

The Other's Language: Feminist Textual Strategies in *To the Lighthouse*

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Recent development of French feminism has witnessed a growing interest in the study of *l'écriture féminine*. French feminist thinkers like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, engaged themselves in the excavation and redefinition of female experiences in the hope that they can formulate a kind of Feminist writing rich enough to express female specificity which was suppressed formerly by the humanist, patriarchal discourse. French feminists in general believe that Western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. As they all posit that female subjectivity lies in women's bodily drives, a reinvestigation of the language that has been oppressing them becomes necessary.

According to these feminist thinkers, the symbolic order existing in the society was sustained by a series of binary opposition inherent in Western metaphysics: Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/Emotions, Intelligible/Sensitive, etc.¹ The man/woman opposition has already underlied in this system. In logocentric ideology, each binary opposition can be understood as a hierarchy, in which the woman side is always considered negative. In patriarchal signifying system, men are related to the privileged term of metaphysical duality, while women represent whatever opposite to the favored concepts. Men are the Being that possesses masculinity, central position, meaning, authority; accordingly women are the Non-Being that is conferred upon with femininity, marginality, absence of meaning and negativity. In a word, Women are the Other, the mirror held up to reflect the subjective integrity of Men. Women in the society were alienated from their own authenticity because their female specificities were excluded and could find no "words" in patriarchal language. Therefore they were silent in human history. Because women are always already caught up in the language net of the patriarchal logic in which logocentrism colludes with phallogocentrism, a resistance to this signifying process seems to be impossible.

How, then, can this signifying process (in the present society it is manifested in speech, writing, myths, rituals, and images) be resisted? First, they challenge the patriarchal sexual difference, contending that femininity and masculinity as shown above are culturally imposed concepts, which repress women's genuine sexuality. For the French feminist thinkers, sexual difference is not a fixed opposition, but a process of differentiation. In order to achieve this, the subject has to go back to the other side of language--the "language" before it enters the symbolic order. Hence, The pre-Oedipal Imaginary is taken as their common source of subversive power, for they find in it a possibility for an unrestrained subject, and the origin of maternal power, which once

entering the symbolic order will be mitigated. Since the symbolic order can not be avoided by any subject, the subject is bound to be split and some drives would be censored and sealed in the unconscious by the symbolic discourse. Once women are transformed in the patriarchal society, they will embody the femininity that the Law of the Father endows upon them. The only chance for women to resist the symbolic signifying process, as these French women agree, consists in the form of *jouissance*, in the reexperience of the infancy pleasure and body feeling that is repressed but not obliterated in the Law of the Father.² On this common ground each of them develops their own modes of strategy.

Julia Kristeva postulates a semiotic discourse as a counter signifying process that can be perceived as a feminist strategy and a new textual theory. She displaces Lacan's division between the Imaginary and the Symbolic into a distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. The signifying process is created in the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic is related to Freud's pre-Oedipal primary processes, in which endless flow of drives gather in *chora*.³ The *chora* is neither a sign nor a signifier, it is an indeterminate articulation before representation, and can only be understood as the analogy of vocal or kinetic rhythm. Once the subject has entered into the Symbolic order, the *chora* will be repressed and can show itself only in the form of pulsional pressure on symbolic language: as silence, contradiction, meaninglessness, absence, and disruption. The semiotic discourse is a gestural, rhythmic, preferential signifying process, that, when responding to symbolic signifying system, enacts like the repressed *chora*. It is in *chora* that both women and men find a space for free bodily expression that is forbidden in the social and cultural discourse.

