"In My Own Voice":

Virginia Woolf's Use of Language

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I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind and my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped. The thing is to free one's self: to let it find its own dimensions, not be impeded.

- Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*

ABSTRACT

The collective work of Virginia Woolf is usually seen as an exemplar of literary modernism and a forerunner of later twentieth-century feminist thought. Instead of looking at Woolf's work solely for the literary and political innovations it displays, however, this thesis traces Woolf's use of language, and considers Woolf's novels, essays and diaries as her expression of a revolution in the paradigm of reality. Woolf's focus on a subjective rather than objective reality engenders her literary and political innovations and provokes her linguistic and epistemological investigations into the nature of language and the identity of the speaking subject. Observing that conventional representational language-use reflects an authoritarian belief in the stability and objectivity of an absolute world and enacts patriarchal tendencies to objectify people, Woolf displays a use of language which recognises and respects other people as subjects. Woolf's awareness of the arbitrary and relative nature of the relation between language and reality parallels Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory of structuralism and marks a significant disjunction between Woolf and the majority of her predecessors and even her contemporaries. Anticipating Jacques Derrida in recognising that language can never, in itself, sanction any single or final reference to the world, Woolf goes on to explore language's potential as a medium of communication beyond direct representation. Woolf uses language to induce a process of consciousness in the reader which will allow her or him to apprehend the writer's subjective vision of the world. Thus Woolf conveys her thoughts, feelings and experiences as a subject in her own voice.

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INTRODUCTION: IN *MY* OWN VOICE

I was originally inspired to study Virginia Woolf after reading about Einstein's work in quantum physics, and I also thought of Darwin on evolution and Freud on the unconscious. I believed that it was only after these scientists had laid the factual basis for a new view of the world that writers could come along and embody such philosophies in their books. I saw the literary movement of modernism as engendered by the results thrown up by recent scientific experiments and theories. Writers, being, in the main, progressive thinkers, could then use the concepts that had arisen from science, and so flesh out the new paradigm, the new world view, in literature. I saw Woolf herself as one of these progressive writers, embodying in her works new concepts - such as relativity, evolution and the unconscious - from the models that science provided, and hence shunned by a conservative canon and misread by uninformed critics who did not understand or accept the Einsteinian paradigm but preferred the Cartesian world view. And Woolf's position, I felt, was common to other modernist writers - D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster - who similarly saw that life was not what the Victorians believed it to be. I felt my search for links between the science and literature of the modernist period to be a further exploration of the dramatic break between the thought and literature of the nineteenth century and of the twentieth century, and so a further definition of 'modernist' literature.

And yet it seems that the more I search, the difference between 'Victorian' and 'modernist' literature, conceived of in the terms of one literary movement following another, is slightly superficial and spurious. Definitions of modernism become tautological: a work is 'modernist' if it contains features common to other 'modernist' works - features which can be found in works from any number of literary periods. Is Hardy a modernist? Is Sterne? Is Aeschylus? While there was certainly a literary phenomenon that took place sometime in the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on similarities between the writers of the period is often at the cost of suppressing the individual innovation and vision of each writer. No doubt in an overall view these individual perceptions are linked somehow, and create a picture of a social movement across the arts. But to begin with such a

definition limits how we approach these writers, or indeed any writer. Virginia Woolf deserves far more than this; her work asks for a far more open and responsive approach. One wants, as Lily Briscoe says of Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, "fifty pairs of eyes to see with . . . Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with" (224). Simply to view Woolf through modernist eyes, and to seek those elements we expect to find is to limit the relevance of Woolf's work. Similarly, simply to view her through feminist eyes also radically limits our understanding of the work of such a multifaceted writer, cutting off our sympathies for other positions that Woolf occupies.

Admitting that I have but one pair of eyes, I seek to look at Woolf from a linguistic point of view: not to identify each linguistic technique she uses and analyse its value, but instead to investigate the relationship between language and reality that Woolf describes throughout her *œuvre*. Agreeing with Pamela Caughie that critics "need to keep in mind that what we are describing is not Virginia Woolf's process or form itself but our own readings or metaphors that enable us to see that process or form" (22), I find that the best way to view Woolf's particular use of language is to see it in terms of a revolution in the paradigm of reality, along the lines of Thomas Kuhn's description of conceptual revolutions in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. To view Woolf in this way looks beyond a shared literary movement and interprets her within a wide and interdependent linguistic, philosophical and cultural movement: a movement, I believe, more dependent on personal realisation than any common or dominating influences. Woolf's linguistic innovation, her reformation of literary standards, her view of the relationship between the sexes (that much-vaunted androgyny), her view of sexual politics, and her view of international politics are all engendered by her perception of reality, her implicit metaphysical world view. Woolf holds a perception of reality that is radically different from her social, political and literary predecessors, and even, it appears, different from her intellectual cohort. Woolf sees the world not in a positivistic way, where things have a self-evident identity and hence meaning in themselves, but relatively, where the categories into which we divide reality, and the identity and hence meaning we confer, are arbitrary and pragmatic rather than actual and absolute. From this approach, boundaries can be fluid, and a change of

identity or meaning depends only on a change of perspective or a change of context. Language becomes the tool and the medium for dividing up reality. This is where my interest finally arrived, for I feel that tracing Woolf's use of language - 'use' in a wide sense, meaning how she explores and enacts to their full potential the communicative functions and effects she finds in language - throughout her works, linking it in to her subject-matter and back out to her metaphysical paradigm, provides a helpful perspective from which to approach many other literary and political aspects of her work. I remain suspicious, however, that to uphold a view of Woolf as a relativist rather than a positivist is little more helpful and less superficial than to see her as a modernist rather than an Edwardian. I hope rather, as Woolf herself does, not to assert definitions and identities, but instead to provide a reading as a conceptual framework for understanding Virginia Woolf's use of language.

