts to scenes. He exerts power over the narrative, in a voyeuristic way, which implicates him in the story's racism, and casts him as guilty of narrative manipulation. His interest, though real, puts pressure on Quentin, who already struggles with his inner conflicts relating to the Sutpen saga.

This conflict is a reaction to the nature of the history being retold, which, as stated earlier, is a series of moral and ethical disasters, that Shreve is so interested in uncovering. There are the racist realities of the Sutpen saga, and the historical moment surrounding it. There is an eagerness to attribute the horror to Sutpen, as he is the intruding figure, the newcomer, who is situated at the centre of it. He is followed by his "wild negroes,"[158] brought from Haiti, and he is described as the "demon" constantly throughout the narrative. The mystery behind the Hundred, and its many abuses, fuels the town's speculations, and their disdain for his foreign ways. Indeed, Sutpen's own relationship with slavery, and with European imperialism, is described by

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[156] PUXAN, MARTA. "Narrative Strategies on the Color Line: The Unreliable Narrator Shreve and Racial Ambiguity in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!" The Mississippi Quarterly 60, no. 3 (2007): 529-60.
[157] Ibid.
[158] LATHAM, SEAN. "Jim Bond's America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in "Absalom, Absalom!"" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1998): 453-63.

Latham in terms of his life in Haiti, where he makes a fortune, becoming the “"pariah-interdict" come to seek his fortune beyond an America that demands he approach the great houses only through the back door.”[159] In a sense, Sutpen is Othered by the fact that he generates his wealth elsewhere, and is made to be an outsider. But this is his only option, as Latham suggests: making it via the “back door.”

From there, his hunger for esteem and legitimacy is what drives him to build an irreproachable home, the mansion, for himself and to marry into the Coldfield family; his actions are in the interest of infiltrating the society which surrounds him, whose criterion for success is entwined with systems of oppression, and with very specific markers of respectability. Thus, there is the “dismay which Jefferson feels regarding him does not alter the fact that it is the community itself that has created that code of conduct which he follows obsessively; Sutpen's face is the community's own, compounded to larger-than-life-size proportions.”[160] Sutpen is a mirror rather than an apparition, and his ambitions are based around Jefferson’s own values. This is exemplified by his desire to marry into a respectable, irreproachable family. He desires to succeed in a racist world, and he does everything in his power to do so. His Hundred amplifies similar patterns of inequality to those which surround it, which makes his story all the more terrifying, particularly for Quentin, who struggles with his inherited identity and his belonging to the society and ideology that produced Sutpen’s ambitions.

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[159] LATHAM, SEAN. "Jim Bond's America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in "Absalom, Absalom!"" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1998): 453-63.
[160] Kartiganer, Donald M. "Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: The Discovery of Values." *American Literature* 37, no. 3 (1965): 291-306.

This ideology is well represented in the reasons behind Henry Sutpen's opposition to the marriage between Bon and Judith, for which he murders Bon. The abomination of their marriage is not, as we find out, the fact of the incest, but the fact of race. The fact that Bon is part Black is unacceptable, unnatural; this has a similar logic as that of Sutpen's Hundred, which is unacceptable not for the fact that it is built by his slaves, but for the fact that he and his host come from Haiti. Being the Other is the true crime, in the eyes of the town, even amidst countless other horrors and violations.

How does this story come across, when fragmented, tangled and retold through the text's unusual style? Before, this chapter focused generally on the form and structure of the book, which functions through the layered, conjectural retelling of Sutpen's intergenerational saga. This mode of storytelling relies upon the perpetual use of the subjunctive mood, as Fitzpatrick writes. This is to say that it does not operate in a modality of "what happened," but rather in one of "what may or may not have happened."[161] This puts precisely what about this text, structurally, has gone farther than *The Sound and The Fury.* It is also in line with our understanding of the narrative voices guiding the text, and disseminating information that never feels full or solid. Through the nesting of the narrators, as well as the perpetual undermining both of the text itself and of the oral storytelling which forms the bulk of it, Faulkner presents to readers a world which is strung between the hypothetical and the viscerally real. The unknowability of the content in *Absalom, Absalom!* is reflected by its modes of telling, and the confusing tangle of voices which steers the text in various different directions. Perplexingly, this

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[161] FitzPatrick, Martin. "Indeterminate Ursula and "Seeing How It Must Have Looked," Or, "The Damned Lemming" and Subjunctive Narrative in Pynchon, Faulkner, O'Brien, and Morrison." Narrative 10, no. 3 (2002): 244-61

lends itself to a kind of "inarticulable" clarity, which is more a quality of feeling than of knowledge.

The "inarticulable" quality created by this ties into the abject horror of the Sutpen saga, and has implications surrounding Quentin's relationship with his history, and the cultural paradigms he was raised in. At the end of the novel, we see a pained series of his thoughts, "." In the dorm with Shreve, and more generally as a result of his move away from the South, Quentin is forced to confront ghosts, like Sutpen and the figures that surrounded him; in doing so, he also has to indirectly confront his own ideologies, and his Southern identity as a whole. The task of neatly sorting through aspects of one's personal and shared histories is impossible. For Quentin, though, it is worse than impossible; it is painful, as it makes him encounter countless contradictions, as well as countless abuses and violations. It is, as suggested at the start of the chapter, a warzone. It implies that there are some things that are so messy, and so horrific, that they cannot be talked through, or reconciled. *Absalom, Absalom!* thus enacts a kind of "notlanguage,"[162] as Hurley observes. Historically, literarily, and in contention with the sterility of fact and figures, the text operates through a form which aligns itself with its chaotic and harrowing contents, never fitting neatly into past or present.

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[162] Hurley, Jessica. "Ghostwritten: Kinship and History in "Absalom, Absalom!"" Faulkner Journal 26, no. 2 (2012): 61-79.

THE UNNAMABLE AND UNKNOWABLE IN BECKETT'S TRILOGY

Samuel Beckett's trilogy is a deconstruction of the human subject, and of language itself. As Cornwell writes, "The Beckett hero does not seek his identity, he flees from it; his quest is for anonymity, for self-annihilation."[163] It covers some similar themes to Faulkner and Woolf, namely the self, the ego, perceptions of the external world, and the experience of consciousness. But, the trilogy unpacks language and meaning through the disjointed and bare experiences of the thinking subject, gradually limiting the physical capacities and sensory awareness of this subject as the books go on. He gives to the reader a very distilled account of internal existence, suggesting ultimately that with all else removed, there is only a state of arbitrariness, and meaninglessness, at odds with our desire to understand and assign purpose through language, through conventional markers of identity, and through superfluous sense perception.