Kristeva's semiotics distinguished itself from traditional linguistics at the juncture when she brings the speaking subject into consideration. For her, this subject is a split subject, who is divided between consciousness and unconsciousness, that is, psychological processes and social constraints. The activities and performances of the speaking subjects are the result of a dialectical process between the semiotic *chora* and the symbolic devices. As a whole, the semiotic discourse, the signifying process of a split subject, the interplay between consciousness and unconsciousness, and the dialectical performance between the semiotic and the symbolic generate what we called feminine writing, or poetic language, or an otherness of language. As is excellently summarized by Leon S. Roudiez:

Poetic language is distinct from language as used for ordinary communication but not because it may involve a so-called departure from a norm; it is almost an otherness of language. It is the language of materiality as opposed to transparency (where the word is forgotten for the sake of the object or concept designated), a language in which the writer's effort is less to deal rationally with those objects or concepts words seem to encase than to work, consciously or not, with the sounds and rhythms of words in translational fashion (in Ossi Brik's phrase)

and effecting what Victor Shklovski called "semantic displacements."⁴

Kristeva's feminist text, henceforth, is not necessarily created by women; its feminist label derives from its textual specificity which makes possible the interplay between bodily drives and patriarchal social discourse. Writers like Mallar , Lautreamont, Joyce, And Artaud, in Krietva's eyes, had created feminine writing because they have been "introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language," which are "a sign of a force that has not been grasped by the linguistic or ideological system."⁵ The pleasure brought about by the rhythm of a feminine text is (sexual) jouissance.

Kristeva's redefinition of femininity results in her particular concept of woman. As she mentions in an interview: "a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being."⁶ Women, following the line of thinking, can not be defined or represented; they can only be understood as a negative existence, something that is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order, hence that which is forever challenging the dominant discourse. Here lies the subversive force of a new conceptual space. Without theorizing and pinning down the concept of "femininity," Kristeva locates women on the camp of dissidence and nonconformism, a position allowing free play of femininity and masculinity, as well as the representation, or signifying process, of genuine female experience.

H l ne Cixous differs herself from Krietva in that she actually advocates writings by women. She emphasizes that women, historically rendered to being sexual objects for men, have been prevented from expressing their own sexuality. Their voices were muffled by the humanist history. If they can dislocate their "within" position in the discourse of men, and explode it, turn it around, then they can establish a point of view in which women can really speak and write their story. For Cixous, the feminine text is the text of body.

Cixous's conceptualization of her feminist texts is based upon Derridean concept of writing. Since Cixous sets it as her goal as a feminist to undermine the logocentric ideology and herald the birth of a feminine language that ceaselessly subverts the phallogocentric binary schemes, Derrida's theory of difference comes up as a convenient and powerful weapon.

Derrida's concept of writing has been a great theoretical inspiration for many feminist thinkers because of its challenge to logocentric attempt to gain an immediate access to meaning in language. According to Derrida, meaning is not produced in the binary closure, rather it is achieved through the "free play of signifier." To demonstrate this concept Derrida used Saussure's idea of the phoneme, considered as the smallest unit of signifying. Thus phoneme /b/ is signifying in so far as it is different from /p/ or /t/; the meaning of each phoneme is forever deferred with reference to another phoneme. Therewith the signifying process can be understood as a series of *diff rence* and *diff rance* among the differential elements in language.⁷ In other words, meaning is never truly present but is produced in a ceaseless reference to other absent signifiers. Thus,

there can be no “transcendental signifier”, namely, a signifier that contains significance in itself, the end of *différance*. Writing, in this sense, can be perceived as the “endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge,” as Norris defines it.⁸

Adopting the concept of writing taken as the free play of signifiers-*différance*, Cixous establishes her own theory of feminine writing in order to shatter patriarchal ideology. As she once puts it, feminine texts are texts that “work on the difference,” aiming to split open the binary closure, and creating an open-ended text. This feminine text will enable women to inscribe their feminine sexuality. It is a text from and of the body, which “will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system.”⁹

Virginia Woolf’s concern with women and women who write have been widely known. Works like *A Room of One’s Own* brings into light women’s predicament as writers. However, it is also critics’ complaint that she failed in her works to offer a powerful feminist ideology that can reflect her experience. The difficulties in identifying her as a feminist writer are ascribed to her narrative style, which they found playful, sly, and elusive.¹⁰ However, Woolf’s feminist revolution takes place exactly at her unique form of writing. As Toril Moi contended: “[through] her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified.”¹¹

It will be, therefore, rewarding to approach Woolf’s work from the perspective of French feminist concepts of feminine writing, which I believe will prove to be a powerful weapon in bringing out the implicit political potential in Woolf’s works.