Several themes run through this thesis as frameworks through which to interpret Woolf's work. Firstly, the term 'subject' recurs, along with two associated terms, 'subjectivity' and 'subject-position'. I use these terms to distinguish the person under discussion as a thinking, feeling entity with a personal experience of the world, and thus, an individual point of view. Throughout Woolf's work, the character's status as a subject becomes of paramount importance; all too often in society or in a personal relationship, Woolf suggests, people are treated as human objects, as if they had no thoughts, feelings, experiences or points of view unique to themselves - as if, being superficially in the same social group as those around them, they automatically accept the views of those around them. Recognising other people's subjectivity is not so much knowing the exact nature of their feelings as recognising simply that they have the capacity to feel - and recognising that this is a realm to which others do not have automatic access. To respect another's subject-position, similarly, is to recognise that another's experience and point of view may be different from one's own, and to respect that difference.

For Woolf, language becomes a medium through which to express this difference and so assert one's status as a subject. The second set of terms used in my discussion, then, centre on speech: such words as 'voice', 'expression' and 'communication'. In her diary Woolf records the satisfaction of expressing herself "in my own voice" (*A Writer's*

Diary [AWD] 47) by finally throwing off the constraints of a conventional literary discourse that hindered her from expressing her own particular thoughts and feelings in her own way. Throughout her writing, public and personal, Woolf acknowledges the horrifying experience of being silent, or worse, silenced. For Woolf herself, the ability to write was vital to her well-being, and she dreaded the times when doctors prevented her from working, as part of a rest 'cure' after periods of mental breakdown. She also recognised a debt of gratitude to the Hogarth Press, for the establishment of the Press gave her control over the formal expression of her own work: "I'm the only woman in England free to write what I like. The others must be thinking of series and editors" (AWD 83). No longer would she, as a writer, be silenced by the barrier of publication. But the need to convey one's experience and point of view to others, the need to establish access between essentially separate subjective minds, still remained. "Communication is health; communication is happiness" says Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* (101), and Woolf shares this sentiment.

The third set of terms that runs throughout my discussion centres on writing. With the meaning of the root-word 'scribe' in mind, such words as 'described', with its connotations of a sketching out in language, 'prescribed', implying both being given a linguistic course to follow and being already written on, and 'circumscribed', connoting being limited and bounded by language, become significant. With a person unable to be known conclusively because of the lack of complete and automatic access to her or his mind, a writer can at best sketch out a subject, giving an impression rather than a definition. Woolf tackles the issue of knowing others and describing them in language in *Jacob's Room*, while Rachel Vinrace in *The VoyageOut* faces society's prescription of her position in society; Katharine Hilbery initially faces life circumscribed by her family and social convention in *Night and Day*.

Finally, my thesis hinges on the tension between two different interpretations of the word 'authority'. Conventional language-use prescribes the subject with an authoritative discourse in two complementary senses: the *right* way to use language is the *only* way to use language, and the right and only way is according to the prescribed social codes - so-

cial codes that require, in many cases, the renunciation of one's status as a subject. Woolf identifies and criticises social tendencies to objectify other people by asserting an authority over them which overrides individual difference and appropriates personal experience. In response, she promotes language's potential to provide a means to reassert oneself as a subjective agent, an agent capable of exercising an authority over one's own life by articulating one's life-experience in one's own voice.

The chapters of this thesis alternate between, on the one hand, theoretical discussions which articulate Woolf's point of view by drawing together comments predominantly from her essays and diaries, and, on the other, textual analyses, which show how Woolf demonstrates these observations, criticisms and ideas in practice. Chapter One gives an overview of the constraints of conventional language-use, and describes Woolf's attempts to express herself in her own voice, challenging as she does so assumptions about language and reality, and bringing upon herself scorn and ridicule from those who did not understand or felt threatened by her non-conformity. Consequently, Chapter Two addresses Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which describes a young woman's experience of being effectively silenced because her expressions do not conform to her society's expectations of language-use. Furthermore, Rachel Vinrace loses her 'voice', her status as a subject and ultimately her life when her patriarchal community objectifies her in terms of her sexuality and her fiancé rejects her music which has been her medium of expressing herself and her view of the world.

I have also paired up Woolf's novels in these alternate chapters where they complement each other in certain aspects. To a great extent, I find that the first novel of each pair I identify investigates particular issues of constraint on a narrative level, while the second novel puts into practice, on a linguistic level, Woolf's solution of liberation. Hence, where Rachel Vinrace dies, unable to express herself and convince others of her status as a subject, Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham from *Night and Day* create a personal discourse which overcomes the fixed social code of language-use to form a relationship based on respecting each other as a subject.

The chapters also trace a linear progression through Woolf's *œuvre*. I deal with the

novels in a predominantly chronological order because I perceive a progression in Woolf's works as she moves from identifying aspects of linguistic, literary and socio-political constraint to describing and embodying in her works the means for liberation. This structure, then, gives the reader a framework for the questions about language and communication that Woolf's works implicitly ask and answer. Hence, where Chapter Two leaves off with Katharine and Ralph seeking to communicate outside of linguistic and social codes of convention, Chapter Three picks up the underlying question 'how can language function outside of these accepted codes?' and investigates Woolf's ideas about the signifying relation between language and reality. Woolf explores the communicative potential of figurative language, such as metaphor, which doesn't presume to define an objective reality, but instead evokes subjective impressions of reality.

In turn, Chapter Four picks up the 'metaphor' metaphor and applies it to a discussion of Jacob Flanders' signifying role in society, where the initial question of 'what does Jacob mean?' becomes 'how does Jacob mean?'. *Jacob's Room* seeks to protect Jacob's status as a complex and private subject by evading a conclusive definition of him in language - since definition would limit and so objectify him - while making the reader uneasy about the assumption that any person could be defined conclusively. *Jacob's Room* is paired with *Orlando*, for the latter work advances Orlando as a complex and unlimited subject by the very assertion and proliferation of definition. The multiplication and contradiction in the identity of such a substantial and larger-than-life character make a farce of any expectations we hold of discovering a single, final meaning in either language or life. But without such a single, transcendent meaning, how can we interpret, and communicate, our impressions of language and life? Chapter Four leaves the reader rhetorically poised on the brink of meaninglessness.

