

THESIS

DIALOGIC AND MATERIAL INFLUENCE
ON THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY
IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY*
AND MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S *THE HOURS*

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ABSTRACT

DIALOGIC AND MATERIAL INFLUENCE ON THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY* AND MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S *THE HOURS*

The Hours and *Mrs. Dalloway* are texts that creatively and poignantly reveal how personal identity can be shaped. The construction of identity as portrayed in the characters of these novels goes beyond sexual orientation and constricted roles for women, two areas frequently highlighted in analyses of these books, to the essence of “being” and especially to how *self* or *identity* evolves in one’s everyday place and time. The focal women in the books, though fictional creations, provide an opportunity to consider how identity evolves within particular ideological settings and how it is influenced by one’s material, day-to-day circumstances and personal relationships. I examine identity formation as reflected in the protagonists with the ultimate goal of better understanding, as Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist states well, “an activity in which we are all implicated. . . creating the ultimate act of authorship [that] results in the text which we call our self,” (315). I draw upon the theories of Mikhail M. Bakhtin to apply his model of identity development and his thinking regarding how dialogics, language, ideology and a person’s unique acts sculpt identity. My thesis emphasizes *kairos*, used here to indicate the particular time, place and socially charged environments in which each of the key female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* are portrayed. Not only do these texts mirror one another, they also keenly mirror human consciousness as it participates in forming personal identity.

Applying a Bakhtinian critique to these novels illuminates the creation, sustainment and potential for change in individual identity, or in Bakhtin's words, "consciousness becoming." A Bakhtinian perspective also calls attention to the choices individuals make of their own accord and the responsibility created because of these choices. This is important in the academic setting today because increased awareness about how identity is formed, both by ideological influences and material reality, can contribute to individual empowerment and belief in the possibility of enacting change in self and in others.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of the past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development. . . . At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a next context).” –Mikhail M. Bakhtin (Speech Genres)

Like many great literary works which have prompted praise and criticism and have created legions of admirers and detractors, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* is a multifaceted achievement of such complexity that it defies over-analysis. The text indeed has seemed to alter its identity as it speaks across generations; it retains its potency as each new age explores the lines within evolving perspectives. In 1998, the text was recreated as a movie starring Vanessa Redgrave as Mrs. Dalloway. The same year, Michael Cunningham’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Hours*, inspired by and reflecting Woolf’s book, was published. Then, four years later, it was made into a major motion picture starring Nichole Kidman, Julianne Moore and Meryl Streep.¹ Despite this recent “pop” embrace of Woolf’s original text, and, in fact, in part because of the fairly ubiquitous familiarity with *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, I have chosen these two books

¹ *The Hours*, directed by Stephen Daldry and based on a screenplay by David Hare, was met by strong viewer and critical acclaim. The film was nominated for nine Academy Awards, three Screen Actors Guild Awards, two Orange British Academy Film Awards and A Writers Guild Award.

as works that are rich for use in English courses and that provide a superb framework for currently emerging theoretical paradigms from which to look at the genre of the novel.

Mrs. Dalloway and *The Hours* offer infinite material for the study of language, of literature as art, for social constructionist evaluation, and perhaps most obviously for modernist, post-structuralist and feminist interpretations. Although these are all valid perspectives, I strike out in a slightly different direction in this thesis. Like literary critic and philosopher, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, whose theoretical outlook provides the ballast for my argument, this thesis seeks to study literature not only as a way to better understand language and aesthetics, but as a way to better understand ourselves. I examine the dynamic works of Woolf and Cunningham not merely from an angle of literary criticism, but from an approach that considers individual identity formation in the texts' characters and the way this stimulates consideration of our own identity development and possibility for personal change.² The focal women in the books provide an opportunity to consider how identity evolves within particular ideological settings and how it is influenced by individual material circumstances and day-to-day personal relationships. I use Bakhtin because his theories adhere to an "uncompromising view of the individual as a creating, authoring being who can never be repeated" (Nollan xvi), and who has a "non-alibi" in existence, that is, who must take responsibility for his/her acts. I also wish to bring Bakhtinian theory to bear upon this study because his concepts reflect an ethical philosophy of language and identity that always depends on at least one other person and some understanding of moral authority. Bakhtin's perspectives and the central premises

² Without absolute strictness, I use the terms *identity*, *self* and Bakhtin's phrase *consciousness becoming* in this thesis to describe who one is in a relational (to others) world. Other similar terms that I use include *being* that suggests a personal concept of basic existence, and *psyche* that I employ more to reflect one's mind, where conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings reside.

of this thesis derive from communicated discourse --- the *dialogics* of language – at the heart of which is the concept that words have meaning primarily because they are heard/received or anticipated to be heard by someone else.³

The Hours and *Mrs. Dalloway* are texts that innovatively and insightfully reveal aspects of how personal identity are shaped. The construction of identity as portrayed in the characters of these novels goes beyond sexual orientation and constricted roles for women, two areas frequently highlighted in analyses of these books, to the essence of “being” and especially to how the concept of self develops in one’s everyday place and time. I draw upon theories of Mikhail Bakhtin to apply his *architectonic* model of identity development and his thinking regarding how dialogic language, social ideology and a person’s unique acts sculpt identity.⁴

My thesis stresses the *kairos*⁵ of the protagonists of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, a term I use to indicate the particular time, place and socially charged

³ A description of *dialogics* or *dialogism* is provided here although the complex meaning of the term will continue to be discussed throughout this thesis. Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist explains in his notes that accompany his and Caryl Emerson’s translation of Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* that dialogism is the “epistemological mode of a world dominated by *heteroglossia*” (a term used by Bakhtin to reflect many separate, distinct individuals’ voices). In this world, where dialogics reigns, “everything *means*, is *understood*, as part of a greater whole – there is a constant *interaction* between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others—“(426). (My emphases.)

⁴ *Architectonic(s)*, is a word that relates to a framework or paradigm based on self-perception and other perception, is key to Bakhtin’s philosophies and theories. Bakhtin believes that at the core of human action is a goal of achieving wholeness, but, that with the undeniable distinctness between self and other, the disunity can never be overcome; it can only be mediated. Architectonics according to Michael Holquist is how “particular differences” are “negotiated into specific relations” (*Art and Answerability* xxviii). Bakhtin’s model in relation to identity development and dialogics will be developed more fully later in this thesis.

⁵ The term *kairos* dates back to the ancient Greeks and has taken on various meanings throughout history. It is used in rhetoric to describe the most opportune conditions in time and place for the delivery of speech or message. It also refers to the way particular situations/environments surrounding communication require or allow certain types of messages and delivery but also to the way they restrict them; thus, it is linked to the ideas of audience and occasion. I use *kairos* to describe the environment that affects speech in a specific moment in time, but also in a broader way because, in keeping with Bakhtinian theory, I see

environments in which each of the key female characters is portrayed. Of course this kairos is infused with various social and cultural ideologies, understood in this thesis to represent the world of values and meanings generated within various cultural systems -- political, religious, nationalistic, educational, etc. I subscribe to the view that ideologies are both unconsciously and consciously adopted by individuals and I also accept Bakhtin's "science of ideologies" wherein the study of ideology recognizes the constant interplay of the individual with the "other," e.g. neighborhoods, classes, professions, broader social systems, etc. (Holquist *Dialogism* 50-51). A Bakhtinian understanding of ideology acknowledges "the reality of both the individual and society without doing conceptual violence to either" (50-51).⁶

The influence of ideology and personal choice and the inextricable relationship of these aspects of daily life to identity formation are seen in both *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. In his mirror text, Cunningham reconstructs, to a substantial degree, Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, the wife of a conservative Member of Parliament in 1923, as Clarissa Vaughan, a lesbian editor in New York in the late 1990s. In another section of his tripartite book, Virginia Woolf is the story's protagonist. *The Hours'* focus on Woolf

consciousness and deeds as forms of *speech acts* subject to the restraint, encouragement and influence of the settings within which they occur.

⁶ In his text *Dialogism*, Michael Holquist further explains that dialogism's basic categories for avoiding reduction of the individual psyche to something set apart from ideologies are "objective psychology" and "inner speech" as defined by Bakhtin in his text *Marxism and Language*. Holquist continues, "Objective psychology studies the relation of inner to outer speech in specific instances. It differs from conventional social psychology in that dialogism presumes all perception, including higher forms of it which we call thinking, is accomplished through sign operations. And, since signs can only mean if they are shared, it follows that the traditional individual/society opposition is best conceived not as a dual of mutually exclusive categories . . . the individual/society opposition like the self/other relation which contains it must not be conceived as a dialectical either/or, but rather as different degrees each posses of the other's otherness" (51). Holquist stresses is that what each individual thinks of as "society" is different and that a majority of social and cultural groups have no real leaders (54). Thus, social ideology cannot be entirely imposed upon us, as has been professed in various Marxist interpretations. Holquist contends that individuals, at least in part, consciously embrace and create social and cultural ideologies.

during the period when she was working on her single-day novel is especially poignant when we study the text of *Mrs. Dalloway* concurrently. The third storyline of *The Hours* that centers on a suburban, mid-twentieth century American housewife, Laura Brown, who is entranced by Virginia Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway*, contributes to how the two novels tap into female identity through the decades from early twentieth-century Western Europe forward through America in the twenty-first century.

The issues and insights in these meditative short novels remain applicable today, perhaps particularly for women in Western nations, but they are relevant to individuals around the world. These discoveries will be illuminated under the spotlight of an analysis that looks at identity making and meaning in Bakhtinian terms. That is to say, using a Bakhtinian critique, a reader can achieve better understanding of the creation, sustainment and potential for change in one's identity, or in Bakhtin's words, "consciousness becoming." A Bakhtinian perspective also focuses on the choices individuals make of their own accord and the responsibility accepted because of these choices. Increased awareness about how identity is formed both by ideological influences and one's material- particularly physical and psychological reality – and attention to freedom of will, can contribute to individual empowerment and belief in the possibility of enacting change in self, in others and in social environments.

SOURCE REFERENCES

There are literally thousands of published academic essays on *Mrs. Dalloway* and a growing number on Cunningham's *The Hours* and its film re-presentation.⁷ This thesis references recent articles and books that confer with Cunningham's and Woolf's writings regarding the identity of and ideology surrounding their female protagonists.⁸ Much of the body of criticism generated on these texts focuses on women's constraints and ills evident in the novels, and indeed, much of this work has contributed to important goals of feminist criticism. I acknowledge the benefit of these analyses and, although I incorporate some of these perspectives in my paper, I primarily work using a theoretical approach that springs from a feminist perspective but moves to embrace the everyday material reality of women and the evolving self within a particular everyday setting permeated by language and relationships.⁹ Like Bakhtin, and several recent, notably feminist, twenty-first century theorists, this thesis strives to bind theoretical

⁷ For an excellent review and critical comparison of the film version of *The Hours* to Cunningham's text and Mrs. Dalloway, see Daniel Mendelsohn's "Not Afraid of Virginia Woolf" which first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, 2003.

⁸ To reiterate, the term ideology is used throughout this text to describe the social and cultural overlay of values and meaning that are both consciously and unconsciously adopted by individuals, via social groups large and small, formal and informal. My definition of ideology is in contrast with a conception of ideology as entirely influential, where members of a social group are said to have a feeling of choice when in this view theoretical of reality, they have no choice at all.

⁹ The term *material*, as used in this thesis, refers to that which is made of matter as well as experienced ideas. I incorporate concepts of the world of matter that surrounds an individual which would include the human body, the natural world--anything with physical presence in one's environment. The material reality of ideas is related to phenomenological experience, that is, subjective experiences and knowledge which relates empirical observations of phenomena to each other. My conception of material reality also includes existential reality that includes our experience of free choice or action in concrete situations.

considerations to the material reality of individuals suggesting that we must recognize both our socially constructed worlds and our material, physical, everyday environments in order to understand our and bring about desired change in ourselves and others.¹⁰

The theorist supporting my thesis, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, began to write in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but much of his work was not translated until the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹ In these decades he received a warm reception by many scholars because, while he recognized some of the discrepancies and confusion of language explored by structuralism and deconstruction and highlighted by his academic peers, he advocated that meaning could be arrived at through the dialogic sharing of language. Bakhtin's theories continue to be popular; indeed, according to Valerie Nollan, his "ideas and vocabulary have become ubiquitous in academic circles" (xiii). Bakhtin's philosophy stems from a cornerstone premise that all individual expression is ultimately the product

¹⁰The recent *material feminist* conceptualizations I touch upon in this thesis come particularly from the essays and editorial comments of Karen Barad and Susan Hekman, in the text *Material Feminisms*. Material feminist theories, which forefront material reality – the human body, nature, and material surroundings -- like Bakhtin's, seek to avoid the abstruse, theoretical nature of scholarly debates, and to connect with the everyday existence of women without ignoring effects of social construction. Additionally, recently there has been integration of Bakhtinian thought into academic studies in a variety of disciplines including theatre arts, philosophy, history, sociology, political science and women's studies. Examples are provided in three collection of essays: *Bakhtin – Ethics and Mechanics* (2004), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theor* (2001), and *Material Feminisms* (2008).