We begin with names, which are presented to us as arbitrary. *Molloy* follows two protagonists: Molloy and Moran. Beckett does not allow either of their identities to take any solid form, as the bounds between them are slowly deconstructed. The two voices, which were already remarkably similar to begin, seem to eventually subsume each other. But this unity between their voices is also paradoxical: *Molloy* "consists of two juxtaposed narratives" which "bear uncanny likeness to each other." At the same time, the two voices are both "juxtaposed," and "bear uncanny likeness" As a result, "Molloy could be taken for a later version of Moran."[164]

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[163] Cornwell, Ethel F., and Laura Barge. "The Beckett Hero." PMLA 92, no. 5 (1977): 1006-008.
[164] Schwalm, Helga. "BECKETT'S TRILOGY AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-DECONSTRUCTION." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 6 (1997): 181-92. A

Yet, there is still "nothing allowing us to infer a definite relation between the two texts [the Molloy and Moran halves of the first novel]." [165]

How is this achieved? Firstly, Beckett establishes their many likenesses. They are both, for a significant part of their narratives, hobbling around a forest, each in bad physical condition, and without resources. "J'etais donc seul, avec ma gibecière, mon parapluie, […] et quinze shillings,"[166] says Moran, after his son leaves him and pockets some of his money. This image, of a man alone and injured (for he had earlier injured his leg) appears earlier as Molloy himself goes through the forest. They have similar bodily injuries, as Molloy is constantly complaining about his various physical handicaps, namely his leg, described as "court et raide."[167] His short and stiff leg is a parallel to Moran's broken leg. Here, they share an eerily similar struggle. At the same time, one begins to wonder whether the injuries are linked. This might imply that they are the same person at different times, though the reader cannot know for sure.

As for other similarities? There is, most obviously, the setting. The forest itself is a recurring motif, and is yet another shared aspect of the characters' experience: they are both entrapped in an endless tedium of sorts. This resonates with the kind of tedium both characters' walking becomes, due to their injuries. "Car mes étapes faisaient de plus en plus courts, et mes haltes, par consequent, de plus en plus fréquentes et j'ajoute prolongées,"[168] Molloy states, suggesting that each motion forward is smaller and more insignificant. "C'est le premier pas qui compte. Le deuxiéme un peu plus,"[169] echoes Moran on his way home. The shared presence of

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[165] Schwalm, Helga. "BECKETT'S TRILOGY AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-DECONSTRUCTION." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 6 (1997): 181-92.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Beckett, Samuel (1951). *Molloy*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 119.

[169] Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1951. 224.

family, however insufficient and reviled, is another interesting narrative thread which offers us a point of comparison. Molloy has his dead mother, and Moran his runaway son. Though differently, each character has a disappointing relation, parental in nature, which gives rise to suffering. This, thematically, relates more broadly to life's cycles, and the same sense of futility we see in their parallel trudges through the forest. The process of reproduction is given the same nihilistic treatment through the dead mother hated still for having birthed Molloy in the first place, and the idiot son who abandons an injured Moran and steals his money. The mother's room is also a symbolic venue, which, coinciding with Molloy's injuries that force him to crawl, suggest a "return to infancy."[170] The proximity between images of birth and death, as well as the recurring motif of family as a reminder of life's cycle, interpose these states of being. In both Moran and Molloy's chapters, birth and death are brought uncomfortably close, and our protagonists undergo "regressive" journeys toward the contradictorily childlike subjectivity of the dying man.

As mentioned earlier, there is plenty of reason, including their shared metaphysical journey toward still unachievable death, to speculate that the characters are not only similar, but the same. But more evidence is necessary. The most tangible example is that of the leg injury: Malone's injury may have led to Molloy's short, stiff leg. There is also textual evidence, such as stylistic similarity. For instance, at the end of the first part in *Molloy*, Beckett writes, from the perspective of Moran, "Molloy pouvait rester là où il était."[171] Here, he slips into referencing himself in 3rd-person, mimicking Moran. As we are used to Moran referring to Molloy in the 3rd person, seeing Molloy do the same of himself further strengthens the hypothesis that they are

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[170] Cornwell, Ethel F., and Laura Barge. "The Beckett Hero." PMLA 92, no. 5 (1977): 1006-008.
[171] Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1951.

speaking with the same voice. This also allows us to take a second look at the relationship between the two characters.

At the very start of his segment, Moran reminisces: "Je me rapelle le jour ou je recus l'ordre de m'occuper de Molloy."[172] Even though they are bound stylistically, they are distinguished by these moments of referentiality and characterized to share a bizarre relationship. However, the nature of this relationship remains fairly ambiguous. Moran's task has something to do with Molloy; he searches for him. Is this akin to soul-searching? Has Beckett accidentally stumbled upon the new age mantra of "finding oneself?" Maybe—there is plenty of evidence that they are two iterations of the same consciousness. Moran's obsession with Molloy can be read as an externalized expression of an internal search. The self-references in 3rd person, on the part of Molloy, seem to be an extension of Moran's search for Molloy, which could well be himself. Obsession, in this case, lends itself to his becoming.

But this assumption, that they are indeed the same character, remains guesswork and speculation, and is never legitimized with conclusive evidence. The two characters are kept far apart structurally. A paradoxical characterization of voice is achieved through interchanging identities of Moran and Molloy, which is housed within the confusing chronology of the first two books. There are some similarities, tonally, between the two protagonists, which would allow a reader to guess that they might be one and the same.

But this is, as stated, speculation. There can be a continual back-and-forth about whether or not the characters ought to be seen as a composite by the end. The open question, however, seems to be the point. Even if the second part of *Molloy* provides some sort of backstory, "there

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[172] Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1951.

is nothing allowing us to infer a definite relation of its two texts."[173] There remains a disjointedness, a disconnect which exists simultaneously alongside the speculative linkages imposed upon the two segments, leaving them "suspended between resemblance and difference."[174]

This opens a meta-textual commentary into the mechanisms of language and identity, relating to the novel's temporality. This suspends the text's sense of reality as a whole, providing no resolution for the reader, no simple or neat way to digest the text's elements, which are at once (seemingly) unified and structurally separate. Here, structure and content act contentiously toward one another, each asserting conflicting identities and realities. The content suggests that Molloy and Moran are the same, while the structure keeps us guessing. The sense of disconnection arising from the very attempt to find identification between the novel's two subjects serves to draw attention to the unknowability of the human subject, and the redundancy of identification. This goes further, as Schwalm notes, to imply also a psychoanalytic failure, which she describes as "the impossibility of identity qua reflection."[175] In *Molloy*, she claims that this is brought out through the polarizing temporality, which works at the same time to bound the figures of Molloy and Moran, and to separate them.