Chapter Five, however, describes Woolf's solution to the search for meaning and communication. The single, final meaning is indeed a wild goose after which we may chase, for attaining meaning, Woolf suggests, is a matter of holding suspended in our minds multiple and often contradictory impressions in order to 'see life whole', to comprehend any element of life as a complex and multifaceted globe composed of our myriad

impressions. This too, she suggests, is the way to make sense of a linguistic object, a text, and thus the way to communicate through language. She promotes the reader's ability to have an authority over a text; Woolf respects the readers' role in arranging the various elements in order to realise a text as whole in their minds, just as she makes real her own experiences by arranging the various elements to make sense of her life.

Chapter Six looks at the ability of four of Woolf's characters - Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway from *Mrs Dalloway*, and Rhoda and Bernard from *The Waves* - to author themselves and their lives: to shape their identities and assert themselves as subjective agents in the world. Septimus and Clarissa negotiate conventional definitions of what counts as a valid self and a valid expression of that self. Rhoda and Bernard shape themselves through language; each has a subjectivity, a consciousness, that must answer the question 'who am I?' by creating an identity and establishing relations with the world. Furthermore, as Woolf shows the boundaries between characters to be arbitrary - since Bernard can use language to overcome the barrier between subject and object by forging an intersubjective communication - outside of the narrative, Woolf uses the rhythm of language to dissolve the boundaries between reader and writer. In doing so, she distributes the agency of the speaking subject between character, author and reader, and confuses the notion of the true author of the text.

Widening the focus to international society and politics, Chapter Seven explores Woolf's vision of a 'linguistic community'. Against Ferdinand de Saussure's use of this term to describe the speaker's social group which accepts, and so fixes, only certain uses of language, excluding other expressions and invalidating those speakers who don't conform, Woolf envisions "a system that did not shut out" (AWD 189). The essay *Three Guineas* records Woolf's concern with the parallels between European fascism and England's patriarchal society, where the proponents of each set out to homogenise society by means of an authoritative structured discourse. In contrast, *The Years* and *Between the Acts* present communities of speaking subjects, in which each subject contributes to a heterogeneous communal expression. Thus Woolf describes a discourse in which all subjects have an authority over life and an ability to express themselves in their own voice.

CHAPTER ONE - "SUBJECT AND OBJECT AND THE NATURE OF REALITY"[1]:

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE TYRANT OF CONVENTION

. . . as the current answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one

- Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*

In her 1922 diary Virginia Woolf writes, "I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; and that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise" (AWD 47). Woolf wrote this after finishing *Jacob's Room*, the first full-length fictional work in which she practises the innovative literary style which distinguishes her as a modernist writer. Yet being able to express oneself in one's "own voice", without need for the praise of others, without fear of the censure of others, is a vital issue for Woolf within and without her fiction: it is an issue that runs throughout her novels, engages her attention in many of her essays, and concerns her, as we can see, in her private diary. Much of Woolf's genius as a writer and thinker, her literary and linguistic innovation and her value for succeeding readers lie not simply in the subjects she deals with and the specific techniques she uses in her works, but in the entire relationship she understands between language and reality, and the linguistic, literary and political implications of this relationship for speakers and writers.

Many readers understand Woolf as a writer rejecting Edwardian literary conventions to create works that have become exemplars of modernist literature. Certainly we can trace Woolf's progress from her first novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, which sustain the traditional chapter and plot structures of Victorian fiction, in which the "two and thirty chapters" ('Modern Fiction' [MF] 188) end in the heroine's death and marriage respectively, through the modernist watershed of the works from the early twenties, *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, with their experimental narrative techniques, through the unparalleled innovation in character depicted in *Orlando* and *The Waves*, and beyond, to the almost postmodernity of the "orts, scraps, and fragments" of *Between the Acts* (xix). The view of 'Woolf as modernist' pic-

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[1] The phrase is from *To the Lighthouse* (28).

tures her as a member of a revolutionary group of writers re-formulating the prevailing literary standards. Yet beyond this straightforward model of Woolf's literary contribution lies a more complex and personal quest to interrogate the constraints that linguistic - not just literary - conformity places on people. Her works overcome the limitations of conventional language-use, exploring and enacting language's capacity for personal expression and communication beyond the traditional linguistic bounds of representation. In doing this, Woolf challenges more than literary standards; her writing engages with a whole range of linguistic, phenomenological, epistemological and political assumptions about language, reality and self-expression that have relevance far beyond the realm of literary modernism.

"In my own voice", then, refers not just to Woolf's particular writing style or literary techniques, nor to the content of her works; it also gestures towards the whole different paradigm[2] of reality within which Virginia Woolf uses language. The contemporary paradigm, as prescribed by her community, was not simply a set of standards that governed literary expression, such as Woolf discusses in *A Room of One's Own*. Nor was Woolf's investigation of the position of women in society, the authority of the patriarchal system, and the political implications of these structures - her subject in *Three Guineas* - the primary factor that made her an outsider as a thinker and writer. Rather, it is the paradigm of reality that she developed for herself, within which she viewed the world, and from which she wrote - the vision of which she struggled throughout her life to articulate in the face of patriarchal opposition, social hostility, literary misunderstanding and political blindness - that underlies her innovative literature, her feminist observations and her pacifist convictions. Woolf's works do not simply record the constraints on expression and argue for change. As her diary notes, she found her own voice in which to articulate her view of the world, creating a literature that did not shut out, but instead disrupted conventional signification and value relations by opening itself up to fluid signification and personal communication.