¹¹ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 1885-1975, was born in Russia and was a student at the University of Petrograd, when the Russian Revolution broke out. After graduating, he moved to rural towns in Russia to teach and to escape the more intense hardships of the civil war felt in urban areas. In these villages he met with several men who became members of the first "Bakhtin Circle." They discussed and wrote about religious, philosophical and political issues. The group included a variety of intellectuals, including Pavel N. Medvedev and Valentine N. Volishinov whose works are usually studied along with Bakhtin's because their topics are so closely aligned with his and because they are said by some to have been authored by Bakhtin. The Bakhtin Circle continued to meet during the 1920s and 30s despite their ongoing persecution by Russian authorities. Although Bakhtin constantly studied and wrote during these years, his first work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* was not published until 1929. That same year Bakhtin was convicted for "religious questioning" and for corrupting the youth because he was associated with a group of Orthodox Christian believers. He was sent to an isolated region of Kazakhstan where he spent six years in exile working as a government bookkeeper. He returned to Moscow to teach in the mid 1940s. Although he continued to write about his philosophical and literary ideas for years, very little of his work was published until the 1960s when some Russian university students re-discovered him and promoted his work. (Dentith, 4-6)

of various voices that are linked to one another through the social nature of language. His *dialogics* or *dialogism* centers on his idea that any individual's *utterance* is the specific interrelationship between his intent in the words he speaks or writes and the listener or reader's response. As Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist distills, according to Bakhtin, "language, when it *means* is somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone else is one's own inner addressee" (Bakhtin *DI* xxi). For the Russian philosopher/scholar, language and the ideas behind language are the product of the interactions between people. Emphasizing the social nature of language, Bakhtin believes that meaning resides "neither with the individual, as the traditionalists believe, nor with no one, as deconstruction would have it, but in our collective exchanges of dialogue" (Honeycutt Ch. 3).

As part of his literary theory, Bakhtin has a strong interest in the historical and social world and a particular fascination with how human beings act and think within specific settings. The cornerstone again to this aspect of his study is that our capacity to have consciousness at all is based on "otherness" (Holquist *Dialogism* 18). As introduced briefly earlier in this paper, Bakhtin formats his conceptualizations within a framework or architectonic based on self-perception and other perception.¹² His architectonics of "consciousness becoming" or identity formation, as he first posited them in his writings now published as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, proceed from a base of: "I for myself," "the other for me" and "I for the other" (which incorporates an "I as the other sees me" component),¹³ and from the unique occurrence of an individual's

¹² See footnote 4

¹³ Bakhtin argues that it is the "I for the other" through which human beings develop a sense of identity because it also includes the conception of the way in which others view me. Conversely, "the other for me"

performed act. Balancing Bakhtin's theoretical scaffolding for the emergence of identity via dialogic consciousness and a person's performed acts or deeds, is his interest in language as the means through which ideologies get articulated.¹⁴ For Bakhtin, language, both structurally and in terms of content, is always ideological, yet, he advocates that language is always material. So, in contrast to structuralist views of language that focus on shape or structure, or New Critical theories that do not go beyond the text for interpretation, Bakhtin argues that we must focus primarily on how individual people *use* language in specific incidences (Gardiner, Holquist).

In writing about the genre of the novel, Bakhtin turns again and again to the two concepts he calls *heteroglossia* and *polyphony*. He believes that the novel's popularity grew in Western literature because of its evolving ability to most accurately reflect the multiple voices, words, and utterances from history, literature, colloquial environments, various economic classes, etc., within a dialogic sphere. He calls this variety of non-unifiable voices and voices that carry their own histories heteroglossia. Although Bakhtin does not deny that an author's voice may dominate a novel, he is intrigued by instances of polyphony, another kind of many voiced-ness, where the significance of the various voices of the characters is nearly equal or equal to the author's.¹⁵

describes the way in which others incorporate my perceptions of them into their own identities. Identity, like consciousness, per Bakhtin, does not belong merely to the individual, rather it is shared by all (Emerson and Morson).

¹⁴ According to Michael Holquist, "Bakhtin's theories work to describe a synthesis between sensibility (the lived act, the world of *postupok*) and reason (our discursive systems for accounting for, or giving meaning to the act, a world always open to the danger of falling into mere 'theoreticism' [which Bakhtin sought to avoid] . . . For Bakhtin, the unity of an act and its account, *a deed* and *its meaning*, if you will, is something that is never a priori, but which must always and everywhere be *achieved*". . . "the subject must 'weave' a relationship to his act by his accounting for it" (Bakhtin, *TPA*, xii).

¹⁵ Four of Bakhtin's primary writings were directed toward the study of the novel. The first, and probably most well known, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, published in 1929, was a critique of Dostoevsky's novels. In it Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's books are distinctively *polyphonic*, meaning that in these

Mrs. Dalloway and *The Hours* since these novels provide excellent artistic representation of human life as a *dialogic process*¹⁶ wherein we find meaning through our interactions with others. As Lee Honeycutt summarizes, heteroglossia and polyphony, so obvious in the subject texts of this thesis, run counter to what Bakhtin calls "monologic" views of language that grew out of rationalist philosophies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that looked for a single overarching, authoritative voice and/or meaning in texts or looked for language that fit into prescribed forms (Ch. 1). *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* are ideal works in which to explore the concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony which, in turn, contribute to a broad outlook for exploring identity formation and for finding meaning in literature. It is important to emphasize that "meaning" in this Bakhtinian sense does not equate to a fixed knowledge or inalterable truth; rather, it is fluid and evolving within the particular global and local circumstance of dialogue. To specify meaning was not Bakhtin's ultimate goal even when he wrote as a literary critic. This suggests that employing a Bakhtinian lens to examine a text can follow an almost infinite number of paths with no definitive conclusions, yet I believe the approach can evoke a great deal of learning since I am committed to the idea that broad-based critical thinking serves people best.

works various characters' voices, often representing views in opposition to the author, are given as much significance as the author's. In a true polyphonic text, the characters are in active dialogue with the narrator (Dentith 41-42). James Joyce and Charles Dickens are examples of authors whose work clearly reflects this technique.

¹⁶The *dialogic process* (like dialogics or dialogism) refers to one's utterance or thought and the reception of that thought. Bakhtin writes in his essay "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination* that the dialogic process incorporates the idea that "every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (280), and "the "internal dialogism" of the word includes "the subjective belief system of the listener" (282). Also see footnote 3.

STRUCTURE OF STUDY

In this study I will next provide a review of some current literary criticism of the *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. Then, I review several texts by Bakhtin and Bakhtinian scholars who provide theoretical description for the construction of my analysis.

Following that, I present my argument showing how Bakhtinian concepts: dialogics, his architectonic model of identity formation, his ideas about ideology, heteroglossia and polyphony and his thinking about performed acts provide an effective framework for analyzing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. My employment of Bakhtinian theories in this analysis, while far from comprehensive, should portray their usefulness. To reiterate, I will focus in this thesis on the female protagonists and the *kairos* within each piece. In the conclusion of the paper, I will address more fully why my thesis is applicable and important for study and scholarship of the subject texts and of literature in general today.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE – PART ONE

--The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment in the possibility of going beyond them – Michel Foucault (The Foucault Reader)

MRS. DALLOWAY

Discussion of identity erupts quickly in almost any consideration of *Mrs. Dalloway* because Woolf's avant-garde novel employs a "stream of consciousness" technique to capture the thinking of her characters during a single day. Writing from this style and point-of-view seems itself a kind of modern portrait of identity, and Woolf's employment of it further does so because of her characters' attention to the details of their everyday existence. This "real" representation of thinking illuminates personal identity as it functions and is constructed vis-à-vis ideologies, relationships and material circumstances. Yet most scholars scrutinize the subject of identity in *Mrs. Dalloway* in terms that focus on Clarissa's formation of self as a product of the social ideologies within which she lives. Critics have frequently analyzed gender issues revealed in the text that emphasize feminist and queer element; and while I will not ignore these

important considerations, I focus on a theoretical approach that holds these aspects to be only some of the contributing factors to formation of self.

In a traditional vein of literary criticism, Shannon Forbes, in her article “Equating Performance with Identity: the Failure of Clarissa Dalloway’s Victorian ‘Self’ in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*,” compares and contrasts what she believes are two conflicting formations of identity in the character of Clarissa. She describes that “Victorians celebrated the idea that the subject was stable, whole, and unified” and that any deviation from this “real,” “moral, earnest and public” self was entirely disruptive (38). Forbes believes Woolf’s writing reflects this conception and suggests that Clarissa holds on to her role as Mrs. Richard Dalloway since it is “the only identity she has,” yet at the same time resents this role because of how it limits her and “functions as only a superficial and ineffective substitute for the self she covets” (39). In the Argument section of this thesis, by providing textual support, I will work to prove how Woolf portrays that Clarissa’s performing role is not completely superficial or meaningless.¹⁷ I believe a Bakhtinian analysis of the text strongly reinforces this and shows that in many ways in her performing as wife, mother, hostess and homemaker brings her satisfaction and enriches her life.

The attention to private consciousness, so obvious in the writing style of *Mrs. Dalloway*, causes many scholars, among them Ban Wang, to begin their arguments about

¹⁷ The concept of “performativity” related to repeatedly performing acts usually associated with one or another gender is usually attributed to Judith Butler who clarifies her conception in her book, *Gender Trouble*. She believes that it is acts or performativity that constitute gender and that these acts result in presenting an illusion of stable gender identity. More recently, Butler’s theories have come under criticism subjected to arguments like mine that purport that while performativity can sculpt identity, this identity is not limited to a male/female construction of self and that it is only one of many variables affecting construction of gender. Additionally I contend that performativity, that is, performance of everyday roles and tasks, provides a mooring of psyche as this paper works to convey.

identity in the novel from a position that criticizes the text's "preoccupation with private consciousness" which, Wang suggests:

presupposes an outmoded notion of the subject that is believed to be autonomous, self-contained, and fully conscious of itself and which is assumed to be the source of meaning and thought, independent of social structure, discourse, and systems of signification –a notion of the subject which has been stripped of its validity by contemporary critical discourse (177).

In his article "I on the run: Crisis of Identity in *Mrs. Dalloway*," Wang reiterates that private consciousness is not so "private and intimate;" that indeed, the consciousness/ subjectivity/ identity of the characters is constructed by language and sign systems and the symbolic order. It is crucial to consider the establishment of identity in relation to symbolic and social orders or ideologies, yet my argument, developed subsequently, stresses that attention must also be given to private consciousness and an individual's construction of self in a real, material or everyday sense.

Virginia Woolf recognized and sought to portray how both the private world and external environment constructs identity. No doubt she was deeply concerned with women's rights and opportunities; Clarissa is keenly aware of her "weaponless state (she could not earn a penny)" as an unskilled, fifty year-old woman in 1920s England (169). Woolf recognized that English women in her time often played roles within their societies, performing, as on stage, scripts written and directed by a patriarchal society. Claudia Barnett notes in her article "Mrs. Dalloway and Performance Theory," that in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, and in her play *Freshwater*, this issue is a central theme. Barnett underscores Clarissa's role playing in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as "the perfect hostess" yet broadens the way we might look at this performativity as Clarissa's way to express herself artistically. Like Barnett, Jacob Littleton proposes in his

article “*Mrs. Dalloway: Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-Aged Woman*” that Clarissa’s parties are her “creative self” and that she is, in fact, a consummate artist. Further, Littleton contends that against the world of “job, family, assets, business and power relationships” Woolf

places a world of private significance whose meaning is wholly irreducible to facts of the external world. . . and that by conceiving of personality as a private fact, apparently alienated from ‘public, political culture’ . . . Woolf shows Clarissa’s ‘actual’ existence --her identity engendered through her home and parties -- to be an unrecognized but fundamental contradiction of traditional assumptions about gender. (37)

I agree that performing small personal acts of creativity and forging relationships, no matter the ideological overlay, are the everyday behaviors a person often seeks to do to keep his/her life enriched and psyche healthy and was a critical point of Woolf’s writing.¹⁸ These activities, whether in line with gender expectations or not, are very often part of one’s identity that is not false but is rather arrived at and sustained by personal choice and pursued connectedness with others.