It is through the text's temporal structure that one is able to bind their identities through the theory that they are the same person. At the same time, the temporal break between Molloy and Moran's sections also implies that their experiences are discrete, seeing as the narrator never explicitly expresses that they share an identity. Thus, the novel's time has a paradoxical effect

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[173] Schwalm, Helga. "BECKETT'S TRILOGY AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-DECONSTRUCTION." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 6 (1997): 181-92.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

which is linked to the impossibility of self-knowledge. It is circular both in the sense that it seems to tell a cyclical story, future leading to past and leading back to future, and in that it reflects upon the circular issue of identification. The reader is must speculate, then make a hypothesis, then speculate again. The cycle continues ad infinatum, destabilizing assumptions regarding narrative continuity and continuity with regard to names and identification.

Molloy also subtly poses a challenge to the mechanisms by which we read, particularly our instinct to hypothesize, speculate, and form links between identities within the text. By writing two characters, who could really be one, without any further explanatory or synthesizing gesture, he rejects synthesis and narrative coherence. To a certain extent, he rejects his prescribed authorial duty, which is to give the reader a clear picture of who the characters are and what their relation is. In choosing to forsake these things, Beckett draws attention to, more broadly, the failure of language the precariousness of meaning, and the fragility of the processes of identification we use to make sense of conscious subjects, and by extension ourselves and others.

How, from here, does he proceed with the trilogy? The failure in identification comes back immediately in full force; the name of the hero has suddenly changed, and we are not even to assume that it is necessarily the same person(s) that we had seen in *Molloy.* Thus, what is established in the first text remains, because the difficulties with regard to language and identity remain paramount. The priority of these issues is also highlighted by the fact that they are the first things the reader is confronted with upon entering the second book, by the simple yet jarring insertion of a newly named character, who *still* shares a similar voice. It is almost frustrating; we can see so clearly that these voices are the same, but cannot confirm it. When the protagonist

refers to himself as Malone, he parenthetically qualifies: "(c'est en effet ainsi que je m'appelle à present,)"[176] once again highlighting the arbitrariness of names.

Usually, when we think of trilogies, we expect a sense of progress between volumes; we expect a world or its inhabitants to become more fully formed, or to move forward in some way. The progress to be made here is not constructive, but regressive. This is to say that the protagonist journeys nowhere but inward. Beckett's protagonist, now Malone, furthers his last protagonist's spiral into a sense of meaninglessness, both on an emotional level, and at broader narrative and metalinguistic level. In *Malone meurt*, Cornwell writes "the hero retreats one step further and his ambivalence increases."[177] How, exactly, is this achieved? She draws a link between the injured and infantile Molloy and Malone, citing that they both undergo "birth unto death." [178] However, we see in *Malone meurt* a slow disintegration, where the body's injuries grow more and more severe. To start, Malone is bedridden, and lacks freedom. The loss of movement and bodily autonomy is a theme as the novels develop. In this text, we see that bodily decay is still very much present and paired with lack of physical mobility, further pushing the narrative to be inside-looking. As stated earlier, the progress of the novel is less onwards and upwards, and more downwards and inwards.

It maintains the first-person voice, beginning with: "Je serai quand meme bientôt tout a fait mort enfin. Peut-être le mois prochain."[179] The end-goal of death is both within and outside of Malone's grasp. He gives us his prediction, but immediately calls it back and makes it uncertain. Again, temporality is important; here, the uncertain timeline of his dying takes away

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[176] Beckett, Samuel. (1951). *Molloy*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 77
[177] Cornwell, Ethel F., and Laura Barge. "The Beckett Hero." PMLA 92, no. 5 (1977): 1006-008.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1.

from his assertion that he will soon be dead. Later he says: In a few lines, "Je mourrais aujourd'hui même, si je voulais, rien qu'en poussant un peu, si je pouvais vouloir, si je pouvais pousser."[180] This gives us the crux of his issue, which is that he stands between himself and the death, and that it is his inability to want, and his inability to expend energy, which keeps him alive. Without the ability to want, and even the ability to be able to ("si je pouvais pousser"), it does not even suffice to say that he has given up. Rather, he is entirely passive, without any power of volition, even in the realm of thinking and wanting.

The completeness of Malone's passivity is what allows for this turning-inward. Whereas we saw in Molloy a protagonist interacting with a world, the interactivity in *Malone meurt* is a lone voice, struggling against its own existence as the world outside slowly becomes more and more irrelevant. He tells the reader about his dwindling awareness of, and weakening relationship with the world:

> "Monde mort, sans eau, sans air. C'est ça, tes souvenirs […] Plus chère des clartés, blafarde, grêlée, moins fate des clartés. En voila des effusions. Qu'a-t-elle bien pu durer, cinq minutes, dix minutes? […] Autresfois je comptais, jusqu'à trois cents, quatre cents et avec d'autres choses encore, les ondées, les cloches, le babil des moineau á l'aube, je comptais, ou pour rien, pour compter, puis je divisais par soixante. Ça passait le temps, j'étais le temps, je mangais l'univers. Puis maintenant. On change. En veillissant."[181]

Thus, the already absurd material world gives way, opening to further absurdity. The world was, in *Molloy*, a repetitive and bleak place. The forest, depicted as a labyrinth, meant that Molloy and Moran were endlessly caught in a cyclical and uninspiring reality. Now, Malone describes how he used to pass the time through counting, through using sense perception. He describes a forest and a night sky, again alluding to *Molloy*. He talks about the outdoors, and

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[180] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1.
[181] Ibid, 144

claims that he used to swallow the universe, to consume it; "je mangais l'univers. Puis maintenant," he says, stating that his mode of interacting with the world has changed with age. No more counting, no more passing time through observing the external, and unforgivingly bleak and banal world around him.

What is left? How does he pass the time now? Is there anything more resigned and meaningless than counting random physical objects for no reason at all? Beckett's answer is yes, and a recourse into the imaginary, the realm of story. Passing time takes on a different meaning in this second book, which relates to the storytelling impulse. Malone thinks: "C'est un jeu maintenant. Je vais jouer. […] J'allumais partout je regardais bien tout autour de moi, je me mettais à jouer avec ce que je voyais."[182] Though he is *somewhat* interacting with his surroundings, by turning on the lights and looking around, he prefaces this by stating that all is a game. Or, at least, that it is to him.