Many of Woolf's essays investigate the constraints that literary conventions place on writers. In the famous essay 'Modern Fiction', Woolf describes a tension between her own

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[2] I use 'paradigm' in its philosophical context, where it means "a central overall way of regarding phenomena" (Flew *Dictionary of Philosophy*) as opposed to its more common, though related, meaning of model or pattern.

view of fiction and the novels of her contemporaries, identifying the source of her dissatisfaction as the "tyrant" of convention. Of her contemporaries she writes, "the writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole" in line with prevailing literary conventions (188). For, she goes on to say, "if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" (189): works would not simply repeat the conventional model, but could instead more closely embody the writer's own vision of life. However, the central problem, as Woolf identifies it in 'Modern Fiction', remained: the "problem before the novelist at present", Woolf states,

> is to contrive a means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to
> have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer 'this' but 'that': out
> of 'that' alone he must construct his work . . . . At once, therefore, the accent
> falls a little differently; the emphasis is on something hitherto ignored; at once a
> different outline of form becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incompre
> hensible to our predecessors. (192)

Here, in these last words, Woolf identifies her position as a writer and thinker: she faces the need to create a new literary form with which to express her vision and experience of life. But, as she notes in her diary, "if one writes only for one's own pleasure" without thought of convention, then "the convention of writing is destroyed: therefore one does not write at all" (AWD 135). Woolf recognises that for communication to take place between writer and reader, the writer must negotiate this tension between individuality and incomprehensibility.

'Modern Fiction' describes particular contemporary novelists as "materialists" (185), and in her diary Woolf records a comment which reveals her concern with the epistemological assumptions behind their literary style. In response to Arnold Bennett's criticism of character in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf draws a distinction between the conventional realism of her counterparts, and a more elusive "true reality": "I daresay its [sic] true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its

cheapness. But to get further. Have I the power of conveying the true reality?" (AWD 57).

Proponents of literary realism make the implicit assumption that the true nature of reality can be known since life consists of objective elements, both material and abstract. Woolf, however, distrusts such assumptions about reality, here admitting that she wilfully insubstantises the elements - such as character - in her own works as if to dispel the idea of a defined, objective reality. In 'Modern Fiction' she argues, "Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (189), rejecting the idea of an objective reality of gig-lamps and emphasising instead the subject's experience of reality as an indistinct and luminous halo of impressions enveloping her or his consciousness. Woolf asks in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', "what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?" (97). In questioning the nature of reality and seeking the arbiters of reality, Woolf challenges the positivist notion that reality is a given and unproblematic series of elements with self-evident identities. Writing of the reality of literary characters in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', for example, Woolf stresses the impossibility of saying anything objective, anything beyond opinion, in attempting to describe what constitutes the essential character of the eponymous Mrs Brown:

> You see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that.
> And when it comes to writing, each makes a further selection on principles of his
> own. Thus Mrs. Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways . . . (97)

For Woolf, the reality of Mrs Brown does not lie in her being rendered substantial and "lifelike" (98) by describing external details. Instead, she focuses on a description of character from the inside - a description of the character as a subject rather than an object - which allows the reader to experience the character's subject-position, since such a technique "has the power to make you think not merely of [the character] itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes" (98). Never having considered "human nature" from this subjective viewpoint, the Edwardians "have developed a technique of novel-writing which suits their purpose; they have made tools and established conventions which do their business" (103-4). But though the conventions of these novelists serve to bridge the gulf between text and

reader by offering the reader a familiar literary form, Woolf asserts that she is of a different generation to her literary predecessors, a generation with different business for whom "those conventions are ruin, those tools are death" (104). Woolf pictures herself as one of a new generation of writers who must reject Edwardian literary conventions and conceive their own literary forms and techniques in order to convey their own particular vision of life.

Woolf contends that the novel has been traditionally used to express, and perceived to express, 'cheap' literary realism, material details rather than subjective impressions: "the bulk and not the essence of life". Yet, Woolf concludes, "any such verdict" that this must always be the case "must be based upon the supposition that 'the novel' has a certain character which is now fixed and cannot be altered, [and] that 'life' has a certain limit which can be defined" ('Phases of Fiction' 144). Believing that life does not have a certain limit which can be defined, over the course of her literary career Woolf challenges any notion that the character of the novel cannot be altered. In her diary she repeatedly explores the idea of new forms for prose fiction, and indeed re-conceives of the form of the novel so radically that she considers at one stage getting rid of the name 'novel' altogether: "I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new --- by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (AWD 80). After completing *To the Lighthouse* Woolf writes, "Why not invent a new kind of play . . . . Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play" (AWD 104).

As Woolf sees it, the traditional form of the novel involves implicit assumptions about the limitations of prose language. In 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' Woolf envisions "an unnamed variety of the novel" (22) that will come to embrace attributes of form and effect previously reserved to drama and poetry. The work will embrace the emotive quality of poetry, and give "the outline rather than the detail" (18); without resorting to "loads of details, bushels of fact" (22), the novel "will express the feelings and ideas of the characters closely and vividly" (18). Instead of merely chronicling social relations, as the novel has done in the past, this new prose work will take on the larger, more abstract and personal themes traditionally addressed by poetry: "the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams" (19). But it will also retain the flexibility and elasticity of prose by incorporating

the heterogeneity and contradiction inherent in life to give "the sneer, the contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life" (19), taking the mould "of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things - the modern mind" (19-20). Furthermore, this new prose work will include drama's ability to evoke emotion and to stimulate an empathic response, by dramatising "some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist":

> the power of music, the stimulus of sight, the effect on us of the shape of trees or the play of colour, the emotions bred in us by crowds, the obscure terrors and hatreds which come so irrationally in certain places or from certain people, the delight of movement, the intoxication of wine. (23)

Rather than transcribe a static and common reality, then, Woolf envisions that this new literary form will have the ability to convey personal, "obscure" and irrational emotions that are beyond the reach of conventional prose.

However, in order to achieve communication through an innovative use of language, Woolf must negotiate the expectations of other language-users. Woolf's understanding of language presents striking parallels to linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's description of the structure and functioning of linguistic systems in his *Course in General Linguistics*. In particular, two of Saussure's postulates - the arbitrary nature of thought-sound divisions and the universal adoption of the resulting signs - make explicit both the flexibility and the limitations of language that Woolf implicitly addresses. Like Woolf, Saussure rejects any positivistic assumptions about language - any assumption that language names an absolute reality in a one-to-one correspondence between words and concepts - for this notion incorrectly "assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words" (65). Rather, he contends, thought is only a "shapeless and indistinct mass" (111) in which there are "no pre-existing ideas" (112). Thought is made meaningful by the application of a linguistic structure which defines, divides and orders the subject's experience of reality into signified concepts which, with the addition of a sound or word as a signifier, become signs. Yet signs alone do not convey meaning. Where 'signification' constructs a relationship between language and reality, linguistic 'value' determines the conceptual relations between the signs themselves.