Vareen Bell reinforces in his article “Misreading *Mrs. Dalloway*” that Clarissa variously influenced. She is complicated and ambiguous. Bell writes that “neither Woolf nor her creation is easily subjugated, and Clarissa Dalloway – as she exists before mediation of the text itself – is far too complex a moral and intellectual being to be the obvious choice for an ideological model” (94). Bell claims that only through selecting specific evidence, often contradicted elsewhere in the novel, may any final and definite idea about Clarissa be made. I admire Bell’s attempt to “restore a perspective to the

¹⁸ For Woolf, the significance of everyday activities to individuals, especially to women was large. "One of these days Mrs. Brown will be caught," Woolf wrote in 1923, describing her longing to capture in words a single ordinary being. "The capture of Mrs. Brown will be the next chapter in the history of literature, and, let us prophesy again, that chapter will be one of the most important the most illustrious, the most epoch-making of them all" (From "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 3 Ed. Andrew McNeillie. New York: Harcourt, 1988. 388).

continuing discussion of Clarissa's story and character that has become distorted either by ideological claims upon her or by her transfiguration in the recent reinventions of her in fiction and film" (95).

Bell notes that Clarissa is engaging and complex because she is regarded with "varying degrees of skepticism" by the novel's other characters – we read about her often as others see her and we frequently see her consideration of how others see her. This moving in and out of many characters' thoughts, seemingly at random, is an important portrayal of the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony and a clear reflection of the I for the other aspect of Bakhtin's architectonic of consciousness becoming where one must "consider the psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us, and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these worlds of others . . ." (Bakhtin *DI* 338).

Although it has been useful for enhanced awareness and discussion of feminist issues to see Clarissa as the characterization of a repressed woman still trapped in the strictures of Victorian mores, it is time for us to broaden our readings of this classic text to see how her complex world, like our world today, pervades our psyches and contributes to our formation of identity in a multitude of ways. Woolf turns many cultural gender stereotypes and generalizations on their heads, and seems to do so more in an effort to portray how people exist in real life rather than promoting an exclusively feminist agenda.

Certainly an important theme and one that infuses many of Woolf's works and discussion of the concept of self within her works is war. Mary Mathis in her doctoral dissertation, "War/Narrative/ Identity -- Uses of Virginia Woolf's Modernism," explores

these concepts. She begins by reminding us that Woolf was born into a society “whose foundations were built on and shaken by violence; she was affected by structural, institutional, and personal violence; she lived through one world war and struggled through part of another” (28). Mathis goes on to suggest that “Woolf is bound to us in many ways; one of the strongest bonds is our shared birthright of violence; the seeming inevitability of force and coercion as a primary means of establishing and maintaining relations of power, the seeming inevitability of war” (29).¹⁹ A response to this statement might be an acknowledgement of how true this continues to be for citizens of the world today. Mathis explains that she has titled her extensive study “War/Narrative/Identity: Uses of Virginia Woolf’s Modernism,” because these three subject categories are so closely interrelated. Within the Argument portion of this thesis, I will explore how the ideological overlay of war and its effect on relationships with others who have gone through its horrors (or similarly a trauma like AIDS) are revealed in *Mrs. Dalloway* and in *The Hours* and that this reality is particularly influential on the consciousness becoming of these characters as it is on so many real world lives.

Many scholars focus on war and its fall-out in their studies of *Mrs. Dalloway* viewing Woolf’s post-war London and the characters in the text as disjointed and confused. Christopher Herbert in “*Mrs. Dalloway*, the Dictator, and the Relativity Paradox,” suggests that Woolf’s main goal, via the whole of her text, is to present an antipode to empirical and militaristic thinking through her commitment to the principle of relativity, the principle, that “nothing is one thing.” Clarissa reflects this thinking expressing frequently that she will not say that anyone is “this or that.” Herbert believes that *Mrs. Dalloway* conveys no central or authoritative truth, and that the novel chiefly

¹⁹ Woolf analyzes this process insightfully in her text *Three Guineas*.

envisions “two opposed zones of experience: on the one hand, that of coercion and violence; on the other, that of relativity” (107). He posits:

Those in sympathy with Woolf’s mode of thinking will conclude with her that it is precisely the overshadowing problem of violence in human life that requires us to free ourselves from making a supreme idol of logical coherence. . .the dream of a philosophical outlook cleansed of paradox is finally a sinister one fundamentally incompatible with the creation of a humane social world (118).

As important as it is to identify the great presence of war in Woolf’s novel and the message that blind compliance to authoritative thinking is pernicious to individual identity formation and to the welfare of nations, it is but one significant influence on the individual consciousness becoming of the characters in the book.

Herbert points out that Woolf presents an excellent model of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “giving full range to a symphonically rich multiplicity of competing voices or points of view” (114). Interestingly, Herbert asserts that because *Mrs. Dalloway* works toward no unifying or whole meaning, the text is in direct contradistinction to the “artistic and higher unity” which he believes Bakhtin proposes as extant in all novels.²⁰ I argue with Herbert’s interpretation that Bakhtin suggest that one overarching meaning exists in all novels. Bakhtin’s philosophy and his writing, particularly cogent to this point in *The Dialogic Imagination*, center on concepts of open-endedness and suggest that some novels present many different and even competing meanings and perspectives.²¹

²⁰ Herbert could more accurately have used Bakhtin’s term polyphony. Bakhtin’s three terms: polyphony, heteroglossia and carnival, are tied to the material and physical context of people and language and are employed by Bakhtin, in part, to evoke a sense of democracy, a gathering voices of the general populace, and to reflect the reality of day to day living and to suggest an anti-authoritarian stance against the “state” via language and literature. (See Hirschkop, Holquist and Dentith.)

²¹ Bakhtin writes: “The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and

REVIEW OF LITERATURE –PART TWO

I'm always sort of bewildered when people say, "How do you want people to leave this movie? What do you want them to come away with?" I don't want them to feel any which way. I hope they have the reaction that I did, which is to feel the sharpness of experience and, you know, how wonderful living is. Even though we walk around whining or in despair or in trouble for different reasons, I thought about just how beautiful it is to love someone and to be in your life. The day-to-dayness of it. The hours I mean, that's what I walked away with. I thought about how exquisitely this story is poised between despair and hope. That's the way a lot of us feel a lot of the time--especially now.
---Meryl Streep (*Newsweek*)

THE HOURS

It is interesting to note that since 1998 three novels have been written that imitate and pay respect to *Mrs. Dalloway*. In “Rewriting Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*: Homage, Sexual Identity, and the Single Day Novel by Cunningham, Lippincott, and Lanchester,” scholar James Schiff quotes Michael Cunningham who explains a reason that authors are drawn to Woolf’s novel is because “[T]he whole human story is contained in every day of every life more or less the way the blueprint for an entire organism is present in every strand of its DNA,” and because they are drawn to Woolf’s conviction “that what’s important in life, what remains at its end, is less likely to be its supposed climaxes than its unexpected moments of awareness, often arising out of unremarkable experience, so deeply personal they can rarely be explained” (389). Schiff’s article provides astute reviews of the three echo texts and, in particular, focuses on the tight parallels in story, motif, symbolism, theme etc. between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Most pertinent to my paper, Schiff explores how Cunningham provides a “many mirrored” variation on concepts of identity, personal desire and choice which coalesce with the text of *Mrs.*

little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages – rather, he welcomes them into his work. . . . Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embedded and already objectified” (*DI* 299).

Dalloway to create heightened impetus and inspiration for enlarged thinking about these ideas.

Schiff highlights that Cunningham's narrative engages in dialogue with Woolf's text. Schiff notes some of the most obvious differences and updating, including notably, that AIDS replaces World War I as the traumatic circumstance that has taken the lives of so many young men and that Clarissa Vaughan -- a late twentieth century "Mrs. Dalloway" as her bi-sexual friend and once lover, Richard, calls her -- is in a happy lesbian relationship, although she thinks frequently of what would have been if she and Richard, now dying from HIV, could have been happy in a long-term relationship. As it did for Clarissa Dalloway, a suicide interrupts the party Clarissa is planning. But in Cunningham's restructuring of the text, it is Clarrisa Vaughan's friend Richard, plagued by psychological and physical deterioration from AIDs, who throws himself from a window to his death just before the commencement of Clarissa's party that she is holding in his honor for winning a literary award. The parallels, twists and contradictions of *The Hours* in comparison to *Mrs. Dalloway* contribute to turning traditional feminist and social constructionist views of both books off-kilter as is more completely examination of this effort follows in the Argument section of this thesis. I contend Schiff make clear that *The Hours* serves as an ideal piece for Bakhtinian analysis where the architectonic model of identity formation, principles of dialogics, attention to material reality, and concepts of heteroglossia -- where language and literature are echoed through time -- are easily and rewardingly researched as further revealed in my argument.

As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, issues of identity and consciousness emergence are at the heart of *The Hours*. Cupping postmodern narrative at the center of her evaluation of

Cunningham's text, Natalia Povalyaeva looks closely at the issue. In her article "The Issue of Self-identification in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Cunningham's *The Hours*," Povalyaeva notes, however, that although postmodernist narrative (found in both texts) usually works with conceptual distancing from a source text, *The Hours* is not much different than *Mrs. Dalloway* in exploring self-identification. She explains, "What looks common to both writers is, first of all, their understanding of the ways and methods of self-identification of a personality in the world: communication with other people, love, family, career, art" (270). The text reflects keenly Bakhtin's insistence that "consciousness can only realize itself, however provisionally, in dialogue with the other" and that a great deal of the discovery of ourselves comes from knowing ourselves in our relationship with others. (Dentith 44).

Lorraine Sim highlights in her article, "No 'Ordinary Day', *The Hours*, Virginia Woolf and Everyday Life," that Woolf used many of her writings, "The Mask on the Wall" and *To the Lighthouse*, and *Mrs. Dalloway* among them, to explore the manner in which domestic events and spaces initiate a vast range of social, political and philosophical mediations and reflections and to portray that a woman's day to day world was as important as men's world of more publically noticed concerns. However, Sim criticizes that Cunningham's *The Hours* does not remain true to Woolf's effort and dramatizes moments and "ultimately undermines the everyday in Woolf's life in favor of stereotypical narratives about mad women writers and their domestic melodramas" (68). Sim believes that while the text begins by suggesting that it is indeed a tribute to the everyday aspects of Virginia Woolf's life in 1923, it actually privileges "melodrama and non-everyday spectacles." Although I concede Sim's point, I do not believe

Cunningham's text portrays the everyday merely as an afterthought. Portions of *The Hours* crystallize a perspective that Woolf sought to portray – that women's day to day domestic existence is critical to their identities and that, while, for some, like Laura Brown, the acts are overwhelmingly a repercussion of constrictive ideologies, for others, like Clarissa Vaughan, the occupations are fulfilling and enriching.²² Bringing attention to these points is critical to engaging students of these texts to consider how identity is so deeply individual and with heightened awareness of this fact and of ideological influences on identity formation, agency and empowerment can grow.

As Mary Jo Hughes notes in her article, "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Postmodern Artistic Re-Presentation," in addition to the usual focus on the opening up of new voices when a post-modern re-presentation of older texts occurs, there is much to gain in looking at other aspects of why and how a new work transforms its predecessor. Hughes's article reflects a Bakhtinian theoretical analysis of heteroglossia in the novel, in the sense that language reflects its past and will continued to be echoed in the future as is eloquently expressed in his quotation opening this thesis. Hughes asserts that in *The Hours* literature is presented as establishing and perpetuating the circle of life; Virginia Woolf dies in the opening of *The Hours* but has given birth to *Mrs. Dalloway* that gives life to Laura Brown. Laura's son Richie grows up to be another writer and, Hughes proposes, "the screen version of *The Hours* reflects yet another world that was created

²² Excellent books on this constrictive ideology of the 1950s include: Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound*, and Joanne Meyerowitz's *Not June Cleaver*.

and animated by the love of life and of art that preceded it, however shadowed by the threat of loss” (8).²³

Although I only touch lightly upon the film version of *The Hours* in this paper, I believe it is enriching to the study of *Mrs. Dalloway* and Cunningham’s text, perhaps particularly when adopting a Bakhtinian perspective in analysis, to watch and contemplate the movie. It is important to note, as Lorraine Sim points out, that the film, even more than the novel, plays up the dramatic moments of Cunningham’s text and in doing so subdues, to the point of snuffing out, some of the key objectives of Woolf and Cunningham’s texts. Sim argues that while *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* are ostensibly committed to portraying first and foremost ‘the everyday’, the mundane, which as Woolf and Cunningham documented consistently was a goal of their texts, the film highlights Woolf’s and Richard’s suicides and has the effect of creating a causal relationship between a woman’s everyday at-home life and madness, which, I agree, was not meant to be the overriding message of Cunningham’s novel. Additionally, Sim confirms my belief that the film presents Woolf narrowly as an eccentric, sick woman which, as Cunningham makes some effort to convey in his text, was far from the truth.