In gamifying his immediate surroundings, Malone suggests that the actual contours of observed reality are no longer immune to his meddling. This sentiment is solipsistic, implying a weakening boundary between the imaginary and the observable. What comes after is thus thrust into uncertainty, as readers are forced to question whether the events of the narrative are simply extensions of the narrator's psyche. His entrapment in the room limits his actual physical horizons: "Cet chambre semble être à moi. Je n'explique pas autrement qu'on m'y laisse."[183] He is left there, and it is not clear who is responsible. He is helpless in this predicament. Still, he only has the room, and this situation further strains the reader's view of physical reality. Without

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[182] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit,
[183] Ibid.

a larger landscape, there are fewer details to hold on to, which exacerbates the effect of Malone's intentional obfuscation of reality.

What is the game he is playing? The answer to this question is linked to a larger metatextual and metalinguistic issue in the text. He begins to tell a story in his voice, creating a nested narrative, thus drawing attention to the act of storytelling. Here, there are multiple fictions nestled within the fiction, which take over the narrative and further alienating the already alien reality of Malone's room. In *Molloy*, two characters, or perhaps one at different times, trudging through a forest, within an abstract yet still somewhat visible physical world. Most of the narrators' thoughts are prompted by a physical experience, an interaction (past or present) with somebody or something, or a physical pain. There is conversely in *Malone meurt* a very bare physical world, and the interiority of the narrator is filled instead with stories. These stories are populated with people who are fictitious to the second degree; they are fictitious even in the world of the narrator. There are constant departures from experiential reality, recourses into imagination. The purpose of these ventures is unknown to the reader, as they might be to the narrator himself.

The smallness of Malone's physical world is seemingly compensated for by these stories. The telling of this fiction, which is of his own design, implies a sort of imaginative vibrancy or abundance, and also a freedom from selfhood afforded by escapist fantasies. However, it is the opposite. Malone is nonetheless filled with "authorial boredom and despair:"[184] "quel ennui. Et j'appele ça jouer,"[185] he says. He is not granted any sort of freedom through his storytelling. The issue of selfhood, which has long been a form of entrapment to our hero, remains at the forefront.

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[184] Beckett, Samuel. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 23.
[185] Ibid, 19.

Even as he tells the stories, Malone cannot truly escape his reality. In a physical sense, he is trapped in the room, and in his body.

But at a psychological level, Malone is trapped with his selfhood. His voice slips through, into the narration of his stories. "L'homme s'apelle Saposcat. Comme son pére. Petit nom ? Je ne sais pas. Il n'en aura besoin […] Lesquels? Je ne sais pas."[186] The authorial self-questioning present in his description of Saposcat ties Malone to his stories; there repeated appearance of personal pronouns within the storytelling mode implies his inevitable authorial involvement. This also goes beyond small authorial intrusions in the interest of changing specific details, as we have seen. There are also more holistic alterations: "Sapo n'avait pas d'amis. Non, ça ne va pas./ Sapo était bien avec ses petits camarades, sans en être exactement aimé,[187]" In this instance, Malone corrects himself, on a plot point. Compared to a name, whether Sapo had friends is a detail that affects the story more drastically, and beyond arbitrary particulars. In this sentence, we see how Malone, feeling a sense of dissatisfaction with his own narrative, remedies it. This implies that there is also an emotive element to his involvement in his story; he is entangled in it also through his feelings, his sense of satisfaction and completion, or lack thereof. Beckett shows, through Malone's frequent intrusions into the story's content, how his consciousness is what furnishes its characters and world. Readers cannot possibly gain access to parts of Saposcat that Malone does not know, because Malone is the originator of the character. This *seems* like a fairly self-evident detail, but it soon becomes a point of existential significance.

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[186] Beckett, Samuel. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 19.
[187] Ibid.

Malone also involves himself in his stories in ways that explicitly draw attention to the process of creation: "J'ai commence d'essayé de réfléchir au début de mon histoire."[188] He outlines specific thoughts he has as he composes his story, and specific reflections. This sentence leads into the quote about Sapo's friends, which is a sentence I had drawn attention to earlier. The alteration of plot points and the evolving nature of the story is thus a direct result of conscious thought, and the effort of the (reluctantly) thinking subject. This further characterizes the story as artifice, and as creation. Moreover, it also goes further to undo the self-erasure, as it shows the subjecting thought processes Malone underwent to come up with his story. All of these little intrusions, which cannot be adequately described as "authorial intrusion" for the fact that they are not interjected by Beckett but by his author-character, characterize the impossible conundrum of erasure and storytelling. Through Malone's stories, he is forced to disclose things about himself. The involvement of Malone in his stories implies that he *must* exist as their creator, and explicitly tethers the interiority of a creator to his creation. Consequently, the self-erasure, which is attempted through the telling of stories, has failed. The impossibility of erasure is thus shown to us through these stories, which are self-asserting, in their attempt to be self-effacing. This becomes a commentary not only on Malone and the impossibility of his desire for self-erasure, but also on the act of storytelling.

This adds an alternate dimension to the concerns that Beckett outlines in the first instalment of the trilogy. In the first book, the question of whether Molloy and Moran were one and the same deconstructed the notion of self-identity, in relation to temporality and external identification. Beckett suggests, through these characters, the disconnect between the subjective

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[188] Beckett, Samuel. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 23.

entity and the identity it inhabits; he goes further to suggest that this disconnect is irreconcilable. The impossibility of reaching complete certitude that they are the same person, even given the abundance of subjective evidence through the two protagonists' shared experiences and their similar voices, creates a liminal space between the consciousness and its experiences and the external markers (which the reader has access to) of the conscious being's identity. Though the two characters are narratively similar, they are also distinct, as a result of the text's temporal layout, and the characters' names. There is shown to be a chasm between the subjective voice and how the speaker is identified. At once, this implies the continuity and the discontinuity of identity, creating an impossible cycle which moves between speculation and doubt, continually affirming and denying the identity of the referent. The self is displaced, existing between identities.

Malone meurt plays on this issue of identity and displacement through the added motif of storytelling. Modes of speaking and writing are employed toward self-erasure, but still force a sense of self-identification, in an infinite loop. A paradox is expressed through the characters of Molloy and Moran, who are at once continuous and discrete, whereby their shared identity, which is both arbitrary and necessary, is affirmed and denied. In the second book, a similar paradoxical gesture can be inferred from the simultaneous self-annihilation and self-insertion seen in Malone's storytelling. The self, in this case Malone's, exists also in a liminality. Identity is displaced in *Molloy* through the simultaneous presence of the two protagonists in different temporalities; it is displaced in *Malone meurt* more intentionally on the part of Malone, through his stories. He attempts to decenter "his own discourse, pointing it away from the self," but "his fictional fragments refuse to remain on the plane of story, bouncing back into the situation of

narrative itself."[189] Thus, we do not stay, as Malone intends, in Saposcat's life; we are brought back to Malone's world, which is where he writes these stories down in his attempt to divert us from his self.