In this paper I am going to discuss some textual phenomena that dissolve the rigid oppositions in the symbolic order of the Victorian patriarchal society in *To the Lighthouse*. These phenomena, in my point of view, are manifestations of feminine writing on Woolf’s part to subvert, revision, and appropriate the existing institutes of cultural and social signifying process.

The narrative of *To the Lighthouse* is constituted with multiple voices of the characters, some unidentified speakers, and the narrator. These voices are the linguistic manifestations of some selves that encompass not only the conscious thought but also complex conflicting drives that lurk beneath the social discourse. The subjects that Woolf presents are, in Kristevan terms, split subjects, “divided between unconscious and conscious motivations, that is, between physiological processes and social constraints.”¹² They are defined, on the one hand, by the signifying process of the symbolic order that involves them in linear time, logical thinking and social discourse; on the other hand, they are the result of some unconscious flows that open up a space for free body expression and repressed desire. Thus, the social reality is by no means the only reality that the characters try to grasp in order to gain a true knowledge of themselves. The social discourse, the center of meaning and the “unitary selves” are challenged, dissolved and even decentered from time to time by the semiotic chora, as mentioned above.

The heterogeneous nature of the split subject problematizes the critical opinions that take Mr. Ramsay as the sign of masculine principle and Mrs. Ramsay that of feminine principle.¹³ As the upholder of Victorian patriarchal system, and the empirical philosopher majoring in Hume, Mr. Ramsay is easily considered the oppressing force, the Law of the Father, and the dominant ideology, that the children and the women in the novel have to rebel in order to find the meaning of their lives. But the textual rendering of this character does not testify to the unitary perspective of the self. In fact, the metaphors that the narrative voice and the voice of Mr. Ramsay uses often decenter the social discourse and the philosophical thinking he abides by. Mr. Ramsay is, in fact, alienated by the very symbolic order he represents. In a long passage in which he meditates about great theme like the progression of civilization and the purpose of human history, he realizes his scholarly research, for the better, is only a guise for him to maintain his social role as a good husband, friend, teacher; for the worse, it has already sterilized his life:

It was true; he was for the most part happy; he and his wife; he had his wife; he had his children; he had promised in six weeks' time to talk "some nonsense" to the young men of Cardiff about Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and the causes of the French Revolution. But this and his pleasure in it, his glory in the phrases he made, in the ardour of youth, in his wife's beauty, in the tributes that reached him from Swansea, Cardiff, Exeter, Southampton, Kidderminster, Oxford, Cambridge—all has to be deprecated and concealed under the phrase "talking nonsense," because, in effect, he had not done the thing he might have done. It was a disguise; it was the refuge of a man afraid to own his own feelings, who could not say, This is what I like--this is what I am; . . .¹⁴

The repression from the Law of the father has created a crisis from which he has no way to break away except demanding female sympathy, as a substitute for the genuine feeling he is no longer able to own. Mr. Ramsay is never a unitary subject—a subject that is in full control of conscious, rational thought; yet, his heterogeneous side was not only repressed but forever paralyzed, forbidding the free play of one's social discourse and clandestine desire, that eventually aggravates his philosophical career. Woolf employs a metaphor that properly refers to the insufficiency of living and thinking in linear time:

It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. Here, stopping for the moment by the stone urn which held the geraniums, he saw, but now far, far away, like children picking up shells, divinely innocent and occupied with little trifles at

their feet and somehow entirely defenseless against a doom which he perceived, his wife and son, together, in the window. They needed his protection; he gave it them. But after Q? What comes next? (p. 53)

The referent of the alphabet metaphor is hard to pin down. Since the order of the alphabet has to be read out in linear time, as the articulation of a sentence, with its sign and syntax happening in the same dimension, the metaphor, in a way, indicates the linear elements of conscious thought, and the limitation of approaching life only in metaphorical perspective. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the metaphor happening in his inner voice and the outer scene observed by the narrator's voice implies some similarity worked out in the unconscious operation in Mr. Ramsay's mind. Giving protection to his wife and son, fulfilling the role endowed upon by the social discourse, like pursuing philosophical research, will eventually trap him somewhere.