Language is a system in which there are no positive terms, Saussure contends (and Woolf demonstrates), but only oppositions and relations between terms. English, for example, sets up a notion of identity based on a mutual exclusivity of sex difference, and encodes this opposition between female and male by its lack of any accepted third-person pronoun that overrides this distinction. "The entire mechanism of language is based on oppositions of this kind", Saussure states, asserting that "whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it" (121). Thus Saussure describes language as an interdependent system of meaning with no intrinsic relation to reality: language constructs what is an essentially relative system, which is to say that language is not a system of inherent meanings, but rather a system of meaningful relations. Woolf, too, as I go on to show, views language, and life, as structures of relative significance rather than absolute meaning.

However, both Saussure and Woolf recognise that for communication to take place through language, the signs representing a personal mental reality must be shared within the 'linguistic community' - a group of speakers who share a common language. Hence, the initially arbitrary construction of signs becomes fixed and universalised by its common usage. Since language "exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community" (Saussure 14), this social contract has the power to fix and make real the conceptual divisions, and the relations between them, conceived by the community:

> Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval - and which added together constitute language - are realities . . . (15)

Initially arbitrary and abstract divisions between sounds and thoughts become conceptual "realities" once they are invested with value within the linguistic system and gain collective approval. Thus, language constructs and embodies a paradigm of reality (in line with Thomas Kuhn's discussion of paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*): a metaphysical framework through which society makes sense of its collective experience of the world and interprets new experiences. Viewing language thus as paradigmatic - as imposing an arbitrary, though shared, conceptual structure through which we make sense of thought - Woolf displays a concern with this fixing stage in the linguistic process. She finds that

some language-users assume that language corresponds unproblematically to a stable, universal and objective reality, and therefore they see truth as the accuracy of correspondence between words and this assumedly transcendent world. In turn, instead of holding language up to scrutiny as an arbitrary system of interpretation, they believe that conventionally-used language is as fixed and self-evident as the seemingly universal and objective reality to which it corresponds.

Furthermore, the process of social sanction, as Saussure describes it, not only fixes signification, but it also excludes any potential alternative signification:

> Whether we try to find the meaning of the Latin word arbor or the word that
> Latin uses to designate the concept tree, it is clear that only the associations
> sanctioned by that language appear to us to conform to reality, and we disregard
> whatever others might be imagined. (66-7)

Language becomes real to the extent that the linguistic community disregards any experience of reality, any subjective thought or feeling in a particular context, that does not apparently conform to the conventional associations sanctioned by language. Indeed, Saussure identifies an important distinction between language (*langue*) and speaking (*parole*), stressing that the system of language itself is quite different to the individual speech acts that articulate it: 'Language is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual . . . . Speaking, on the contrary, is an individual act. It is wilful and intellectual" 14). The essentially social nature of the linguistic system, then, precludes any personal expression that deviates from social norms.

Throughout her work, Woolf demonstrates her awareness of the fact that where language constructs and embodies a social paradigm of reality, it also prescribes individual speakers with this interpretative framework. Similarly, linguist Henry Lee Smith, Jr. recognises that language is a system, "in fact the most important system", through which a society reflects and transmits its culture (90). Defining culture as "the sum total of the learned, shared and transmitted, patterned and systematized ways man goes about meeting the problems raised by his environment . . . all of his attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and values" 89), Smith sees language as society's primary means of enculturating and socialising the

ndividual speaker into the pre-existing social group. Language becomes a process of initiaion by which the speaker's inclusion in the social group depends not simply on learning the anguage itself; the speaker's inclusion is contingent upon assuming the attitudes, beliefs and values of the group that language embodies.

Moreover, this prescribing process is inevitable, for language cannot avoid embodying collective assumptions about the nature of the world. Thomas Kuhn poses and rejects the possibility of a neutral language, a language of "pure percepts" uninfluenced by any paradigmatic assumptions. Attempts to eliminate all non-logical and non-perceptual terms from a particular discourse all met with the same failure, he says, for the "result is a language that - like those employed in the sciences - embodies a host of expectations about nature and fails to function the moment these expectations are violated" (127). Kuhn explains that as a paradigm of reality is established by the community to make sense of its world, the community forms a judgement about the nature of reality. Any use of language, then, that does not subscribe to social beliefs and assumptions about reality "fails to function" as communication because it does not conform to the expectations engendered by the prevailing paradigm. Furthermore, if the prevailing paradigm is strongly established or particularly dominating such an anomalous expression won't just seem meaningless - meaningless because it can't be interpreted by conventional means - but it will be marginalised or rejected as invalid. And, as Woolf goes on to show, a so-judged invalid expression casts doubt on the authority of the speaker.

According to Saussure, Smith and Kuhn, then, using language necessarily involves accepting the prevailing assumptions about the nature of the world that society has encoded into the linguistic system. For an individual speaker's expression to function as meaningful communication, it must conform to the common discourse of the community. Yet the very fact of a social, shared discourse prevents the individual speaker from using language in a way different from conventional language-use and hinders the speaker from expressing ideas and views that dissent from the prevailing paradigm of reality. In that language has a dual function in communication, a linguistic system thus sets up two constraints: the constraint of expression, that is, the obstacles to what the speaker can conceive and articulate; and the

constraint of reception, that is the positive or negative response of the speaker's community which indicates how, or whether, the speaker's message has been received.