Carol Iannone in, “Woolf, Women and “The Hours,” and Daniel Mendelsohn in his review titled, “Not Afraid of Virginia Woolf,” provide interesting studies of the similarities and differences between Woolf’s text, Cunningham’s work, and the film. As both authors note, the film was tremendously successful and struck a chord in many

²³ Although I am unable to discuss thoroughly the topic of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* as works of art or aesthetic ideals, this kind of analysis would work well within a Bakhtinian theoretical framework since he was deeply concerned with the complexities of valuation of literature as an aesthetic object and with the aesthetic perspectives of reader, writer and text. In his essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” Bakhtin grounds aesthetics in what he sees as the inescapable relationship with others in which our own sense of self is constituted and which our sense of the other is also constituted. To Bakhtin, aesthetic form is neither the natural shape into which a life (character) falls, nor an arbitrary assignment of shape upon the life by the author but it emerges from a relationship between the two.

women; no doubt because of the feminist bent exaggerated in the movie; and, I hypothesize, also because with visual presentation some of the material realities described in text become more intense for many. Iannone conveys that the feminist theme is the focus of the movie and indeed extends her argument to say that, “*The Hours* seems to suggest that only in a world from which men have been ruthlessly banned or dispatched can women hope to achieve a modicum of genuine happiness” (52). I acknowledge, along with Iannone, that the movie, like the book, shows women’s progress in terms of achieving equality with men in the western world, but believe that if the movie were to remain true to Cunningham’s text, the expressed feelings of the protagonist women would not be so one-sidedly anti-male. Cunningham sought, as did Woolf, to represent aspects of male and female relationships as they exist in real life: complicated, conflicted, interdependent and nearly impossible to categorize, quite obvious, for example, in Clarissa’s relationships with daughter, Richard and Sally.

In his piece, Mendelsohn declares that Mrs. Dalloway was the everyday woman that Virginia Woolf alluded to so much in her writing before and after *Mrs. Dalloway* was published. Woolf, he claims, achieved the proper subject and style of the “authentic women’s literature” she was striving for and that she emphasized in her lectures that were later published as *A Room of One’s Own*. He notes that the novel reflects the values of a woman’s life, the kind of real experiences that lay “hitherto buried in interstices” of traditionally (male-centered) recorded moments (150). Mendelsohn believes the same objective is captured in Cunningham’s text.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE –PART THREE

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined.

–Mikhail M. Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination*)

MIKHAIL M. BAKHTIN

Bakhtin's texts are known to be difficult to decipher;²⁴ they can be vague, convoluted, complex and repetitious. Because of the abstruseness of much of Bakhtin's writing, in this thesis I frequently depend on explanatory and interpretive texts by several Bakhtinian scholars that will be reviewed below. I do, however, cite directly from Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act, Art and Answerability* and sections of his *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

Toward a Philosophy of the Act is one of Bakhtin's earliest works. The parts of it that have been recovered were written around 1920, but because pieces are missing, and because of the nature of Bakhtin's writing, it is often cryptic. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* was part of a major philosophical treatise Bakhtin began but never finished in which he sought to fuse the three great subjects of Western metaphysics -- epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics -- into a single theory of the deed. Portions of this writing however became integrated into Bakhtin's text that was later translated into English as *Art and Answerability*. The text is critical, however, because it introduces some of the philosophical, psychological and sociological questions that he continued to grapple with for the remainder of his life, including his concept of dialogics, his architectonic model of

²⁴See Holquist, Gardiner, and Dentith .

identity formation, his concepts of ethics and his thoughts on aesthetics. As Michael Holquist's foreword to this short work recounts, it was written by a young Bakhtin who was studying, lecturing and debating the ideas of Immanuel Kant. Bakhtin studied with many scholars involved in the popular Neo-Kantian movement of the time. This movement returned to the philosophies of Kant that had fallen from favor in academia. Recognizing that Bakhtin's text is a response to Kant, particularly that Bakhtin is seeking to move from the purely theoretical to the lived experience and moment of one's thought, act or deed, is especially helpful.²⁵

In this essay Bakhtin focuses on questions which "lie on the boundary of aesthetics and moral philosophy" (*TPA* xi). Here Bakhtin is concerned with human action -- the "world of the event," "the world of the performed act--" and argues that the moral girding of this framework is "answerability" where every utterance and action anticipates a listener, observer or responder because, based on his philosophical and religious beliefs, Bakhtin was convinced that someone or some moral authority exists beyond ourselves to which we must be accountable (*TPA* xii). The distinctive concretization of answerability is a concept that Bakhtin introduces in this essay but that infiltrates all of his writing; that is, a "non-alibi in Being." In his introduction to *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, S. G. Bocharov translates this concept: "a human being has no right to an alibi -- to an evasion of that unique answerability which is constituted by his actualization of his own unique,

²⁵ Lee Honeycutt explains, "Prior to Kant, most modern philosophy had been divided between John Locke's belief that we can know the world only through our senses and René Descartes' idea that logical inquiry was our sole path to a knowable reality. Kant's breakthrough was to insist on the necessary interaction -- the dialogue -- between the two. Kant argued that thought is a synthesis of two sources of knowledge, sensibility and understanding" (Ch 2). But at the end of the nineteenth century philosophical and academic theories abounded that were founded upon positivism and empiricism. Neo-Kantianism grew in reaction to this trend.

never-repeatable 'place' in Being; he has no right to an evasion of the once-occurrent answerable act or deed" (xxii).

It emerges in this early Bakhtin text that central to his theories is his belief that our capacity to have consciousness at all is based on "otherness." To re-emphasize, he generates here his idea of the architectonic of "consciousness becoming" based on self-perception and other perception that are constructed around the relational models of: "I for myself," "the other for me," and "I for the other," that incorporates an "I as the other sees me" component.²⁶

In his lengthy essay "Discourse in the Novel" found in the text *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Bakhtin focuses on the study of literary forms or genres as examples of dialogics. Bakhtin presents particular ways of perceiving the novel versus other literary forms that Woolf and Cunningham almost appear to have had specifically in mind while writing the texts under examination here. This is especially true in regard to how themes and messages in these books are revealed through different languages and speech types -- dispersed into "the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia" (263). Bakhtin emphasizes the sense of history and social determination found in novels' dialogic notions of language that are usually absent in poetic literary forms. He stresses that poetic forms can proceed from a unity of language while the novel form does not since it seeks to present real life and lived language. Fictional narrative Bakhtin proposes, "not only does not require these conditions [unity of language and style] but . . . even makes of the internal stratification of language, of its social heteroglossia and the variety of individual voices in it, the prerequisite for authentic novelistic prose" (264). Bakhtin's

²⁶ See also footnote 6 and 13

ideas about heteroglossia and polyphony are important to the analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* in this thesis because they contribute to aspects of ideology and, in turn, to formation of identity.

Lee Honeycutt's dissertation "What Hath Bakhtin Wrought? Toward a Unified Theory of Literature and Composition." conveys how radical Bakhtin's theories were in the first half of the twentieth century since Western philosophy up to that time thrived in the rationalist tradition that viewed language, philosophy, and truth perceived awareness in solely monologic terms.²⁷ Honeycutt explains that Bakhtin's concept of dialogics resurrects a communication model of speaker/utterance/listener, speech and writing that occurred in the Middle Ages when rhetoric was adapted to the study of texts. He explicates: "Both modeling schemes stress the persuasive aspect of discourse and emphasize the importance of the other, the listener, in its generation. Both frameworks are oriented toward contextuality: the practical, ideological environment in which discourse is conducted" (Ch. 4).²⁸

This concept of communication that includes the aspects of rhetorical modeling, speaker, listener and kairos is discussed by Don Bialostosky in "Architectonics, Rhetoric, and Poetics in the Bakhtin School's Early Phenomenological and Sociological Texts." His essay explains how *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* sets itself against Kant's theoretical constructs working to explicate that acts come before rationalization of acts and thus are at the core of any concrete or ethical plan or design. Bialostosky illuminates Bakhtin's contention that consciousness is always "answerable," writing that

²⁷ Coincidentally, Virginia Woolf was writing her modern novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* at about the same time.

²⁸ Because of its comprehensiveness and clarity, Honeycutt's dissertation would be a useful introductory text to Bakhtin in any post-secondary English course.

for Bakhtin, consciousness, even unarticulated consciousness is “always evaluative and includes an *ought* or a desire in connection with that of which it is conscious” (360).

Bialostosky stresses that for Bakhtin, thoughts too are communicative and social acts. His article shows how Bakhtin’s writings evolved to apply his architectonics concept of identity- I for myself, I for the other, the other for me - to all social activities. Bakhtin believed as well that the conscious subject is dialogically constructed within socially/historically specific contexts and can only exist through “its materialization in social and intersubjective signs” – that is, influenced by ideology, the social world of values and meanings (87). Gardiner also emphasizes that, contrary to many twentieth century theorists, Bakhtin does not portray ideology as a ‘negative’ or distorted form of knowledge (8). Gardiner, somewhat critically, concludes that Bakhtin bases this notion on his “idiosyncratic philosophical anthropology and a utopian conception of the dialogic community” which he believes helps explain Bakhtin’s position that “a philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy” (8). In other words, Bakhtin believes that within their specific place and time, men and women seek to be morally responsive to others because their thoughts and deeds, all founded in language, are inescapably answerable because they each depend on the other to have meaning and that this individual awareness can prevail for the betterment of all. Gardiner calls Bakhtin idealistic and adds that Bakhtin is often criticized for his “theoretical failure to come to grips with the extra-superstructural features of the social world, and his concomitant hyper-inflation of the critical potentialities of art and aesthetics” (189). However, he concedes that because Bakhtin envisions ideology as a material force in its own right, he recognizes that “when colonized (or ‘monologized’) by dominant cultural forms and institutional arrangements,

particular ideological discourses can play a crucial role in the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations” (7). Gardiner’s conclusion this is that Bakhtin was not naïve, but fully understood that the “better a person understands the degree to which he is externally determined . . .the closer to home he comes to understanding and exercising his real freedom” (75). The impact and reality of this dictum is honestly portrayed and ripe for analysis via the characters of Clarissa Dalloway, Clarissa Vaughan, Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf in the novels examined here.

CHAPTER THREE

ARGUMENT

Our existence is a shared/social one and our problem is that of becoming individuals, finding an authentic mode of personal existence.—Martin Heidegger (quoted in Magee, 213)

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES APPLIED TO ANALYSIS OF *MRS. DALLOWAY* *AND THE HOURS*

This section takes several of Bakhtin's basic tenets: dialogics, his architectonic concept of identity formation, his ideas about ideology and concepts of language, in particular heteroglossia and polyphony, to support the thrust of my thesis. My goal is to prove that applying a Bakhtinian critique of *Mrs. Dalloway and The Hours* can provide insight and broad avenues for exploring literature and for discovering meaning that speaks to individual readers in the here and now. To reiterate, I will focus on the protagonists of the novels and the kairos of the characters in these books. This critique focuses on specific instances within the books and centers on the material/everyday reality of characters -- how they think, respond and act within a specific situation -- while at the same time giving credibility and weight to sociological/ideological aspects of being and language. Thus, my analysis goes beyond traditional critique and literary theory to apply what Bakhtin scholar Simon Dentith describes as the "distinctive Bakhtinian double emphasis: both the ethical stress on the irreducibility of the individual and the recognition

of the complex social determinations [ideologies] that make that individual unique” (63). The first Bakhtinian concept is expressed within Bakhtin’s writing in various ways, but the ideas I employ here relative to this “irreducibility of the individual” are consciousness becoming, that I equate to identity formation, and individuals’ answerable acts, that implies speech and deeds which always acknowledge a listener and relationship with that listener.²⁹ As this paper has earlier discussed, these ideas exist within the all embracing concept of dialogics that understands communication and meaning as emerging on the boundaries of consciousness between two or more people. Bakhtin elucidates his concept:

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a consciousness (toward a *thou*). . . The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means to *communicate*. . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. . . . I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and acceptance). (*PDP* 287)

Bakhtin’s simplified description of his dialogics as I for myself, the other for me, and I for the other, provide useful categories with which to explore Woolf and Cunningham’s texts. The analysis then can continue to follow Bakhtinian logic to further consider how within this architectonic (via our acts and deeds) “all the values of actual life and culture are arranged” (Bakhtin *TPA* 54).