If women in Woolf's novel have any differences from men, they are not attributed to women's femininity as perceived by the patriarchal discourse, rather to their powerful semiotic potentials (which is femininity in Kristeva and Woolfian term). As we have observed above, Women are defined in view of position. Because of their marginal position, women are embodied with more revolutionary potentials. Women, like poets, artists or psychos are split subjects, subject to symbolic order on the one hand, yet maintain prelinguistic sensation in their unconscious on the other hand. Mrs. Ramsay is a woman of this kind.

Identifying herself with the role of "the Angel in the House," Mrs. Ramsay is the ideal Victorian woman devoted herself to the task of a housewife and social unifier. She has completely merged herself in the symbolic order that allows her only to talk like a wife, a mother, someone who believes in the discourse of romantic love and marriage. The undoubted acknowledgement of patriarchal ideology wins her respect and love in social life at the expense of the free expression of herself as being. The oppression from symbolic signifying process eventually leads to the disjunction of the self. With her keen body drives still powerful on the semiotic level, as well as a conscious will to abide by the Law of the Father, she develops some strategies to counter the dominant discourse without openly affronting it, and a peculiar approach to the core of the matter, quite unlike her husband's.

Throughout "The Window" section of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay has been obsessed with the riddle of life. Yet, her search for the meaning of life can never be answered in language. Because the quest for meaning calls for the logocentric, hence phallogocentric, myth for a conceptual closure, which is always already at odds with her semiotic energy. Her question, instead, is answered by the privileged moment when the world is charged with fluid sensation of things in a state of perfect harmony. Mrs. Ramsay reaches this moment when planning a match between Lily Briscoe and William Banks at the dinner table:

Foolishly, she had set them opposite each other. That could be remedied tomorrow. If it were fine, they should go for a picnic. Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It parktook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Banks to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had once today, already, of piece, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (pp. 157–58)

This moment is a moment of difference (the term includes two concepts: *différence* and *defférance*) for the experiencing subject.¹⁵ It differs itself, first of all, from the linear time in which reason, concept, logic exist as the tool for truth and meaning. At that moment, Mrs. Ramsay places herself outside the present reality, outside the social discourse going on during the meal, and retreats back to her “wedge-shaped core of darkness” so that the repressed desire and the prelinguistic drives can be released to experience, in a rhythmic space, the moment. The long quotation above is a perfect example of Derridian *différance* in which meaning constantly eludes the grasp of sense; it can also be conceived as Kristevan genotext since the underlying force of the text is not a conscious mind, but a drive discharged from the semiotic chora. As we have shown above, the chora, when “expressed” in the temporality, is subject to a regulating process, which effectuates discontinuities. A close examination of the textual structure of the passage will attest to Kristeva’s statement. This passage consists of paratactic syntax, disrupted from time to time by loosely joint clauses, intruding parentheses of the narrator’s voice referring to Mrs. Ramsay’s outer actions (“she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights”), or inner voice (“but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots”), and figurative languages dealt out exuberantly and withdrawn rapidly (“like a hawk. . . like a flag... like a smoke. . . like a fume. . . like a ruby”). The reader’s analytical intelligence is kept at bay by the verbal web of flowing nuances and disrupted syntax. It seems there is an unconscious force latent in the linguistic expression perpetually

postponing the moment when the sentences can be committed into a final meaning. And the figurative expressions, swarming up and substituting each other in such a short span of time, prevent the reader from coming to a metaphysical conception of their referents, leaving only a synaesthetic trace in the reader's mind.¹⁶