This brings us to the topic of the notebook, and of written word, which interplays with the subjective voice of the narrator: "Quelques lignes pour me rapeller que moi aussi je subsiste."[190] The act of writing comes into play here, through the notebook and pencil which Malone holds on to as one of his final possessions, and perhaps the only possessions that seem to truly matter to him: "Vite, vite mes possessions. […] Mon crayon, mes deux crayons."[191] Later, he states:

> "Mon cahier, je ne le vois pas, mais je le sens dans mon main gauche. Le lit serait donc à moi aussi, et le petit table, le plat, les vases, l'armoire, les couvertures. Que non, rien de tout cela n'est à moi. Mais le cahier est à moi, je ne peux pas expliquer. Les deux crayons donc, le cahier et puis le bâton."[192]

Here, we are given Malone's entire physical landscape consisting of things which are "à moi," which belong to him both through proximity and use, but also through something else he ("je ne peux pas expliquer") cannot quite verbally justify. The physicality of writing in this context has a grounding effect, which explicitly gives his stories a physical existence beyond the existing materiality of the novel they find themselves nested within. They, written with pencil on paper, are made of material as much as of thought content. This goes back to the paradox of self-annihilation, suggesting that one's physical form, in addition to their psyche, must be present for the generation of stories, which are themselves vain attempts at self-erasure. Yet it also

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[189] Schwalm, Helga. "BECKETT'S TRILOGY AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-DECONSTRUCTION." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 6 (1997): 181-92.
[190] Beckett, Samuel. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. 1971.
[191] Ibid, 116.
[192] Ibid, 117.

establishes a certain precariousness to the whole endeavour, through the symbol of the shortening pencil, the waning materials available toward the generation of more lines, more content: “Ainsi peu à peu mon crayon raccourcit, c’est forcé, et le jour viendra où il n’en restera plus qu’un fragment si infima que je pourrai plus le tenir.”[193] The mode of writing itself is fragile and slowly thinning, implying the diminishing returns of his storytelling endeavour. There is something very insufficient in the act of writing, at least in the context of Malone’s desire to annihilate himself.

In these novels, we have the paradox of the self, and the impossibility of perfect identification, which sets the narrative up to be continued with Malone’s failed attempt to erase the self through writing and storytelling. The ambition of this philosophical project makes the texts themselves difficult to read; being used to narrative continuity, as well as some measure of solidity in physical descriptions of settings, Beckett’s trilogy is intentionally disorienting. Finally, in *L’innomable,* we are met with a final gesture pointing toward the impossibility of self-erasure. The text rids all identifying information from its subject, and gets rid of most interaction between the subject and the external world. The unnameable one gets close to consciousness in a bare form, and through him Beckett fully lays out his objectives: “The trilogy, then, seeks to deny the subject knowing that it can never be fully denied. This is the notorious Beckettian paradox.”[194]

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[193] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *Malone meurt*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. 77.
[194] Schwalm, Helga. "BECKETT'S TRILOGY AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-DECONSTRUCTION." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 6 (1997): 181-92.

In *L'innomable*, the "narrative "I" enters as a radically depersonalized, displaced speaking agent."[195] The text opens with: "Où maintenant ? Quand maintenant ? Qui maintenant ? Sans me le demander. Dire je. Sans le penser. Appeler ça des questions, des hypothèses."[196] The novel opens with these repetitive questions, destablilizing the subject geographically, temporally, but also in relation to itself. Where, when, who, the speaking subject asks. But the answers to these questions are impossible, and are not to be answered with any clarity. Rather, these questions are stated to set a precedent for the novel, which will exist in the same state of uncertainty that they have evoked. The subject does "not inhabit a place."[197]

"Qui maintenant ?"[198] is a question different from the others; while it is not at all unusual to ask where one is, or what time it is, it is certainly strange to ask of oneself who he is at a certain time. The depersonalization of the subject takes place both through this rhetorical question, and his namelessness. The fact that he is never given a name, and is instead exclusively referred to by this title, "l'innomable," implies the amorphousness of the protagonist, and the indefinability of the boundaries of his self.

Later the unnameable one says: "J'ai l'air de parler, ce n'est pas moi, de moi, ce n'est pas de moi."[199] Here, we see a sentence being completed as it is uttered. The speaker adds the article "de" midsentence, and repeats himself. Firstly, the developing sentence, which finishes itself as it is spoken, reinforces the speaker's uncertainty through tone; the prose, as a whole, reads

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[195] Addyman, David. "WHERE NOW? Beckett, Duthuit and "The Unnamable"." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 26 (2014): 179-91.
[196] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *L'innommable*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1.
[197] Addyman, David. "WHERE NOW? Beckett, Duthuit and "The Unnamable"." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 26 (2014): 179-91.
[198] Beckett, Samuel. 1971. *L'innommable*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1.
[199] Ibid.

neurotically, erratically. It is built of incomplete thoughts coming into being. Secondly, this sentence is linked once more to the uncertainty of identity as implied by the speaker's initial questions. The sentence suggests a distance between subject and the speech. He claims it is not him speaking, and then that the speech is not of him, or coming from him; this adds further dimension to the depersonalization of the subject, as it implies that the words to which we have access as readers are also depersonalized. Yet, he needs to assert himself through a personal pronoun to make this point in the first place. We are thus drawn back to the self-effacement paradox: an attempt at erasure is undercut by the fact that self-reference is a grammatical necessity.

He continues with the questions "Ces quelques généralisations pour commencer. Comment faire, comment vais-je faire, que dois-je faire, dans la situation où je suis, comment procéder ?"[200] The text's reflexivity thus extends also to its own composition; while the first set of questions were related to the speaking subject himself, this set of questions deals with the text readers have access to, and how it is formed. It is self-conscious, calling into question how his experience is rendered to the reader. It poses the question of how one ought to present oneself; this directly contradicts the notion that ("ce n'est pas moi"[201]) it is not him who is speaking. Thus, the contradictions present themselves from the very first page of the novel, which already addresses the back and forth between the denial of the self and the asserting the compulsory nature of self-identification.

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[200] Beckett, Samuel. *L'innommable*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 1.
[201] Ibid.