Woolf confronts the constraint of expression in many instances, finding often that the only terms available are inadequate to express particular points of view, or that they carry unwelcome connotations. Throughout *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf calls for new words, or makes up her own terms in order to discuss women from their own viewpoint rather than from a patriarchal point of view. If "Chloe like[s] Olivia" in a novel (*A Room of One's Own* [AROO] 108), the novelist must struggle to convey the relation of woman to woman, to capture "those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves . . . when women are alone, unlit by the capricious or coloured light of the other sex" (110). Woolf contends that "the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence" before a woman could adequately describe her experience of life (113). Woolf argues in this essay that female writers face extreme difficulty in expressing themselves in their own voices because all they have at their disposal is a literary (and linguistic) system "made by men out of their own needs for their own uses", and "since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women" (100). To remedy this situation, Woolf calls for female writers to cease attempting to use the "man's sentence" (99-100) and to develop a form of literature and a use of language with which they can express themselves freely, without the constraint of needing to define themselves, and assert the validity of their expression, in opposition to patriarchal society. In the author's notes to *Three Guineas* Woolf explains her political motives behind her use of the term "educated men's daughters" (157):

> Our ideology is still so inveterately anthropocentric that it has been necessary to coin this clumsy term . . . to describe the class whose fathers have been educated at public schools and universities. Obviously, if the term 'bourgeois' fits her brother, it is grossly incorrect to use it of one who differs so profoundly in the two prime characteristics of the bourgeoisie - capital and environment. (369)

Woolf argues that such women need to assert their own points of view by defining them-
selves in terms that articulate and so make real their status of political inequality. Here
Woolf uses language to identify individual subjects and their concerns, resisting the univer-
salising implications of a common label. In other cases, however, Woolf advocates getting
rid of words that unnecessarily define and divide people. The word "feminist", Woolf be-
lieves, "has done much harm in its day" because it sets men and women in opposition to
each other instead of emphasising their similar goals and so encouraging them to work to-
gether for a common political cause (302). In both situations Woolf feels constrained by the
limits of the available terms, and has to reconstruct elements of the linguistic system in order
to get her own point across.

Woolf's major literary and linguistic innovation, however, lies in her re-evaluation of
the use of prose language. She overcomes "this appalling narrative business of the realist:
getting on from lunch to dinner" by giving up the "false, unreal, merely conventional"
(AWD 139) representational narrative techniques of the realists which assume an objective
reality, and developing ways - not primarily representative - of using prose language as a
medium for communication, which reflect her own perception of a reality of subjective expe-
riences. Edward Bishop explains Woolf's perception of the relation between language and
reality:

> The quality she called 'life' or the 'essential thing' refused to be fixed by a
>
> phrase, but it could be arrested, briefly, by a net of words: words that evoke as
>
> well as indicate, that conspire to produce their own luminous halo, rendering (by
>
> inducing) a process of consciousness rather than a concrete picture. (38)

In order to communicate more closely with the reader, Woolf uses language to induce the
reader to identify with the subjective impressions and experiences described in the work, and
thus she "lead[s] the reader to the point where he or she can apprehend the writer's vision"
(Bishop 16).

In particular, four techniques serve to facilitate communication, whether between
writer and reader, character and reader, or between characters themselves. The first is phatic
communication. Phatic expressions are usually defined as meaningless social exchanges -

small-talk, in other words - but I want to extend this definition to cover any sort of language that derives its import not from the denotative meanings of the words but instead from the communicative function that the words provide. In this way, phatic communication becomes any use of language that serves primarily not to convey information but to affirm the personal relation between the speakers. In *Orlando*, for example, the narrator describes a phatic exchange between Orlando and Shelmardine:

> . . . it would really profit little to write down what they said, for they knew each other so well that they could say anything, which is tantamount to saying nothing, or saying such stupid, prosy things as how to cook an omelette, or where to buy the best boots in London, things which have no lustre taken from their setting, yet are positively of amazing beauty within it. For it has come about, by the wise economy of nature, that our modern spirit can almost dispense with language; the commonest expressions do, since no expressions do . . . (165)

Because the speakers invest their discourse with personal significance, rather than relying on the mundane, public meanings of the words - since no social terms can ever contain the personal feelings motivating the expression - phatic communication achieves a close relation between speakers. Indeed, Woolf often depicts phatic exchanges between couples - such as Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham, Clarissa and Richard Dalloway, and Mrs and Mr Ramsay - for whom this private and intimate use of language can express and confirm feelings that remain otherwise unexpressed.

Metaphor, and figurative language in general, is Woolf's second technique. Since all linguistic structures are paradigmatic, being a framework of interpretation for reality, even literal language is metaphoric to an extent in that it uses (albeit collective) subjective concepts to stand for the reality being communicated. 'Love', for example, is a word and a concept we apply to an actual mental experience. Language is always at a remove from the reality described. Metaphor, however, does away with the pretence of direct and objective reference and heightens the communicative potential of language by its full use of evocation, asking the reader to respond to the language, rather than simply decode the meaning, and thus be more fully involved in the communication process. Furthermore, metaphor func-

tions by conveying a subjective impression without presuming to define any objective refer-ent. Thus it helps to orientate the reader towards the writer's vision of reality without pre-suming to define an objective reality. Woolf uses metaphor to enable the reader to see what she sees when she cannot describe her intentions in a more direct and conventional fashion. The metaphors and anecdotes she uses in discussing language and literature - the luminous halo, and Mrs Brown, for instance - help the reader to grasp her point on subjects where conventional models of conception are unavailable or inappropriate.