Bakhtin’s adherence to his highly individualistic moral philosophy and refusal to accept conventionally defined theoreticism and determinism follows a similar conceptual

²⁹ See editorial introductions to the texts: *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, *Bakhtin: Ethics and Mechanics* and *Dialogism*.

approach to that of Woolf and Cunningham as expressed through the multiplicity of voices, messages, themes and unique moments in their novels. Valerie Nollan defines:

Bakhtin's ethics is "one of the here and now, particularized, and made answerable in the individual human being who has potentially limitless choices to make at every given moment of his or her life. Thus each individual not only accepts full responsibility for his or her thoughts and deeds (the non-alibi in being), but also possesses unlimited choices, or, to put it another way, a healthy freedom of the will. (xv)

Yet Bakhtin, like Woolf and Cunningham, never denies social and ideological influences on a person, and throughout his writing refers to the ideological reality and the situatedness of each individual at any given moment that influences language, thought and action.

It seems worthwhile to note that Bakhtian theory is one of many existing and several emerging theories, often labeled "reconstructive" criticism, that move beyond the problems of language to examine how writers and readers create meaning in their textual encounters. These theories strive to evoke increased awareness of how personal identity evolves and how language carries meaning both within and outside of the pages of literature. For example, Susan Hekman's proposal in *Material Feminisms* is that universal theories of feminism are no longer valid and that a new critical stance should be "not as one who 'debunks,' but as one who 'assembles'" (88). However, with justifiable concern, Hekman reminds us that we need to remember that "[p]rivileging reality over construction, the modernist settlement, is not preferable to privileging construction over reality, the social constructionist alternative. What we need is a conception that does not presuppose a gap between language and reality that must be bridged, that does not define the two as opposite." Hekman concludes that "We need a "more complex theory that incorporates language, materiality, and technology into the equation" (92). I submit that

these emerging theories, in alignment with Bakhtinian thinking, are important today in our, at once, highly individualized yet globalized world. Enhanced attention to one's very unique self in specific material environments and ideological surroundings can embolden agency that may be expressed in both personal and broadly social ways.

In his earlier writing, through the 1920s, Bakhtin emphasized predominantly his conviction that meaning only emerges between people, but later he and his compatriots, P. N. Medvedev and V. N. Voloshinov, wrote of relationships between people that were understood in more profoundly sociological/ideological ways than the abstractedly philosophical bent of his first presentations. And, as much as Bakhtin's expressed thought began to converge more consistently with Voloshinov's and Medvedev's, who are quite explicitly Marxist in stressing the importance of class in much of what they conveyed, Bakhtin most frequently articulated that he felt "utterances" remained unique and particular and were "not merely a reflection of the underlying base" (Dentith14).³⁰ Bakhtin does acknowledge the importance of class as is reflected clearly in his writings about heteroglossia and carnival, yet usually his concerns about class surface in the subtle ways in which the multiple contradictions of social life operate and influence speech and acts.³¹ Thus, this thesis skims only briefly issues of class in the texts. However, other ideologic concerns, the subject of much traditional criticism, are incorporated here and provide excellent material for the construction of a Bakhtin based analysis of *Mrs.*

Dalloway and *The Hours*.

³⁰ Much discussion has developed around the Marxist/non-Marxist nature of Bakhtin's writing. For good summaries of this see the Gardiner and Dentith.

³¹ See footnote 20.

ARGUMENT: MRS. DALLOWAY, OVERVIEW

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is so exemplary of the omnipresence of ideology, of architectonic identity development, as well as heteroglossia, polyphony and dialogics in communication in literature reflecting everyday life, that it is possible to take almost any selection of pages of the novel and perform a rich study. That being said, here I will use the first fifteen pages of the novel to investigate the depth and a variety of meanings in this classic work vis-à-vis Bakhtinian thought.³²

IDEOLOGY IN MRS. DALLOWAY

Since Virginia Woolf is a writer in whose texts sexuality is, and has been for decades, a major critical concern – particularly in regard to ideology surrounding sexual orientation -- a discussion of this issue seems a good place to begin. It is essential to keep matters of sexuality, both material and ideological, in mind because they are so obviously a part of Woolf's texts and her life; however, my opinion contrasts with others who contend that *Mrs. Dalloway* first and foremost conveys an agenda of a repressed lesbian identity and with those who believe that the novel is primarily a feminist polemic.³³ Although these issues are important in Woolf's piece, and they are echoed in Cunningham's text, I contend this book is more broadly a cynosure for exploration of consciousness becoming, of I in relation to the other, than solely a piece for consideration of I in relation to ideological pressures.

³² Pages 3 through 18 of Harcourt's 1981 Harvest Book edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* are used.

³³ See, for example, "Mrs Dalloway: the Communion of Saints" by Suzette A. Henke in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (1981), Sarah Ahmed's "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, "Queer London in Literature," by Gregory Woods in *Changing English: Studies in Culture & Education*.

James Schiff argues, along the same lines as other critics, that Clarissa's "[s]exual orientation would appear to be largely toward women" in the book and that "she ends up in a rather chaste marriage that crushes her soul" (368). I interpret that the text conveys that Clarissa does not see her marriage as soul crushing and, in fact, overall for her, it is satisfying. Clarissa admires Richard as a hard worker, as a father, and appreciates that he shows his love for her by bringing her roses (118-22). Of course, segments of the text have been appropriated to satisfy the objectives of contradictory literary opinions. As Vareen Bell suggests, "Any conclusive reading of the novel (notwithstanding that he too comes to several within his article) must necessarily be achieved by a calculated selection of evidence that excludes salient contradictory evidence put there in plain view by Woolf herself" (94). *Mrs. Dalloway* conveys that the character of Clarissa exists in a socially and ideologically defined world that is also defined by her choices and her physical being and surroundings. She has doubts and musings about sexual attraction, lost opportunity and past personal decisions that are now irreversible, but this does not entirely discredit who and where she is at the present. She appreciates the "independence there must be between two people living together day in day out; which Richard gave her, and she him" (8), at the same time she and Peter, her ex-lover, still "lived in each other" (9), and simultaneously Clarissa revels in the morning, the morning she describes as "fresh as if issued to children on a beach" (3).

Some early passages of *Mrs. Dalloway* give an interesting take upon homosexual orientation where the ideological strictures of religion and social causes are attacked rather than restrictive conformist behavior regarding sexual preference (11-12). Clarissa's thoughts lead her to consider Miss Kilman, the cold religious activist who has

become a close friend of Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth. That she may be a love interest of her daughter's appears to be of no particular concern to Clarissa --or to anyone else. Rather, it is Miss Kilman's association with ascetic and self-sacrificing behavior, based on her ideological beliefs, that bothers Clarissa. She thinks to herself with relief that her daughter really still loves her dog more than her girlfriend: "better poor Grizzle than Miss Kilman. . . better distemper and tar and all the rest of it than sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book! Better anything, she was inclined to say. But it might be only a phase, as Richard said, such as all girls go through. It might be falling in love. But why with Miss Kilman?" (11).

While Clarissa's thoughts express that in "her experience, religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes); dulled their feelings, for Miss Kilman would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she. . ." (12). It is not Elizabeth's attraction to Miss Kilman but her desire to embrace self-deprecating and self-righteous ideologies that cause Clarissa grief. Clarissa is looked down upon by Miss Kilman for her social-economic status which Clarissa deeply recognizes (11-12); however, to establish Clarissa as superficial and uncaring shortchanges the more complex character Woolf designs in the text. Clarissa's continued inner and outward dialogue conveys in the opening pages and throughout, that she is sensitive to the plight of others and often does what she can, given her environment and personality, to give help and support to people around her: she admires and supports her husband, invites people to her party and visits her sick friend in a nursing home, "[t]imes without number" (6). Although the character of Clarissa is critiqued for her

superficiality and privileged existence, her constant introspection brings to the fore the complex reality of any individual within a modern social environment.³⁴

The first sections of the novel are representative of the remainder of the novel that is an almost incessant internal dialogue, and sometimes external expression, or characters' thoughts and the thoughts and words of others. A clear relationship to Bakhtin's architectonic framework of I for myself, I for other, and the other for me, inextricably tied to answerable acts, that take on an ethical nature and elicit the "ought" response is obvious. For example, Clarissa's criticism about Miss Kilman causes deep anguish for Clarissa that she likens to a spectre which at any moment has power to "make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and make all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love!" (12).

Throughout the book Clarissa finds fault with organized religion, the British Empire, its monarchy, and other ideological overlays that are inescapably part of her day to day existence (7, 17), yet she consistently sees aspects of these sociological constructs that often provide palliative aid and give meaning to people's lives,. The passing of a dignitary's car, perhaps the Queen or Prince, brings "a spirit of religion" to the faces that see it (14); even Clarissa stands for a moment with "a look of extreme dignity" (17). On the other hand, she seems not naïve about the fact that the poor masses, are blindly "... ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth"(18) and that suffering due to the war has been severe: "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them

³⁴ There are many articles that examine the social snobbery of Clarissa Dalloway including Wang, Bell and Littleton's.

all, all men and women, a well of tears. “Tears and sorrow” (9). Yet pride in English heritage is indelibly stamped upon its citizens and upon Clarissa, and also invests in them “courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing” (10). This is not to say that the horrors of state-sponsored war and the realities of social inequality are not obvious in almost any reading of this text.

While reading this novel nearly a century after it was written it is understandable to envision a woman’s position in London in 1923 as repressed, controlled and dominated by men; but, it is worth remembering that in comparison to any earlier era in the country, women had a great deal of freedom. They had just obtained voting rights, had many modern conveniences that allowed them leisure time that earlier generations could hardly have conceived of and, particularly in large cities, women were experiencing an empowerment in regard to choices of vocation, lifestyle and independence that was relatively quite extensive; and although Woolf strongly advocated women’s rights in much of her writing, I contend that in *Mrs. Dalloway*, she does not primarily promote a feminist agenda, but more accurately, lays out a text that muddles what would be a logical development of this objective. There are many times when Clarissa embodies traditionally conceived masculine traits such as control and power, and Septimus, the male protagonist, along with other male characters, exhibit traditionally feminine ones like romance and surrender. As Jeanette McVicker notes,

It is Clarissa, not Septimus, who is moved by thoughts of Empire and strength; it is Clarissa, not Septimus, who needs to be in control of her surroundings and maintain order. On the other hand, it is Septimus, not Clarissa, who pays attention to nature; it is Septimus, not Clarissa, who believes that love must conquer war and death. (178)

McVicker extends her analysis to conclude that Clarissa has not married for love, and is not maternal. However, I find a great deal of language in *Mrs. Dalloway* that refutes this. Even within the first dozen pages we read that Clarissa finds satisfaction in her marriage. She believes she made the right decision in marrying Richard and is preoccupied with concerns about her daughter (8, 11, 12). Clarissa is in many ways traditionally feminine, though in many other ways she is not. These unfeminine behaviors do not bring her scorn or dismissal; indeed, they create the complex individual that is Clarissa. Undoubtedly, she acknowledges that it is a male directed society she lives in, yet she forges her creative and energized self into the midst of it, the match of Hugh Whitbread and his colleagues, “the gentlemen of England that night in Buckingham Palace” (17). Like them, Clarissa, too, is proud to plan and have guests at a party (17).