Then, he says, "Malone est là. De sa vivacité mortelle il ne reste que peu de traces."[202] This seems to reveal that we are dealing with yet another new protagonist in *L'innomable* but one who has an awareness of Beckett's other characters. This extends to his other novels too, as the unnameable one mentions Murphy. Later, he says "c'est peut-être Malloy, portant le chapeau de Malone."[203] This confusion between characters is a further attempt to undermine identity and identifiers; it also approaches the characters in Beckett's own oeuvre with a flippancy and an irreverence, highlighting their arbitrariness. He "begins by scattering the puppets of Beckett's earlier creation-- Murphy, Watt, Mercier," in order to find traces of himself. These past characters, which appear intertextually throughout *L'innomable,* suggest that the unnameable one will be the one to subsume all his others. In this text, he claims that it is he who has written them. His descriptions of these characters are more vivid than those of his settings. This makes a metatextual point about the author, and literature as a means for impossible self-identification.

These references act on another level as well, actively erasing the presence of Beckett himself, their actual author. By claiming that he has written these characters, the unnameable one takes them from their real author, and absorbs them instead into this narrative, nesting them in fiction. A greater project of self-erasure can be said to come out of these choices, which affect our understanding of the author's place in his work. Essentially, in relinquishing claim to his own characters, Beckett also erases himself, again revisiting the project of erasure by calling into question his ownership of his artistic creations.

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[202] Beckett, Samuel. *L'innommable*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 1.
[203] Ibid.

As Rickels writes, "All traveling is toward the self, all waiting is for the self, all escape is from the self."[204] The references to Beckett's other characters is an example of this, but the text as a whole tends to what we have been referring to as the central paradox of his work, which is the contradictory desire for self-erasure, and the concurrent attempts to destroy and establish the self. The self is at the centre of all things while also being that which is pushed away. This chaotic and continually contentious presentation of the self is reflected at a sentence-level, through the voice of the protagonist.

As noted earlier, the book sets itself up with a series of questions, and then another. Each of them deals in their own way with this issue of the self, and its uncertainty. The fact that the self can be both asserted and denied is a necessary feature of it. This conflict is linked to unusual way by which consciousness is presented by Beckett in the text. There is the constancy of questioning, the contradictions and discontinuities, the referentiality and the inconsistency in observation; all these chaotic elements are absolutely essential to how Beckett characterises our relationship to ourselves. Yet we are left to wonder what exactly this "self" is in the first place.

The uncertainty set up by the unnameable one's questioning poses an obstacle to the reader, and makes the text difficult to read and comprehend. His questions are not inquiries regarding the world around him, nor anybody in particular. Rather, they are intentionally unsettling questions which destroy the foundations of character and characterization as we know it, thereby forcing the reader to acknowledge the instability of the narrator's personality and by extension his self. Thus, the question of the self can be answered through an appeal to this instability. And the acknowledgement that Beckett's representation of personhood characterizes

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[204]RICKELS, MILTON. "Existential Themes in Beckett's "Unnamable"." *Criticism* 4, no. 2 (1962): 134-47.

it as something disjunctive and incomplete. The mode of representation by which selfhood is explored in the text implies that the actual conscious experience of the self is incoherent and undefined. Ultimately, the "testimony of The Unnamable is that neither the experience of life nor of the universe is perceptible as an orderly structure. Man seeks form in his experience and in his universe, but at bottom he experiences neither rationality nor intelligibility."[205]

For the reader expecting continuity, or meaning through a complete hermeneutic circle, Beckett's trilogy is troubling. The stream of consciousness, particularly in the final volume, is tiresome and seemingly unending, perhaps appropriately so. At first, it toggles between short sentences and long, multi-clause sentences, where one clause often contradicts the next. These sentences also frequently employ asyndeton to further imply incoherence, and to further distance the unnameable one's thoughts from proper language and conventional narrative. Even within a sentence, and within strings of proximate thoughts, there is confusion and disagreement. As we go deeper into the text, we get more of this longer, meandering, and contradictory variety. The last sentence of the text runs for several pages. In that space, the sentence argues with itself, it agrees with itself, it disagrees with itself, it repeats itself, it contradicts itself. As we have said, the self is not simple, so its thoughts cannot be either. "Complex" is insufficient to describe the experience of living, as Beckett depicts; rather, our consciousness is discordant and ever-tangled with itself, both affirming and denying itself, moving toward and way from itself.

It has been a struggle, undoubtedly, to come up with singular and unified argument which would unify the trilogy's elements. But I would posit that this difficulty is part of Beckett's

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[205]RICKELS, MILTON. "Existential Themes in Beckett's "Unnamable"." *Criticism* 4, no. 2 (1962): 134-47.

project, which aims at conveying that aspect of human experience which is so indescribable, and in many ways so bleak.

The end of the book acts as a direct answer to the beginning. First, the unnameable one asks where, when, and who. He answers without answering: "ça va être moi, ça va être le silence, la où je suis, je ne sais pas, je ne le saurai jamais, dans le silence on ne sait pas, il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer."[206] Of course, none of the questions can be answered. The self remains displaced, this time through the motif of silence, and of death. The only certainty is this uncertainty, and the experience of not knowing. The reality of the self is as Beckett says through those last two clauses; it is something utterly unbearable, yet entirely compulsory.

[206] Beckett, Samuel. *L'innommable*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1971. 211.

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

I bring myself into the paper now, as is necessary to convey that comparative interpretation of these texts will yield differently to different people, whose experiences shape their reading. To me, it does not suffice to say that the form is simply necessary to the plot and story; rather, the form is itself a story to be told, which has its own narrative content.

First, there is Woolf, who employs rhythm and soliloquy to capture the ebb-and-flow of life, and to make an ambitious attempt at metabolizing the contradictory aspects of interiority in *The Waves*, following in the vein of similar explorations in *To the Lighthouse.* The former is a radical project, which is both unlike her work preceding it, and an echo of her most explored themes. As she does in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf writes about death, mourning, and the cycle of life in *The Waves.* The text moves through its many perspectives; some of these are human, and another is grander and more overarching. *Lighthouse* unpacks Mrs. Ramsay's death from the perspective of those closest to her, examining the impact it has on her family and close kin. Though the book speaks to a very specific event, a particular loss of one particular woman, the effect of the story as a whole is more far-reaching and universal. Mrs. Ramsay is not only herself, but an analogue for the kind of mother figure that Woolf herself had lost, and that resonates outside the bounds of the Ramsay family. Indeed, the text starts within a family, and extends outward, becoming more universal by virtue of the story's affect, and by virtue of the access Woolf grants the reader to Mrs. Ramsay's interiority, despite her death and distance. This structure is inverted in *The Waves,* where we move from the overarching to the particular; we begin with the waves themselves, and locate the characters within this external and universal reality.