Thus Mrs. Ramsay transcends her fear of change, of flowing time, of death, not by sudden illumination, but by fulfilling her bodily pleasure which then turns out to be a pleasure of the text. The passage itself is a ruby that "shines out in the face of the flowing." With this triumph, this perfect peace and rest, she further defeats the paternal intellect that she hates and detests so much for its oppressing nature: "To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible an outrage of human decency. . ." (p. 51) "How much they missed, after all, these very clever men! How dried up they did become, to be sure." (p. 150) Two passages later after the above long quotation, Mrs. Ramsay reflects upon the civilization woven by the paternal discourses of intellect in a totally different way:

What did it all mean? To this day she had no notion; A square root? What was that? Her sons know. She leant on them; cubes and square roots; that was what they were talking about now; on Voltaire and Madame de Stael; on the character of Napoleon; on the French system of land tenure; on Lord Rosebery; on Creevey's Memoirs; she let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree. Then she woke up. It was still being fabricated. William Bankes was praising the Waverley novels. (p. 159)

History, literature, mathematics--discourses that fabricate human civilization are translated into fluid sensation in this privileged moment when the metaphor "fabric" is actually felt as if it were upholding her, the suspending hawk. By praising paternal intellect in a sensuous way she in fact dismantles the will to truth underlying the discourse of civilization. The privileged moment then reaches its peak when she repudiates herself from the everyday reality and the world of conscious reflection to the extent that what is left is only the voice, color, gesture, kinetic rhythm; it happens when she realizes Charles Tansley's brag is only a way to show his ego:

Now she need not listen. It could not last, she knew, but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing

themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling. So she saw them; she heard them; but whatever they said had also this quality, as if what they said was like the movement of a trout when, at the same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left; and the whole is held together; for whereas in active life she would be netting and separating one thing from another; she would be saying she liked the *Waverley* novels or had not read them; she would be urging herself forward; now she said nothing. For the moment, she hung suspended. (pp. 160–61)

Again, images entail images contiguously mitigating the effort to arrest the elusive meaning: the light, the trout in the water. Social language is muffled and translated to a rhythm produced by a trout; or she herself is the trout “lit up, hanging, trembling,” seeing, hearing in silence. The objects of seeing and hearing are not important; it is the process of these physical sensations that counts. The experiencing subject was thrown into a whirl of confusing sensation, vivified by the synaesthetic use of visual, hearing, and kinetic images, while meaning is infinitely delayed. The paternal, linear sense of time is disrupted in a signifying process like this, which emphasizes rhythm against the meaning of language and creates a radically different time sense. As Kristeva observes in “The Ethics of Language”:

But the irruption of semiotic rhythm within the signifying system of language will never be a Hegelian *Aughebung*, that is, it will not truly be experienced in the present. The rigid, imperious, immediate present kills, puts aside, and fritters away the poem. Thus, the irruption within the order of language of the anteriority of language evokes a later time, that is, a forever. . . . Now, by thus suspending the present moment, by straddling rhythmic, meaningless, anterior memory with meaning intended for later or forever, poetic language structures itself as the very nucleus of a monumental historicity.¹⁷

The monumental time is the time of another history, another subjectivity.

Mrs. Ramsay's tendency to bring things together, to merge with things, eventually culminates in a materialization of words, that is, the autonomy of signifiers in her particular signifying process. The whole process covers nearly twenty pages starting at the end of the party when Mrs. Ramsay hears her husband reading aloud some poem and lasts until she sits with her husband in the room, both reading:

Come out and climb the garden path, Luriana Lurilee.
The China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the yellow bee.

.....

The words (she was looking at the window) sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them,

but they had come into existence of themselves. (p. 166)

.....

And she opens the book and began reading here and there at random, and as she did so she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all. (p. 178)

.....

“Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose,” she read, and so reading she was ascending, she felt, on to the top, on to the summit. How satisfying! How restful! All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean. and then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here--the sonnet. (p. 181)

The words in the poem are experienced as words, not merely as signs that correspond to some objects or concepts which are the purpose of language; rather, the words occupy a space in time and are endowed with a materiality that is neglected in patriarchal, official language system.: “she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here--the sonnet.” The sounds and rhythms of words in the poem replacing the abstract meaning fabricate another reality in which Mrs. Ramsay escapes temporarily from the linear time in which she is forced to be silent: “He could say things--she never could.” In this monumental time she articulates freely with her bodily feeling: “as she did so she felt she was climbing backups, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curve over her.” The juxtaposition of Mr. Ramsay reading Scott’s novel and Mrs. Ramsay reading an anonymous poem brings two realities into play. Mr. Ramsay’s conscious, logical reading brings him joy at that moment because he “felt that he had been arguing with somebody, and had got the better of him.” With this Darwinian competitive mentality, Mr. Ramsay glides through the moment in an abstract way in the trap of the linear hegemonic time, whereas Mrs. Ramsay’s semiotic “reading” disengages herself from the pressure of a time in which she finds no voice. She spatializes that moment by retrieving the physical existence of the words and projects the impossible meaning to a forever future-to-come.¹⁸ With this, time is elongated into “eternity” at that moment, and the transience of the present--a fear shadows Mrs. Ramsay in the novel--is overcome. The confrontation of the two realities proves to be a silent revolt on Mrs. Ramsay’s part against the linear history, the symbolic order, the patriarchal discourse, and the social constraints that are always already there in the social life for both men and women.

With Mrs. Ramsay’s death, the decomposition of the house on the beach, and the end of World War I, the Victorian discourse is dissolved. The quest of the meaning of life is handed down to Lily Briscoe. Though toppling the symbolic order at the privileged moment when the established order was disturbed, Mrs. Ramsay never represents nor

reiterates her specific signifying process. It is Lily's responsibility as the spiritual "daughter" to fill in the "blank page" of the feminine discourse in a ravaged post-war world.

The task of filling this "glaring space" is not only a process of artistic creation. It is also a process of the quest of Lily's lost, original feminine specificity, one that has been fragmentalized by the social constraint in the present reality. The first step of retrieving her repressed chora is a conscious resistance to Mr. Ramsay's demand for sympathy. Lily's tacit challenge to the Victorian sexual difference, which requires women to serve, please, and help men in social decorum, indicates an effort to repudiate from the established gender dichotomy. By neutralizing her social role, Lily gains a transcendental position enabling her to maintain an abstract relationship with Mr. Ramsay and a mother-daughter relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. The maintenance of both relationship is instrumental in the process of Lily's representing her answer of life with painting. Lily's action of painting is juxtaposed with Mr. Ramsay's action of sailing to the lighthouse. Textually, the synchronical deployment of two scenes at the same duration of time evokes a similarity between the two actions. That is, sailing from the house to the lighthouse refers to some signifieds shared by what Lily's process of painting refers to. Psychoanalytically, Lily's need to keep an eye on the sailing boat, though contradicting her former aversion to Mr. Ramsay, is a sign of her effort to maintain a link to the Symbolic order. Here Mr. Ramsay is not perceived physically as a father, a husband, or a man, but as the abstract Law of the Father. Watching Mr. Ramsay's boat sailing across the bay, Lily reflects: "She had always found him difficult. She never had been able to praise him to his face, she remembered. And that reduced their relationship to something neutral, without that element of sex in it. . ." (p. 254) In her attempt to represent her feminine experience, Lily realizes the importance of keeping herself in the symbolic order lest she degenerate into nothingness. According to Lacan, only psychos exulse the fundamental signifier (the phallus) from the subject's symbolic universe. Thus a total break from the symbolic order takes the risk of ripping one's subjective integrity. As Minow-Pinkney states:

Since the symbolic order is constituted by the repression of the somatic, to "express" the body is to transgress the limits of representation. Lily's near impossible desire to articulate "these emotions of the body" risks subverting the symbolic and precipitating madness or even death.²⁰