IDENTITY FORMATION IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*: OVERVIEW

Much of McVicker’s article, “Identity and Difference in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*,” argues that “‘Identity’ defines what is at stake for the novel’s society” (172). McVicker, Wang, Povalyaeva and others propose, and I agree, that Clarissa derives her identity – her self – from her family, from her friends, from the British Empire, and from her material reality which she has helped to construct. However, McVicker claims Clarissa’s “instances of ‘slippage’ where these facts of her identity are called into question, reveal Clarissa’s lack of a ground (and reveal even more that there *is* no ground for the Self)” (174). McVicker suggests, as does Shannon Forbes, that for Clarissa, “Reason (sanity) is tied to tradition and insanity occurs when there are threats or perceived threats to its hegemony” (173). I refute this assessment and submit that although the text reveals fissures in Clarissa’s sanity, or perhaps more accurately, shows her depressive and

disconnected thoughts relative to many doubts and frustrations she has had in her life, not merely those where she feels she has broken with tradition. These would include: her aging, her physical characteristics, her precarious relationships, war, etc. Similarly, my interpretation contrasts with critics, like McVicker, and Forbes, who claim that tradition forces an order on Clarissa that she is compelled to accept. Forbes argues that Clarissa “desperately desires” to possess a Victorian unified self” and supports her view by emphasizing how Clarissa finds solace and stability in the city of London which Forbes believes represents the patriarchal world that, like the tolling of Big Ben, gives order to Clarissa’s existence (40). Although, I agree that Clarissa is indeed seeking an external grounding of herself and unification of her identity, I do not believe she gains this by living in London, but rather she obtains it through her interactions with others and with her day to day environment and how she connects and creates within it.

Clarissa is invigorated by her customary environment: “Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved” (7), “Bond street fascinated her” (11), etc.. She is moored by her casual re-connections with others in her life, for example, Miss Pym “liking her, trusting her” is a “wave that she let flow over her” (13). As Bakhtin conveys, we give order to things so that we can understand our own existence (Hirschkop 17). Of course this order is always perceived from the vantage point of our unique circumstances –“related to demands and requirements posed by the nature of the situation . . . in the realm of everyday social existence” (Gardiner, 87). Connections with others are what critical to forming Clarissa’s identity, yet, because even these most personal and day-to-day experiences evolve

through language that is necessarily steeped in a social milieu, it is impossible to be separated from an identity that is not, to at least some degree, shaped by society, institutions and empires.

It is nearly impossible to have understanding that entirely transcends our particular being in a moment. I think this is strongly exemplified in the way Clarissa expresses her connection with World War I and its aftershocks in the text. Some critics posit that the horrors of war are non-existent for Clarissa.³⁵ Yet, the kairos for Clarissa is five years after the end of World War I, and even in the frame of the single day time-span of the novel, the resonances of war are not erased; it continually revisits her consciousness and her relationships. For example, she recalls hearing news the night before of a soldier's death and recalls Lady Bexborough's telegram relaying that her son John was killed (5). Though the war seems nearly too tragic to consider, its "well of tears" still omnipresent, and though it is "over; thank Heavens -- over," its realities continue to invade the day, putting fissures in an orderly world and repeatedly laying a fog of *weltschmerz* over Clarissa and over London (9,5).

MATERIAL REALITY and IDENTITY FORMATION IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Unquestionably, Woolf directly sought, in part, to confront the ideology of limited, prescribed roles of women in 1920s England in her writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*, but rather than explicitly pushing a strict feminist agenda, we know from her personal writing, interviews and lectures that she sought to write a woman's novel that would emphasize the importance of domestic failures and successes in a woman's life and reveal their nobility; "The trick will be to render intact the magnitude of Clarissa's miniature but very real desperation; to fully convince the reader that, for her, domestic defeats are

³⁵ See Vareen Bell's "Rereading *Mrs. Dalloway*," for good discussion of this topic.

every bit as devastating as are lost battles to a general,” Cunningham describes Woolf as saying (84). This echoes Woolf’s claim in her essay “Modern Fiction”(1925), that we must “not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.” Her success with this effort allows *Mrs. Dalloway* to portray moments of lived experience, and answerable acts, that no matter how menial, form Clarissa and allow her to form her world of “private significance”: buying flowers, greeting friends, “irreducible facts of the external world” (Littleton 37).

Mrs. Dalloway conveys throughout how tightly a person’s thoughts and deeds are inscribed within his or her physical reality. Clarissa’s identity is influenced by her physical self. Interspersed frequently in her thoughts are concerns about her physical make-up and her aging, fifty-two year old body. Early on Clarissa interjects in her inner-dialogue:

Oh if she could have had her life over again! She thought stepping on the pavement, could have even looked differently. She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes. She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified very sincere. Instead of which she had a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird’s. (10)

Clarissa’s “consciousness becoming,” as is true for most living individuals, can’t escape the material reality of her physical being or personality.³⁶

Although often Clarissa’s enthusiasm seems youthful, she is an aging woman. “She felt very young; but “at the same time unspeakably aged” (8). Her disillusionment about growing old is clear as she continues to consider,

But often now this body she wore . . . this body with all its capacities, seemed nothing --- nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being

³⁶ It is interesting to note that Woolf was intensely aware of her own physical attributes according to her diaries, letters, etc. as noted in Lee’s and Caws’s biographies..

herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more: this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (11)

For many critics, Forbes and Wang among them, this passage, and the title of the novel in particular, point to what they believe is a “perceived” Clarissa Dalloway – who is not the “real” Clarissa Dalloway. In adhering to a Bakhtinian perspective in regard to identity or consciousness becoming, I argue that both are who Clarissa is. This dialogic becoming is never static but is indeed formed at any given moment by situation and material reality. In examining this text with a Bakhtinian or material feminist approach, as Karen Barad espouses, we cannot privilege language and social constructionism and “deny the materiality of matter” (Barad 104). Ben Wang suggests that *Mrs. Dalloway* creates a conception of identity development that is not “as some entity foreclosed in the structure of language and constituted once and for all, but as a dynamic and unstable process involving both the imaginary and the symbolic, the unconscious and conscious” (178).

Woolf’s text reveals that Clarissa’s environment, her physical sense of self, and the choices she’s made affect who she is. And, regardless of her constraints, she plunges forth into her day despite continual doubts and fleeting, but recurring, depressive thoughts about what could have been, the prospect of aging, and possibility of dying. I posit that this is Woolf’s representation of reality, similar, I conjecture, to that of many real-life middle-aged women, who may feel they fall short of complete self-actualization and are constrained by physical phenomena,³⁷ yet do not feel doomed to live a

³⁷ The concept of self-actualization is prominent in psychology and most commonly centers around the concept of an individual’s motivation/desire to realize his or her full potential. The idea is often associated with the highest level of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, i.e., the final level of psychological development.

meaningless existence nor to wish to die rather than see another day. In my reading of the entire novel, but as is apparent even in the first few pages, Clarissa is, for the most part, creative and energized; she is “going that very night to kindle and illuminate” (5). Her attitude of *carpe diem* is palpable; she loves, “life; London; this moment of June” (4).

DIALOGICS AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Woolf portrays Clarissa’s identity as constantly evolving, indeed shaped primarily, as Bakhtin proposes, as her consciousness emerges through dialogic communication with others and with herself. Even within the relatively short sample of pages I examine here, this is obvious. In Bakhtinian conceptualization, a continuous dialogue with the ‘other’, with oneself (inner speech), and with the external world, involves the active construction of relations between I for myself, I for the other, and other for me. To reiterate, I for myself cannot be the complete source of identity and Bakhtin argues that it is the I for the other through which human beings fully develop consciousness because it incorporates the way in which others view me.³⁸

Because we experience Clarissa’s stream of consciousness, we constantly see her inner speech which variously agrees with, subsumes, or battles prior speech in her life, and especially the words of those close to her. There is certainly the Bakhtinian sense of heteroglossia, the many voiced-ness of words that take meaning in specific context, in the pages of the novel where we share Clarissa’s thoughts; and it is often the communication, not the words, that are important. Bakhtin emphasizes that “not words but the utterance of words have meaning” (Holquist *Answering* 313). Beginning on page

³⁸ This concept is discussed in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Here Bakhtin writes: “One must also consider the psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us, and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these worlds of others (living hermeneutics)” (338).

one of the novel forward, Clarissa reviews the ideas, not only the words, in her communications with people of her past and present, to create sense and meaning in her life. She contemplates the words of her old friend, her love interest, Peter Walsh, during a summer when she was eighteen years old. She tries to recall what he said to her as he came upon her alone in the garden then. “‘Musing among the vegetables’-- was that it? Or ‘I prefer men to cauliflowers’” (3). Clearly, it isn’t the exact words, it is his intent and the reception of her communication with Peter that remains part of her consciousness.

Continually, Woolf’s writing also immerses the reader in Clarissa’s development and maintenance of identity that is tied to I for the other/I as others see me. Much of Clarissa’s expressed sense of self-worth and self-doubt is connected to what she thinks Peter, Miss Kilman, Richard and others think of her. “‘A cold heartless prude’” Peter called her years ago” (8). Miss Kilman makes her “feel inferior” (12). Miss Pym’s “liking her, trusting her” solaces Clarissa (13). She is aware of this reality and chastises herself for its importance to her, “. . . half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make others think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew” (10).

A question several of the characters in the novel ponder and critics pose is whether Clarissa’s life has been a self-fulfilling prophesy, borne on the wings of what others think she should be, a victim of social construction, or whether it has indeed evolved from choices she was free to make. She alludes to this obliquely; years ago Peter predicted some aspect of who she would become: “She would marry a Prime minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said” (7). And, though a reader might question if her day to day existence is meant to be portrayed as a

sham, the text makes it soon apparent that, at least in large part, the interactions she has with others that has, and continues, to define Clarissa's identity and that she is a free-willed participant in the process: she chose Richard over Peter (7), she chooses to invite people to the parties she hosts, she decides to buy the flowers herself where her experience with the people she meets on this errand contribute to her consciousness becoming. It is clear that Clarissa's identity is never static, and is always fluidly in the process of becoming as she speaks with others. She too seems to acknowledge this: "She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. . . and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (9). Clarissa seems to be paraphrasing Bakhtin, who is absolutely convinced that self is always in flux, related to specific circumstances and always experienced from a particular point in time and space (Holquist "Existence as Dialogue," *Dialogism*). This underlining of the situatedness or contextuality of identity formation contributes to a broadened view of how every person is so uniquely individual and to an awareness of the agency attendant to this fact.

HETEROGLOSSIA and POLYPHONY AS A REFLECTION OF REALITY AND AS INFLUENTIAL ON IDENTITY FORMATION IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Woolf conveys a Bakhtinian commitment to various aspects of heteroglossia from her opening pages forward. *Mrs. Dalloway* is very obviously heteroglossic, even carnivalesque, reflecting non-normative and contesting, contemporary and emerging uses of words and phrases.³⁹ Woolf uses idioms, colloquialisms and frequently cockney speech interspersed throughout the text: "for Lucy had her work cut out for her," "What a

³⁹ See footnote 20. For a good overview of Bakhtin's conceptions regarding carnival see *Bakhtinian Thought*, Chapter 9 and *The Dialogics of Critique*.

lark! What a plunge!” (3) “In the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; . . . in the trump and the jingle” (4). In addition, many passages throughout the novel reflect subtly, and sometimes very obviously, the Bakhtinian notion that social history and prior years’ experiences are imbedded in language. The text reveals, as Bakhtin emphasizes, that words are already marked by history, bearing the traces of all types of past uses (Dentith 196). Examples abound of heteroglossia resonating as past literary language resurfacing and re-appropriated by others who decentralize or de-monologize words in any particular context to make them take on new meaning. The phrases from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* in a book in a store window which catch Clarissa’s eye while shopping: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/ nor the furious winter’s rages” are repeated both verbatim and in distorted re-figurement throughout the day.⁴⁰ These lines are never interpreted, by the narrator or characters; they are left to linger through the pages as they linger through years in history, to be subsumed, refracted, reinterpreted, etc. At the time Woolf was writing *Mrs. Dalloway* she was intensely studying Shakespeare Sophocles, Euripedes, Proust, and Joyce.⁴¹ The influence of the language of these authors infuses the novel and, though a fascinating study, is well beyond the scope of this thesis.

An obvious feature of *Mrs. Dalloway* is its portrayal of polyphony, made most acute perhaps due to the omniscient narrative point-of-view and the stream –of – consciousness of the major (and many minor) characters. Like Dostoevsky’s books that

⁴⁰ These lines are taken from the funeral song of Act IV, Scene II. The first six lines of this section from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, published by Cambridge University Press, 198, p. 1046, are:

Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast don,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

⁴¹ As noted by Maureen Howard in her foreword to the *Mrs. Dalloway* edition used in this thesis.