I noted that something similar was done between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner initially writes a family and their past, which is complex enough as is; he later explodes this in *Absalom, Absalom!,* which is multigenerational as well as more broadly socio-historic, dealing not solely within the family unit, but also in the sphere of culture and nationhood. The Sutpen saga historicizes the Compton family's existence, contextualizing it in a larger scope, which readers are given access to through the nested structure of the narration, which uses oral history to both articulate and dishevel the past and its stories.

Here, we see gestures: progressions from the contained, to the uncontainable. Woolf writes the uncontainable through her narrative and imagistic motif of the waves' rising and falling motion, alongside her interlacing soliloquys. Faulkner does so through the subjunctive tense, and through the interloping voices of multiple sources, overlaid with a non-linear temporality. Speaking, though, of language and modes of expression, Faulkner and Woolf are frequently compared through their use of stream-of-consciousness narration. Though executed in different stylistic registers, Woolf's being more fluid and rhythmic and Faulkner's being more saturated and descriptively loaded, both authors frequently use methods which allow readers entry into their characters' minds, putting aside temporal markers and conventional naturalist descriptions to favor long and meandering excursions into thought content. This dilates time, drawing out single moments, and making them last longer in line with characters' mental states, and subjective realities. Not only in *The Waves* and *Absalom, Absalom!,* but also in the earlier texts, *The Sound and the Fury* and *To the Lighthouse*, do we see these similarities.

Thus, we see a lot shared between Woolf and Faulkner, in terms of how they construct these experiments, and how their most radical texts exist in relation to others. An important similarity, in the context of my essay, is this: even at their most experimental, both authors still

function within a world of significances, but they each challenge it in their singular ways. Through their experiments in structure, they maintain the value of signification, and their texts add nuance to the project of signification and meaning, rather than challenging it entirely.

The Waves complicates signification through its impressionistic register, which creates image in a fragmented and collectivist narrative pattern through the use of several narrators, whose soliloquies each contribute to the overall texture of both the natural world, and of their human conflicts and dramas. Woolf's images are both complete and incomplete, personal and shared. By blurring the lines between "objective" reality, and subjective perspective, she allows for her text to flow in a way that contradicts naturalist narrative chronology, opting instead for a more melodic mode of storytelling. As we have discussed, the consequence of this unusual mode of telling is an enduring uncertainty; Woolf provides an experience of reading which is affectively similar to the ebbing-and-flowing which she has thematically conveyed. Though it can be argued that meaning is put aside in favor of this aesthetic choice, given that her story has become harder to follow and understand as a result of it, there is also something to be said for how the form reinforces her project, and brings home the meaning she wished to convey through it.

Much of the text is concerned with "phrases," and how they, as explored through Bernard, are used in the vain pursuit of comprehensibility, of making meaning out of the ever fluid universe, which presides over the text's human stories. Phrases, as a mode of meaning-production, are how we assert the primacy of the human perspective; our ability to impose meaning, however futile it is in the long run (because the waves will continue to rise and fall regardless of our speaking and writing,) is deeply human. I would posit that what is achieved through this text is not any denial of meaning, or of signification, but a more abstract approach to

these things, which is both confusing and illuminating. Though the structure of *The Waves* would seem to detract from the meaning of the book, especially if we are to see meaning as a linear and accessible relation between the reader and the text, it actually, and very interestingly, asserts its own emotive logic as another form of meaning. After reading the book, one is left with several impressions, each with several degrees of clarity and coherence; Woolf suggests that these impressions, too, mean something, because they are able to communicate emotively with the reader. This is true, even if they are fleeting, incomprehensible, and lost within an endless stream of other impressions.

The Waves' newness, and Woolf's excitement about it, comes from its rejection of how meaning is usually constructed in the novel; it stands out precisely because it is constructed in such a manner which leaves behind the expectation of linearity and solidity in its treatment of meaning. It seeks to question our understanding of what signification entails, and assert that this kind of impression-driven narrative is also able to convey a form of understanding, perhaps one that, in Woolf's view, is truer to life.

Faulkner's experimentation in *Absalom, Absalom!* looks very different, and indeed is enacted to very different ends. There is still a multiplicity of perspectives, and a general sense of uncertainty brought by this kind of narration. In *The Waves*, the readers' understandings of setting, time and place were limited necessarily by the form of the narration, and the natures of certain characters; in *Absalom, Absalom!* these understandings are made more complex through the layers of speculation and conjecture that the narrators speak with. The Sutpen saga has no objective witness, only the perspectives of those either affected or obsessed with it, each adding further obstacles to clear-cut and straightforward understanding.

This is a reflection of the society that the stories are situated in; the Supten saga is so *wrong* on so many levels, so difficult to tell, that it is hard to imagine another way to narrate it. It is a story which begets the way it is told, through rumors and whispering, through morbid fascination. This does challenge our modes of signification, and of finding meaning; without a reliable account of the story, how are we to know what it meant?

Yet, something is still communicated through the affective realities replicated by the novel's overall structure, which is one where layered perspectives tell the same story. This echoes what we found in *The Waves,* which also uses multiplicity to a very specific sort of intentional uncertainty, where meaning cannot be articulated simply in neat, summative phrases. Thus, the text in its entirety, is a chaotic synthesis, which carries meaning not in an easily negotiated manner, but in complex ways that, like Woolf's methods, challenges naturalist expectations for a long-form narrative. This is done with particular emphasis on hindsight, on history and the past. In this vein, it is not enough to say that the Supten story is conjectural and uncertain, or that it is so loaded that it has bias-inducing emotional effects on those who tell it. Faulkner allows the readers to feel this, and to know this through the way the text reads, the way its narrators act. Though I have been rather vague in my discussion of significances in Woolf and Faulkner's radical texts, I believe this Incommunicability is, for the both of them, central to the unique ways of constructing meaning. What the text is supposed to say, then, is wrapped up with how it is told.

Any account of meaning, found through these Woolf and Faulkner texts, is not at all clear-cut or easily defined. But, in both, there is something communicated through the disruptions and fragmentations that a naturalist, linear text might take as hindrances to plot, and consequently, to conveying significations. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Waves* do not preach

meaninglessness, but that in meaning and truth perfect linearity and clarity is impossible. This is a feature of the mind, where things are much more subjective, conjectural, nostalgic, traumatic, and interpretive. This, of course, is a list that can continue ad infinatum. In short, through their stylistic choices, both Woolf and Faulkner have challenged the way we interpret meanings, as well as our overall conceptions of meaning.