Lily's need to paint takes the form of a solution to her quest of meaning, yet paradoxically sets her in a double bind. Vacillating between the two poles of madness and total surrender to the discourse of the phallus, Lily is struggling to find the pivot between the two axes of her self formation--the symbolic order and her repressed feminine desire. The harmony she seeks to attain in her picture is more than an aesthetic question; it is the harmony between a subject's relationship to her social reality, and that to her inner bodily feeling. Lily's picture is the feminine representation of bodily feeling. Thus

she realizes the importance and difficulties of finding a balance between the painting and Mr. Ramsay: "For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary." (p. 287)

Lily's spatial relationship with Mr. Ramsay sailing to the lighthouse evokes in her mind the memory of Mrs. Ramsay at some particular moments, which temporally relates Lily to Mrs. Ramsay. In fact, the whole process of painting with the memory of Mrs. Ramsay rising up in Lily's mind is, in my view, an allegory of feminine writing.

In "The Laugh of Medusa," Hélène Cixous urges women to break the silence assigned to them in the symbolic order and write. But women's writing distinguishes itself from the patriarchal writing by inscribing femininity in their texts. By writing her self, "women will return to the body, which has been more than confiscated from her."²¹ Moreover, feminine writing is a writing of the body that ruptures the repressed feminine subjectivity, and brings forth the immense resources of the unconscious which has been kept under seal. For Cixous, the interplay between body and writing is a cyclical one. As she comments upon a description of a woman persistently exploring her own body since her childhood:

This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful.²¹

The pre-symbolic bodily experience entails aesthetic activity that expands and utters feminine unconscious desire; whereas feminine writing not only writes about and with the body but reinforces the body.

For Cixous, voice is privileged as the femininity in writing, "writing and voice. . . are woven together."²² When a woman speaks, she speaks with her body to support her logic. As Cixous claims: "she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying. . ." ²³ The voice in feminine text, on the other hand, is an echo of the Voice of the Mother inherent in all feminine texts. Toril Moi ingeniously summarizes Cixous' bond between feminine writing and the mother as the source and origin of the voice:

Woman, in other words, is wholly and physically present in her voice--and writing is no more than the extension of this self-identical prolongation of the speech act. The voice in each woman, moreover, is not only her own but springs from the deepest layers of her psyche: her own speech becomes the echo of the primal song she once heard, the voice of the incarnation of the "first voice of love which all women preserve alive. . . in each woman sings the first nameless love" (JN, 172) It is, in short, the Voice of the Mother, that omnipotent figure that

dominates the fantasies of the pre-Oedipal baby. . .²⁴

The voice that is anterior to feminine writing is the mother and the mother's voice, that "leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style."²⁵ Thus, when a woman writes she is spurred by the voice of the mother, the Other with whom she rescues her feminine subjectivity.

In the case of *To the Lighthouse*, painting is a metaphor of feminine writing because of its subversive power. It is, firstly, free from the symbolic signifying process, and it relies on the lines and colors for its units of sign. Furthermore, it allows the movement of the body to participate in the process of signification. In the process of painting, Lily undergoes three layers of semiotic experience simultaneously: her own unique bodily sensation of the immediate reality surrounding her, her memory and evocation of Mrs. Ramsay at some privileged moments in the remote past, and the action of painting. Each experience sets in motion the other experiences and then recycles the operation in Lily's mind as the process of feminine representation unfolds gradually.

Lily's long delayed wish for a painting was rekindled after Mr. Ramsay, Cam and James left for the lighthouse. Just like many years ago the sound of the waves (a metaphor for feminine element) shocks Mrs. Ramsay into her immense feminine space, the movement of painting is a catalyst that discharges Lily's semiotic energy (voice), removing her from the closing in paternal discourse and throwing her to her vast bodily territory as well as another reality long buried:

The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it--a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her. For what could be more formidable than that space? Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers--this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention. (pp. 235-36)

Lily's painting involves the body, the "dancing rhythmical movement." And it helps her regain the body confiscated by the symbolic order, opening up a space that first seems formidable and frightening for it arouses "one to perpetual combat" with the social reality. In a metaphorical sense, her painting "is" the body. As I have mentioned before, painting, for Lily, is the locus where the aesthetic quest intersects with the quest

of one's original self, hence the meaning of life. Therefore the solution of the artistic problem implies a return and acceptance of her bodily space. As the rhythm of painting persists, she comes to the realization that words and language can never fully grasp an experience; they "fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low." It is one's bodily feeling that "speaks" to fill in the space on the canvas, not words.