Bakhtin felt were so exemplary of this characteristic of novels, Woolf's text is distinctively polyphonic, giving the voices of the main characters as much authority as the narrator's voice. Thus the text reflects in Bakhtinian terms an acknowledgement of "the other" which influences both ideological themes and identity formation in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The "plurality of unmerged consciousnesses" exist in a form of true polyphony where valid voices, as Michael Gardiner explains, are "not subordinated to authorial intention or the heavy hand of the omniscient authorial /narrational voice" (24). In the sample pages I use for this discussion, the voice of Clarissa is prominent, but by page fourteen, when we are introduced to Septimus Smith and his wife Lucrezia, it is clear that other characters' voices are equally important, and remain almost entirely unmerged with Clarissa's (or others) throughout the book. As Christopher Herbert describes, "Rather than vesting the storytelling function in one central consciousness, [Woolf] distributes it among a fluid consortium of eighteen or so major and minor characters who take turns reciting the tale-except that it is barely a tale (consisting as it mainly does of events that would seem unworthy of narration by the standards of conventional fiction)" (113). Because she plainly emphasizes the voice of her war hurt hero, Septimus Smith, it is clear that Woolf's polyphony also serves to disrupt the status quo of Empire-backed participation of soldiers in war. As Christopher Herbert summarizes, *Mrs. Dalloway's* polyphony "dismantles much of the structure of traditional prose fiction as part of a radical strategy for 'altering current values' and forming a new contemporary mentality, one wholly alien, above all, to the mentality of dictatorship" (113). I believe that this influenced Woolf's choice to write her text as she did; however, I underscore that many rationales can be obtained within the text, and, as Bakhtinian

analysis would advocate, this kind of novel should be recognized as work useful for a process of analysis that is never closed but remains open to varied interpretation.

ARGUMENT: *THE HOURS*, OVERVIEW

It was Woolf's poignant life and work that captivated Michael Cunningham for years and inspired him to write *The Hours*. His novel provides ideal material for a Bakhtinian analysis tied in the spirit of dialogics, heteroglossia and polyphony to the study of *Mrs. Dalloway*. *The Hours*, like its "mother" text (in fact, *The Hours* was the title Woolf originally had given to her story) provides pointed exploration of identity formation drawn from interaction with others, from ideology, from language and from literature. Its characters' thoughts and words can be considered, as Bakhtin proposes, by looking at how characters establish utterances in their particular situations (Holquist *Dialogism* 63). That Cunningham chooses to build his novel around three days that fall in the beginning, middle and end of the twentieth century, makes the text resoundingly heteroglossic and polyphonic, while also contributing to a portrayal of the changing freedoms of women in the ideological settings within which they live their days.

IDEOLOGY IN *THE HOURS*

Cunningham opens his novel with a prologue that is a scene of Virginia Woolf on the day of her suicide in 1941. Several chapters later he flashes back to a day in June in 1923 when she is beginning to write *Mrs. Dalloway*. Again, although much has been made of the idea that *The Hours* like *Mrs. Dalloway*, seeks to convey the struggle of a repressed woman driven mad by a restrictive society to the point of killing herself, I believe Cunningham's intent and the phrases in this text do not suggest that this is the overriding meaning of the storyline that focuses on Woolf. As in the original piece, it is

obvious that ideology about women's limited roles is an issue, but it is also clear in Cunningham's work that Woolf is an independent and strong-minded female who has made an indelible mark on her world. It is also apparent that she suffers from a mental illness that totally incapacitates her ("the voices are back. . . the headache is approaching as surely as rain" (3-4)) and it is that which leads her to desire to take her life by drowning. The pages just following these lines contain Woolf's actual suicide note to her husband where she writes, "I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. . . If anybody could have saved me, it would have been you" (6-7). Although these sentiments could be construed as ravings of a mad woman, from what we know of Woolf from her personal writing and from others who wrote about her, they suggest that Woolf was concerned and dedicated to changing the world she lived in - bringing attention to the treatment of mental illness and limited life choices for women in European society. Woolf's social reality was not greatly oppressive; it was, sadly, the material reality of her extreme mental illness that drove her to suicide.⁴²

Literary critics who have applied gay or queer theory in looking at Cunningham's text focus on several scenes in the story including the instance where Woolf kisses her sister. They tie this thread with the more obviously erotic kiss between Laura Brown and her neighbor, Kitty, and the lesbian/bisexual orientation of Clarissa Vaughan and her lovers in their arguments.⁴³ Again, I believe that by using a Bakhtinian lens in viewing the novel we grow beyond limiting these women, their relationships, and these texts to any one particular theoretical orientation to an expanded consideration of the ways in which self evolves within the environments and interactional relationships with others.

⁴² This subject is particularly well researched and described in Lee's biography of Woolf.

⁴³ See Schiff (370), Ionnone (52).

Schiff notes that “a strict demarcation between queer and strait is problematic” in Cunningham’s text (368). He explains, “In *The Hours*, men and women desire touch and contact with one another and that desire often transcends or contradicts the narrow identity labels, via sexual orientation, that society has constructed” (368). As I see it, this is not because Cunningham wished to repress gay or bi-sexual realities, rather it is because he sought to create a novel that would, as Bakhtin encouraged via his theories, coax us to look at “the vastly complex ways in which words, voices, people and social groups act and react upon each other and are transformed in the process” (Dentith 15).

Nonetheless, the power and effects of ideology are important in *The Hours*. Unquestionably, in the “Mrs. Brown” sections of the book, the influence of ideological interpellation is extremely strong. The kairos for this young pregnant wife, mother of a young boy, with a husband recently returned from the war living in American suburbia in 1949, presents a particularly restrictive situation. Laura, her husband and son, like many families in the U.S. in this period, have moved to a rather sterile new home and neighborhood. Laura is subsumed by the popular mythology of the era that laid out a conformist model of the middle-class housewife. She, like many women of this era, has joined this segment in a desire to create a solid, rewarding home life for her husband who has fought overseas. Within the “Mrs. Brown” pages the situation is described: “Outside. . . young men walk the streets again, men who have known deprivation and a fear worse than death . . .” (45). Women in America at this time were attempting to build stable, secure homes against the uncertainty and fear occasioned by the Depression, anticommunist hysteria and the threat of nuclear war.⁴⁴ Laura thinks to herself that she

⁴⁴ See footnote 22 for reference to excellent texts on this subject.

has consented to perform simple and essentially foolish tasks, examining tomatoes, sitting under a hair dryer, etc., because it is “her art and her duty./Because the war is over, the world has survived, and we are here all of us, making homes, having and raising children, creating not just books or painting, but a whole world of order and harmony where children are safe. . .” (42) For many women the role was sufficient; for Laura, “it is almost enough” (44), but it clearly falls short in ways that begin to cause her to experience sinking depression. A personal identity emerging within this kind of domestic reality, though not without limitations and frustrations, seems to have been enough for Mrs. Dalloway, but fails Laura. Accepting this imposed identity seems inescapable to her if she remains in her home. Indeed, in this particular environment, for this particular woman, it is impossible for an identity to exist outside of the societally expected role even if “she goes to a store or restaurant she’ll have to perform” (145). Of course many theorists from Louis Althusser through Judith Butler have based nearly all of their writings on exploration of this topic. Althusser argues that there is no identity outside of the social community; that there is no individual who is not always already a subject.⁴⁵ This idea relates closely to Butler’s theory of performativity, which argues that identity cannot predate the gender it performs; thus Butler promotes that gender is something one does rather than something one is.⁴⁶ This seems all too true for Laura: “She is possessed

⁴⁵ Althusser was a French Marxist theoretician who has contributed significantly to the concepts of ideology and is attributed with the term interpellation which is when people are made to feel independent of social or market force when really they are not free of them at all.

⁴⁶ See footnote 17. However, it is worth citing here that Karen Barad. in her essay “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward and Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” in *Material Feminisms* (2008) critiques the seminal work of Judith Butler and develops a theory of what she calls “performativity” that can only be understood as an explicit challenge to Butler’s concepts. For Barad, performativity is a “materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist elaboration that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming “ (122) Butler’s theory, she concludes,” reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices [though she cannot explain how discursive practices produce material bodies]. We

(it seems to be getting worse) by a dream-like feeling, as if she is standing in the wings, about to go onstage and perform in a play for which she is not appropriately dressed, and for which she has not adequately rehearsed” (43). Adding to this, “She can’t always remember how a mother would act “(47). Thus, conveyed through Laura is that ideology and circumstances often very powerfully define us.

Although literary criticism focuses on Laura’s kiss with Kitty and interpretation abounds with the idea that Laura is a repressed lesbian and this causes her to leave her family, I adhere to the interpretation that she is much more trapped by her role as a middle-class suburban parent and wife than as a possibly closeted gay. In fact, the text does not discuss at all Laura’s personal life after leaving her home. We learn only that after giving birth to her second child, she leaves her family to become a librarian in Canada. What the text does reiterate about Laura’s reality is that as a suburban housewife she is a woman who does not feel comfortable in her skin. Her identity is as her unmarried self, Laura Zielski a “solitary girl” and “incessant reader” (40). She feels incapable in her performative role as wife and mother; she feels that she is “impersonating someone” and is “weary and beleaguered” by it (110). Laura finds her creative and intellectual challenge or outlet losing herself in books. Indeed, *Mrs. Dalloway* provides a text to reader dialogic situation that helps her begin to define herself. She craves reading the book, allowing herself another moment to read in bed before she goes downstairs to face her day.

She is taken by a wave of feeling, a sea-swell, that rises from under her breast and buoys her, floats her gently, as if she were a sea creature thrown

need to explain not only how the body is discursively constructed but how the discursive construction is related to the non-discursive practices that vary widely from one society to another” (121) . I join arms with Barad and add that it is imperative to include in this kind of a theoretical approach the biology and psychology of individuals in their material worlds as well.

back from the sand where it had beached itself—as if she had been returned from a realm of crushing gravity to her true medium, the suck and swell of saltwater, that weightless brilliance. (40)

Laura does not remain in the environment that has left her beached on shore. She chooses to leave her family. Although her decisions about many things up to this point, from marrying her husband to selecting fabrics in her home, have been permeated by mid-century American ideology, she still retains the ability to make a choice for herself. She does not escape responsibility for her actions, and the text underscores that despite the heavy hand of ideology, choices were hers to make and that she has the power to make future choices.

Judgment about the correctness or inappropriateness of Laura's decision to leave her family will be made by readers of this story. Laura's actions will have consequences. Bakhtinian philosophy suggest that any deed is "answerable" and that each person has a "non-alibi" in his or her existence – there is no escape from ourselves or our acts. These facts are undeniable, yet I believe Bakhtinian theory works to suggest that it is not possible to impose truth or correct ethical behavior in a way on individuals indiscriminately. This concept as expressed by Bakhtin, Woolf and Cunningham, is tied to a "relativity principle" that Christopher Herbert explains is not "a nihilistic praise of ambiguity and equivocation," but is reflective of Poincaré's Principle:

though the great scientist Henri Poincare, the co-discoverer of special relativity, was not the first to state it:[it is] the principle that there is not a single true explanatory theory of any given set of facts,. . . It is not that things cannot be known, not that we are helpless observers of the indeterminacy of meaning and hostage to "confusion" and the want of "clarity," but, rather, that things may always be known in various competing ways among which it will not ultimately be possible to decide on empirical grounds. . . Definitive value judgments of characters and their actions may scarcely be attainable in *Mrs. Dalloway*, [or *The Hours*]

but nothing could be clearer than that this impossibility does not entail any paralysis of moral insight (117).