A semiotic use of language, the third technique Woolf displays, can be thought of as the poetic side of phatic expression. Described by Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, after Julia Kris-teva's use of the term[3], as belonging to "the musical, rhythmic, non-sense effects of lan-guage, the ones evident in poetry or in the echolalias of children" (331), the semiotic dispo-sition of language recurs again and again in Woolf's works as inarticulate or broken phrases, nursery rhymes, singing, flights of poetic language or incomprehensible nonsense. The old woman on the street in *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, sings "ee um fah um so, foo swee too eem oo" (88), for the moment not meaning anything except that she is taking part in life. Speaking for the sake of listening to the sound of their own voice, characters confirm their very existence by this ability to 'give voice' to some sound. Language used in this way can also let others know that one is there, as when Mrs Ramsay soothes her daughter Cam to sleep in *To the Lighthouse*. Having wound her shawl around the pig's skull that her son James insists on having in the room, Mrs Ramsay comforts her daughter by saying

> how lovely it looked now; how the fairies would love it; it was like a bird's nest;
>
> it was like a beautiful mountain such as she had seen abroad, with valleys and
>
> flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes . . . .
>
> Mrs Ramsay went on saying still more monotonously, and more rhythmically

---

[3] I am aware that Julia Kristeva presents a comprehensive and complex body of work, the implications of which - her psychoanalytic focus, for example - go far beyond the bounds of this thesis. While in no way do I claim to incorporate or apply the full import of her work, I wish to use her term 'semiotic' for two reasons: primarily because it names particular incidences of Woolf's language more appropriately than any other term; and secondarily because it gestures toward a perception of self and language - a sense of fluid ego boundaries, in psychoanalytic terms - that I think Woolf and Kristeva share. In Chapter Six I use the term to name one of Bernard's uses of language, and though I don't apply the term with its full psychoanalytic implications, the potential to fully apply Kristeva's linguistic and psychoanalytic theories is there. Indeed, many critics have discovered the similarities between Woolf and Kristeva. Jean Wyatt discusses *Mrs Dalloway* with refer-ence to Kristeva; other critics have explicated *The Waves* using Kristeva's work.

and more nonsensically, how she must shut her eyes and go to sleep and dream
of mountains and valleys and stars falling and parrots and antelopes and gardens
and everything lovely . . . until she sat upright and saw that Cam was asleep.
(132)

Semiotic language communicates on a level of sound and rhythm below conventional symbolic representation.

Not entirely distinct from language's semiotic disposition, rhythm is the fourth technique of Woolf's that I identify. Referring to *The Waves*, Richter describes Woolf's language as "articulated feeling" (134), and Woolf's own words confirm this description. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf discusses the effect of rhythm she hoped to achieve in *To the Lighthouse*, revealing her perception of how language functions in articulating thought:

> Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A
> sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to
> get it; and in writing (such is my belief) one has to recapture this, and set it
> working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks
> and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it. (quoted in Richter 216)

Where a sight or an emotion creates a wave in the mind of the writer before the application of language that would - in line with Saussure's description - structure it into conventional terms, Woolf embodies this initial rhythm in her own words as she writes. As the reader reads, then, the rhythm of the words, rather than the meanings, creates the same wave in her or his mind, and so conveys the same emotion that Woolf originally felt. Thus rhythm becomes a means of using language to achieve the same 'wave-length' between reader and writer, engendering communication beyond the constraint of conventional terms and concepts.

Where Woolf did manage to express herself 'in her own voice' by using language in the ways outlined above, she faced the consequences of offering an anomalous linguistic product within the conventional system. In 'A Mark on the Wall', Woolf writes of the hold that convention has over the members of a community, and the impossibility of advancing

anything that deviates from conventional expectations: she recalls

> a whole class of things indeed which, as a child, one thought the thing itself, the
> standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of
> nameless damnation . . . . There was a rule for everything. The rule for table-
> cloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little
> yellow compartments marked upon them . . . . Tablecloths of a different kind
> were not real tablecloths. (44)

Just as "[t]ablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths", Woolf finds that any use
of language that deviates from conventional language-use - a conventional language-use that
embodies the prevailing paradigm of reality - does not constitute a real expression.

Even within her own community of friends, the intellectual and seemingly innovative
thinkers of the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf found that an expression had to conform to cer-
tain conventions. Though they challenged traditional ideas about religion, morality, social
behaviour, politics, art and literature, the group still maintained its own paradigm of what
they considered real and true and rejected any expression that did not conform by invalidat-
ing the authority of the speaker. Gerald Brenan reminisces of the Bloomsbury Group:

> though they thought of themselves as new brooms and innovators, they quickly
> found that they were playing the part of a literary establishment. What I chiefly
> got from them was their respect for the truth. Yet this - they gave the word a
> capital letter - was defined in a narrow and exclusive way so that anyone who
> held views that could not be justified rationally was regarded as a wilful cultiva-
> tor of illusions and therefore as a person *who could not be taken seriously.*
> (quoted in Poole 61, my italics)

Specifically, debate within the group, though ostensibly calling for the expression of a per-
sonal opinion, still required this expression to conform to prescribed rules of logic and ra-
tionality, and to conform to the group's assumptions about the relation between language
and reality, and the function of an expression:

> Words, in the world of G.E. Moore especially, were logical counters in a world
> of public logical discourse, and must have a clear and precise, not merely a per-

sonal, meaning. 'What exactly do you *mean* by *that*?' [a Bloomsbury inter-

rogative initiated by Moore] is a demand for a publicly available and checkable

meaning" (Poole 66, original italics)

Words in the world of Virginia Woolf, however, are not logical counters with singular and
self-evident meanings, but are a means to give voice to personal experiences and subjective
visions of life. Poole notes that the interrogative was not used by the group to assist com-
munication by encouraging further explanation, but "as a warning not to speak in terms that
the group will not accept . . . . 'What exactly do you *mean* by *that*?' *meant*: conform to our
verbal conventions, or prepare to be ridiculed" (66-7, original italics). As Poole describes it,
Woolf faced a linguistic community that not only did not understand her use of language, but
actively discouraged her attempts at expressing herself in her own voice.

Furthermore, Woolf was articulating an epistemological paradigm that differed from
that of her contemporaries in its relativistic, rather than empiric, ideas about perception,
knowledge and identity. Poole states,

It was the essence of Virginia's genius that what she had to say, to show,

was not capable of being further verbally reduced from the expression she had

already given it . . . . It might take fifteen pages to describe a mark on the wall.