In each author's experiment, there seems to be a sense of consequence, a sense that what happened had mattered, not solely to those involved in the narration, but on a larger human scale. This is because both books are situated in specific and recognizable geo-temporal spaces. There is still a very present world of significations which Faulkner borrows from; in tying his book to the world at large, by bringing in history and aspects of geographical setting, Faulkner acknowledges that the events transpiring within it have some meaning. This is true also of Woolf's *The Waves*, which is grounded not only in its natural landscape, but also in London, an urban center. Both Woolf and Faulkner's characters exist in relation to other people, and are conscious of their relationality with other people; their concerns are also often to do with other people. In different ways, relationships are intensely important in both texts, be it friends or family. As a result, the subjective consciousness is not isolated from the world around it. The text is bound to a part of history, a specific geo-temporality; it is grounded in social and political tensions, and amongst very real events.

Even while disparaging the significance of human activity, as Woolf does through asserting nature as the force that will outlive human meaning, and as Faulkner does through the conjectural fragmentation of the Sutpen story, they both engage with signification. This is true also in their respective uses of symbolism and metaphor to tell their stories; the allegorical aspects of each of their narratives, Faulkner borrowing from Biblical stories and reproducing

images of the South, and Woolf's nature motif, amongst others, contribute to the narratives. What they are up against is not the project of signification itself, but the notion that signification is simple, clean, complete.

This is where Beckett's *L'innomable* is unique, and important to our discussion. The "uncontainable" looks very different in this context, as it is more related to semantic content, and language's failure. Beckett's project takes that next step, of posing an epistemological challenge to signification and meaning both in life and in literature.

Rather than London, Cambridge, or Jefferson, Beckett opts for the barest of realities. The consciousness of the narrator pulls focus, and is the only thing that readers can pay attention to. Thus, the individual subjective experience is at the forefront of his narration, in all its existential horror; at the same time, the novel's subject has his own project of self-erasure, which creates and sustains a contradiction, that persists throughout the trilogy. The stream-of-consciousness style forms nearly the entire basis of Beckett's trilogy, explores a miserable internal life, or lives, depending on how one chooses to read the ever-changing protagonist. Beckett writes in perpetual first-person; our character, by the time we get to the third book, has nothing to say about his personal history, and little engagement with the world around him.

The result of Beckett's novel is a deconstructive approach to narrative, where the larger human scale is gone, and we are left with the individual in conflict with his own meaning, and with the compulsory nature of the self. L'innomable, as a character, is missing a lot of the personal significations and ties that Woolf and Faulkner's characters have; there is little access to history, little reference to people and relationships, and a diminishing sense of place. The narrative minimalism removes the ability to find significances, to relate the consciousness of the individual to the world around it, and to find meaning through that larger context.

The hyper-isolated protagonist is the perfect medium to explore meaninglessness and futility, in relation to the human self. The impulse to find meaning is ubiquitous and seems, for the most part, central to our humanity; we communicate through language, find place for ourselves in societies and countries. We interpret external stimuli and give those perceptions significance. It is perfectly human to search for meaning, to find ways to define the self. Beckett gives us the human being, but stripped of this. What is left is a multi-layered denial of definition, which implies that the essence of existence is the fact that the self is compulsory, whether or not it has meaning. It also suggests that, lacking external meaning, the self's true state is decrepit, wishing only for an impossible escape from its own consciousness.

These assertions about meaning also affect the issue of authorship, and the text, because Beckett goes further to directly involve himself, and his other characters. The unnamable one suddenly claims authorship of the protagonists from the other books written by Beckett, Watt. By absorbing these characters, and metatextually layering them through *L'innomable,* Beckett poses a threat to his own authorship, thereby erasing himself as the author, through a character who attempts, in vain, to erase himself as a character. As we have seen, the project of self-effacement cannot truly be realized; this is a feature of Beckett's project, which asserts not only bleakness but inescapability.

What we have, rather than full erasure, is a picture of human existence which is excruciating, and which is devoid of all the other features of our lives by which we define ourselves. This could suggest that all these other things, which we see to color our existences, are distractions from the true nature of our being, which is as the unnamable one's is: bare, exhausted and bleak.

To Beckett, the project of signification, even if complicated as it is by Woolf and Faulkner, would seem to be but a temporary diversion from the truth of things; that underneath even the lyrical meditations on nature and the explosive and haunting retellings of the Sutpen saga, there is simply the inescapable subjective consciousness. Put simply, lacking all externalities, the individual would revert to its Beckettian form, which exists compulsorily, but in futility in the empty world around it.

Does this mean that the vast and complex worlds of signification constructed by Woolf and Faulkner are rendered obsolete? Not exactly. Beckett introduces an unexpected twist in our exploration. Our other two authors use narrative style to complicate signification, but Beckett questions it in entirety, particularly through the minimalism of his character's surroundings. Given only the unnamable one's stream of consciousness, we are offered an account that dismisses signification as arbitrary, and superfluous to the essence of experience. But there is a reason that Beckett's protagonist is so desperate to escape his bare existence.

When we are left in a world without things upon which to project significations, or, in that same vein, if we begin to question the reality of all significances, we risk becoming akin to the unnamable one, who is aware of his passivity, his helplessness within his own body and mind. This is hardly a life, and Beckett never claims otherwise. Life, as we know it, is still more along the lines of what Woolf and Faulkner accomplish, with its many significations; this does not at all detract from the existential terror of it, as we have seen. It is nearly impossible to live such a bare life as we have seen in *L'innomable*, which seems to function more as a thought experiment than a plausible account of experience. Beckett gives us a framework by which we see the arbitrary nature of significations, and how empty life is and what life is, at essence,

without them. This does not preclude significations from mattering, even if they do not amount to any tangible or objective reality.

While it is impossible to prove conclusively that anything means anything else, this does not detract from personal significances, and the impulse to create meaning, to draw relations between things. Beckett challenges even the complex worlds of significations presented to us by Woolf and Faulkner. His rejection of meaning in totality gives us a clue as to why meaning is so complex, as they are explored in *The Waves* and *Absalom, Absalom!* in the context of life, memory and trauma. It is the arbitrariness of symbols and images that make them come alive, and that make our obsession with them yet more remarkable. Signification is human; it is invented and passed between us like rumor. Beckett gives us an empty world not to deny that it *is* populated both with people and with the meanings they create, but to draw attention to this fact; this fact, which is all too clear in Woolf's and Faulkner's work.

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