DIALOGICS AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN *THE HOURS*

The sections of the *The Hours* focusing on Clarissa Vaughan, who lives in New York City in the late 1990s, serve to direct attention away from ideological concerns to a more personal architectonic/dialogic definition of identity. This Clarissa has had choices unavailable to women of earlier eras, like Laura Brown and Clarissa Dalloway. She is a successful editor, lives openly and happily with another woman, and even has a child apart from a man. Yet she too, is circumscribed and described by her day to day reality – her age, her personality, her past, her loves and her choices. The stream of consciousness disclosure of Clarissa’s internal speech reveals that it is within these dialogic relationships that her identity formation or consciousness becoming occurs. Her constant volleying with I for myself, I for the other, and the other for me, is as clear as it is for the other Clarissa. Of course this is an effect Cunningham sought. Clarissa Vaughan, like her namesake, sets out into the city to buy flowers for the party she is hosting in the evening and the words of people who walk into her life or reappear in her past in her mind are all involved in her constant consciousness becoming. For example she runs into a friend:

. . . they pass through an awkward moment about how to kiss. Walter aims his lips for Clarissa’s and she instinctively turns her own mouth away, offering her cheek instead. Then she catches herself and turns back a half second too late, so that Walter’s lips touch only the corner of her mouth. I’m so prim, Clarissa thinks: so grandmotherly. I swoon over the beauties of the world but am reluctant, simply as a matter of reflex to kiss a friend on the mouth. Richard told her, thirty years ago, that under her pirate-girl veneer lay all the makings of a good suburban wife, and now she is revealed to herself as a meager spirit, too conventional, the cause of much suffering. (16)

There are many occurrences of the weightiness on consciousness becoming of the reality of I as others see me throughout Cunningham's text. She describes Richard's inscription of her and other people he knows ". . .if he insists on a version of you that is funnier, stranger, more eccentric and profound than you suspect yourself to be – capable of doing more good and more harm in the world than you've ever imagined – it is all but impossible not to believe . . ." (60). Clarissa Vaughan's interactions with others promote, in a truly Bakhtinian fashion, that individual consciousness and its interrelationship with others is a primary nexus for identity creation.

MATERIAL REALITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN *THE HOURS*

Like Clarissa Dalloway, Clarissa Vaughan is preoccupied by her age, her guilt over her comfortable living situation, her concern about her teen-aged daughter and other aspects of her day-to-day material reality. She cannot long escape her material reality. She "an ordinary person (at this age, why bother trying to deny it?) has flowers to buy and a party to give" (10) and she has "gotten used to avoiding the mirror" (57). And, like Clarissa Dalloway, she is repeatedly assaulted by regrets and uncertainties about decisions she has made. She often ruminates about her oughts and answerable acts. She is thinks about having chosen, twenty years ago when they were all in love with each other, Sally for a life-partner instead of Richard, who is now dying of AIDS. "How often since then has she wondered what might have happened if she'd tried to remain with [Richard]; if she'd returned Richard's kiss on the corner of Bleecker and MacDougal, gone off somewhere (where?) with him. . ." (368). Clarissa's actions and attitudes are circumscribed by her own personality. She is jealous of Richard, his past lovers, her partner Sally lunching with a producer and envious of Mary Krull's attention to her

daughter, Julia. She is tired of Richard's illness and condition in many ways (11, 58-62). She recognizes her weaknesses and acknowledges that she should make changes. For instance, she scolds herself about not being more sensitive to Richard, "What's wrong with me?" she chides (11) and she knows there is weakness in her becoming a "society wife," as Richard points out and vows to be more fully connected with Richard (20). Although Clarissa Vaughan is often consumed by her own shortcomings, like her counterpart in 1920s London, she presses on to embrace the moments where life appears to "burst open and give us everything we've ever imagined" (230) while she experiences her day in New York in the 1990s. The material reality of the world around her enlivens Clarissa. She thinks to herself that this is the reason "we struggle to go on living. . . It has to do with all this, she thinks. Wheels buzzing on concrete, the roil and shock of it; sheets of bright spray blowing from the fountain . . ." (15). In sum, the unfolding of identity evolution has much to do with her material reality.

The drama of the suicides of Woolf and Richard in the novel can be seen to overshadow the text's important focus on the evolving self within the everyday environment. Lorraine Sim asserts that *The Hours*, "embodies a contradictory and troubled approach to the relationship between the woman writer and the theme of everyday life. While *The Hours* intimates that it presents Woolf as an artist who is committed to capturing and celebrating in her fiction the quotidian – particularly a woman's "everyday" life – she is portrayed as desiring to transcend it" (60). I argue that Cunningham does work to portray that Virginia Woolf was not tormented by male-dominated ideology and found grounding and real pleasure in her daily surroundings yet suffered from the material reality of acute mental illness. Similarly, the pages that take

place in the late 1990s, while full of the horrid reality -- the war that is AIDS -- and the suicide of one of its victims, portray Clarissa Vaughan's consciousness becoming within her day-to-day existence as entirely significant to the book. In this way, *The Hours* clearly mirrors intentions of its predecessor text.

HETEROGLOSSIA AND POLYPHONY AS A REFLECTION OF MATERIAL REALITY AND AS INFLUENTIAL TO IDENTITY FORMATION IN *THE HOURS*

One aspect of Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, that words and speech carry the voices of the past, is obvious in the way Cunningham employs the tropes, techniques and motifs of Woolf's work. In addition to focusing on the conscious self and awareness of identity formation through the stream-of-consciousness writing style, he uses characters, mini plots, colors, flowers, kisses, art, suicide, and social connectedness to re-embody the classic piece. I believe it is important to recognize, as Mary Jo Hughes confirms in her article, "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Postmodern Artistic Re-Presentation," that in *The Hours* literature is presented as establishing and perpetuating the circle of life; Virginia Woolf dies in the Prologue of *The Hours* but has given birth to *Mrs. Dalloway* that gives life to Laura Brown. Laura's son Richie grows up to be another writer (8). As well, the power of literature to help Laura to recognize her genuine identity and to help her re-create herself is poignant; she is "fascinated" by a woman like Woolf and entranced by the genius of *Mrs. Dalloway*. (42). When Laura has escaped to the hotel, "With a sensation of deep and buoyant release, she begins reading" (150).

Polyphony, so critical in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is also central to *The Hours* with three distinct stories, incorporating, as Bakhtin describes, particular "contested, contestable and contesting" multitude of voices and opposing points of view (Bakhtin *DI*). And as

Bakhtin felt, the polyphonic novel should through its presentation of many voices, and of many heretofore marginalized voices – like that of the compliant mid-American housewife and lesbian, gay and bi-sexual personalities --contain a “utopian promise of the full emancipation of human thought and creativity” (Gardiner 41). But of course, despite this possibility, the reality of true depression and mental illness, portrayed through Richard and Virginia Woolf, haunt the work and bring attention to the equally important significance of day to day reality that, for the characters, as for readers, can be weighty.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Bakhtin provides no elaborate epistemological or eschatological justification for [his] stance, he makes no dogmatic appeal to 'science', 'truth', or 'the historical mission of the proletariat'. In short, his is a critical hermeneutics without guarantees. The Bakhtinian justification of critique is a moral one, which is ultimately connected to our immediate ethical concerns in the sphere of practical social intercourse. This is what could be termed Bakhtin's gamble, his Pascalian wager' ---Michael Gardiner (The Dialogics of Critique)

Mikhail Bakhtin spent years writing about and living a life that reflected the powerful influence of language. The dark side of this power was manifest in the criticism he received in post-revolutionary Russian to the point of his being exiled for what he wished to write and speak about. Yet for Bakhtin, as for most writers, language also provided a way to develop his thinking, to explore philosophy and reality and to record for others his own deep insight that arose from his experience in his particular place and time. *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, as well, portray the terrific influence that language can have to extend beyond specific eras and settings and, exemplifying how language, through its interactive nature, creates our personal and public worlds and is key to forming our identities.

In Michael Gardiner's words, Bakhtin felt that we "require a dialogical interaction with others before we can develop a coherent image of self and engage in morally and aesthetically productive tasks," and that, "Such a co-endeavor is ideally conducted in a

spirit of mutual recognition and trust, even love” (3). For the female protagonists of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* almost every instance where identity emerges or is refined occurs within or because of interactions with others and because of the answerable nature of consciousness. These texts make clear that language and thought, consciousness becoming and identity, require at least two people who respond to each other and who are inescapably part of their broader cultural and social worlds.

The distinctly heteroglossic and polyphonic nature of Woolf’s and Cunningham’s texts portrays that truth and knowledge are products of subjective thinking, and that authorial intention and overriding themes--while not unimportant to consider --are also fluid and dependent on the time, place and mind-set of the reader. Leaping from thought to thought, from perspective to perspective, the consciousness becoming of the characters in these texts artistically renders the reality of this unending process in which there is very little that is static since a life is always in motion, even if in motion toward old age or death.

The Hours and *Mrs. Dalloway* spotlight, time and again, the material reality of an individual’s circumstance which is always a unique experience bound by the very specific instance of one’s being and by unique, undeniable and answerable acts. Michael Cunningham comments on this as it figures in *Mrs. Dalloway* saying, "Woolf was then and remains today unparalleled in her ability to convey the sensations and complexities of the experience known as being alive. Any number of writers manage the big moments beautifully; few do as much with what it feels like to live through an ordinary hour on a usual day."⁴⁷ Woolf and Cunningham both also exquisitely draw attention to how our thought processes and the ways we relate to our material realities of everyday life work to

⁴⁷ From the “Introduction” to *Mrs. Dalloway* xx.

ground us – to give centripetal order to the usual centrifugal disunifying force of the world around us -- and how our language, especially internal language that is unique and answerable pursues, in concert with our cognition, a quest for meaning and purpose.

That human nature, moment by moment, is prone to doubt, second guess and ponder actions and purpose is vivid in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. Woolf's Clarissa conveys this answerability to herself expressing, "But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh it was very queer" (116). She thinks of her friends scattered about London who she has invited to her party, ". . . she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?" (122). Her palpable self-consciousness permeates her inner-speech, exemplified as she stands at the top of the stairs greeting her guests. "Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another. . . it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow" (171). Cunningham's Laura echoes the same sensation,

She is herself and not herself. She is a woman in London, an aristocrat, pale and charming a little false; she is Virginia Woolf; and she is this other, the inchoate, tumbling thing known as herself, a mother, a driver, a swirling streak of pure life like the Milky Way, a friend of Kitty (whom she's kissed, who may be dying), a pair of hands with coral-colored fingernails (one chipped and a diamond wedding band gripping the wheel of a Chevrolet . . . (188)

As is superbly reflected by Cunningham and Woolf, the quest to understand existence and to portray consciousness is at the heart of most fiction. Francine Prose in

her introduction to *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader* contends that why anyone becomes a serious writer of fiction in the first place is because what interests them is “consciousness, human awareness, the mind and soul of one’s characters.” She believes that this is also what makes “*Mrs. Dalloway* so successful and so impressive – the fact that Virginia Woolf somehow managed to write a novel about consciousness in such a way that it is virtually impossible to mistake her intention. What else could we say the book is about? Shell shock? Hosting a party?” (8).

Yet, as this thesis has worked to prove, Woolf’s book is not one thing, nor is Cunningham’s. Both works *are* intimately and intensely about shellshock or the post traumatic stress of war or living in a world continually afflicted with global disasters like AIDs and local tragedies like the death of family members.⁴⁸ They are also intimately about myriad everyday things such as hosting a party. Like a life, like our own perspectives about a work, these texts speak to us in various and very individual ways, which is why they are so appropriate for use in the English classroom. Meaning, purpose and importance of literature are most deeply felt when unearthed for oneself, a phenomenon that occurs in especially poignant ways for young adults. It is important to reiterate, as Bakhtin stresses, this kind of attention to one’s particular situatedness is not to aspire to ambiguity or absence of meaning, rather it is to underscore that meaning may be understood in various ways and often in ways that are not possible to prove on purely empirical grounds.

⁴⁸The character of Clarissa Dalloway suffers the loss of a sister in youth. Virginia Woolf lost her mother when she was thirteen, her father when she was twenty-two and brother when she was twenty four. According to biographer Hermione Lee, these events were extremely traumatic for Woolf, who, as mentioned attempted suicide after the death of her father.

The language of *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway* and the consciousness becoming of their characters, as well as their readers' language and thoughts, are steeped in specific, un-ignorable, ideology. Recognition of this is particularly useful in study of these texts, again, especially for young adults living in a vastly multi-cultural world. In the *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin portrays this by saying:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (277)

For Bakhtin and as this essay has worked to prove, despite Michael Bernard-Donals' argument to the contrary, it is not impossible to tie strains of individual consciousness and social constructionism together. Though certainly a Bakhtinian analysis does not set itself in blatant opposition to traditional Marxist or feminist theories, (or other commonly applied critiques) it does indeed examine and question emphatic and unidimensional social ideology and, should make no apology for foregrounding individual identity formation.

Bakhtinian thinking highlights that we each are invested quite personally in the experience of literature. An exploration of literature with a Bakhtinian theoretical overlay assists in helping us know ourselves and our worlds. It should provide an improved awareness of ideology and of our day to day material realities and how both interplay and permeate the development of our identities. It should create a more holistic consciousness that can be particularly useful in reminding us that, though inescapably

part of our ideological environments, we are each arbiters of our own thoughts, utterances and actions.

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