The Moorean attitude had no patience with such descriptions. Its question was,

so to speak, 'Is it a stain or is it a nail?' Virginia was trying to draw attention,

however, not to what the mark in fact empirically *was*, so much as to the process

of human vision which allows such enormous and radical imprecisions. (67,

Poole's italics)

Poole recognises Woolf's concern with the process of forming subjective impressions and
points of view in contrast to empirical assumptions about an unproblematic and self-evident
reality.

Just as Woolf herself suffered because of her unconventional use of language,
Woolf's work also suffered for not conforming to conventional expectations. Some critics
were confused by her attempt to alter the paradigm of reality. In 1950, D.S. Savage wrote,
"Truth, the absolute, forms in every integrated work of art the invisible centre around which

everything in it coheres and in relation to which it becomes a communicator of value" (13); the passage suggests that he recognised the function and importance of a paradigm of reality in the creation of a work of art. However, Savage went on to contend that "in Virginia Woolf we see the elementary bewilderment of a mind incapable of formulating a clear view of her world of experience consequent upon inability to establish foundations in belief of whatever order" (19). Though he demonstrates an awareness of the concept of a paradigm in art within which everything coheres and becomes meaningful, Savage nevertheless also believes that there is only one such valid paradigm - for him it is Christianity - and he cannot make sense of, let alone confer value on, a work that embodies an alternative paradigm.

Writing in 1976, James Naremore provides a slightly more recent example of the same vein of literary criticism, in this case highlighting Woolf's use of language, which he finds objectionable. Focusing his discussion on Woolf's use of lyrical language, Naremore suggests that "lyrical" and "rhythmic" equal "poetic" (14), and in turn, "poetic" equals (in addition to "feminine") "mannered" and "ornamental" (17). "Mannered" and "ornamental" are representative of "literary convention" (19), and "literary convention", used in this way, contrives a picture "based wholly on fancy" (19). For Naremore, to be "based wholly on fancy" in this way means that Woolf's language is "detached from experience", and so he concludes that the "charm" of Woolf's work "seems false, its authority invalid, and its beauty sterile" (19). Naremore fails to recognise his own implicit assumptions about language and literature. Where he expects that language should be "put to the scrupulous service of presenting life", he makes two assumptions of the writer: he assumes that 'life' is a universally similar experience, and he assumes that any use of language which does not 'present life' cannot function as literary expression.

Woolf herself is quite explicit about the need to interpret and evaluate literary works from within the paradigms they create. She anticipates Kuhn's observations about anomalies being seen as meaningless or marginalised: novelists are already so far apart, she writes in 'Phases of Fiction', "that they scarcely communicate, and to one novelist the work of another is quite genuinely unintelligible or quite genuinely negligible" (144). In the essay 'How Should One Read a Book?', she stresses the need for the reader to appreciate the dif-

ferences between works, saying "it is necessary to approach every writer differently in order to get from him all he can give us" (392-3). Woolf suggests the reader become an "accomplice" to the writer, following the inclinations of the work and renouncing any initial prejudices in order to maximise his or her chance of understanding:

> if we remember, as we turn to the bookcase, that each of these books was written by a pen which, consciously or unconsciously, tried to trace out a design, avoiding this, accepting that, adventuring the other; if we try to follow the writer in his experiment from the first word to the last, without imposing our design upon him, then we shall have a good chance of getting hold of the right end of the string. (390)

Woolf argued that this approach to reading was especially relevant when reading the works of the modernists themselves - works which required a greater effort of comprehension from readers of traditional literature. Of her contemporaries, she says: "wherever there is life in them they will be casting their net out over some unknown abyss to snare new shapes, and we must throw our imaginations after them if we are to accept with understanding the strange gifts they bring back to us" ('Hours in a Library' 29-30).

Woolf reconceptualises reality, creating in her works "new shapes" after which we, as readers, must "throw our imaginations" in order to fully understand her voice. With the advent of deconstruction as a literary and linguistic tool of inquiry, we can now begin to appreciate the import of Woolf's use of language. Such an approach parallels Woolf's own investigations into the production and reception of literary and linguistic expression, for she seeks no definitive literary form or incontrovertible meaning in language, emphasising only the goal of communication: "Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers" (MF 192). As one critic notes with regard to *A Room of One's Own*, for example, Woolf prescribes no 'woman's sentence', but only asserts the desire for women to be able to express themselves in their own voices. With regard to Woolf's work, Pamela Caughie describes literature as a dynamic process which offers "possibilities, not fixed positions" and "functions, not appropriate forms" (6). Caughie, like Woolf, focuses on the

speaker's motivation behind an expression and the reader's response to that expression, for each remains open to the potential for communication beyond fixed social codes of denotative meaning.

Certainly some readers have responded to Woolf in terms of the rhetoric of her work. Toril Moi contends that "remaining detached from the narrative strategies of *Room* is equivalent to not reading it at all" (5), arguing that what the work *does* for the reader goes over and above what it simply states. Clare Hanson concurs, explaining that the "very method of *A Room of One's Own*, with its shifting viewpoints and sudden juxtapositions, encourages us to see 'truth' as varying and unstable, and value as dependent on point of view" (116). Woolf enacts her vision of reality in her texts, deconstructing the certainty of any one fixed point of view by her use of language. Thus Woolf provokes the reader's awareness of the implications behind different constructions of reality and different uses of language. Victoria Middleton writes of Woolf's "re-cognition" which entails "becoming conscious of how we know, what we know, and *where* we know: where we stand in relation to the dominant culture" (415, original italics). Middleton describes how Woolf's observations on language and her use of language, in "exposing the relativity of supposed absolutes and endorsing pluralism of meaning" (406), enact a political position of resisting the "imperial appropriation of knowledge, the assumption of mastery over and total certitude about the world" (412) that conventional language-use assumes. Woolf deconstructs any one speaker or group of speakers' claim to an authority over language and reality by promoting the authority of every speaker to use language to express themselves and their experience of life in their own voice.

In the chapter that follows we see Woolf exploring and enacting different uses of language and the implications of these uses for speakers. She begins, in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, to depict the effects of the tyrant of convention on speakers who want to escape the social codes by which society defines them, speakers who seek, like Woolf, to express themselves in their own voices.