On the other hand, painting as a form of feminine writing evokes the voice of her body that reverberates with the voice of the mother-Mrs. Ramsay, whose name Lily invokes at the moment when she was dangling between renouncing the symbolic signifying process and full acceptance of the semiotic energy. The voice, manifested itself with painting, finds an echo in the constant intrusion of the memory of Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's consciousness. Mrs. Ramsay's bodily *jouissance* experienced at the privileged moment is never shared by anyone. Yet, Lily enjoys similar experience years after, that relates her to the memory of Mrs. Ramsay at some moments in the remote past. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay, who goes through the moment of *jouissance* without being able to represent them, Lily consciously acknowledges the futility of concepts and words, and the necessity of going back to the things itself before they are polluted and oppressed by the symbolic order. Thus she utters in her inner voice:

What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything. (p. 287)

The need to utter, to express what is forever eluding her draws back the image of Mrs. Ramsay--the source and origin of her feminine power, first a glimpse of her in grey hat, then scene after scene occurring in the past projecting their influence on the present consciousness creating a repetition of time. Going back to the past to gain an insight of Mrs. Ramsay is going back to the lost self for Lily. Lily understands that it is not by logical thinking that she can go back to the Mother. She needs feminine vision, "fifty pairs of eyes to see with," and "some secret sense." With this she finally reaches her vision of the Good Mother,²⁶ Mrs. Ramsay sits knitting her stocking. (p. 116) At this moment, Lily and Mrs. Ramsay are one. The writing woman is protected from the threat of the patriarchal discourse (Lily's fear of someone coming out from the house to destroy the harmony) for she is never alone.

Lily achieves a particular sense of time when she paints and recalls the past. For Lily, what happened in the past had not gone; it was folded up, waiting for the future to give birth to another thing reverberating with the former. Time is repetitive and cyclical for speaking/writing women.²⁷ With this, speaking/writing women reenter history from which they have been exiled and remake it. The silence is broken and the vision achieved.

The textual treatment of "To the Lighthouse" reveals the truth and knowledge about

a repressed and unconscious universe. It exists not according to the gender, but how far we can distance ourselves from the social discourse and its fundamental signifying process. As the waves and the sounds of the poem freezes time into a feminine space for Mrs. Ramsay, and the process of painting salvages Lily's genuine subjectivity, the text of *To the Lighthouse* provides a space of fantasy and jouissance out of the abstract and frustrating order of social sign. It is in this light that we can fully grasp the revolutionary power of Woolf's language and her importance as a feminist writer.

Notes

1. See Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 90.
2. *Jouissance* is a word rich in connotations. "Pleasure" is the simplest translation. The noun comes from the verb *jouir*, meaning to enjoy, to revel in without fear of the cost; also, to have an orgasm. See Stephen Heath's Translator's Note in Roland Barthes's *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 9. A note to Introduction 3 in *New French Feminisms* explains feminist connotation of jouissance as follows:
This pleasure, when attributed to a woman, is considered to be of a different order from the pleasure that is represented within the male libidinal economy often described in terms of the capitalist gain and profit motive. Women's *jouissance* carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure. (p. 36, n. 8)
3. Plato in the *Timaeus* defines chora (from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb) as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible". Kristeva appropriates and redefines Plato's concept and concludes that the chora is neither a sign nor a position, but 'a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral stases. . . . Neither model nor copy, it is anterior to and underlies figuration and therefore also specularization, and only admits analogy with vocal or kinetic rhythm." See "Revolution in Poetic Language." in *The Kristeva Reader*, Julia Kristeva, ed. Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 93-98.
4. See the "Introduction" of *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Julia Kristeva, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, rep. 1989), 5.
5. Kristeva, *New French Feminisms*, 137.
6. Kristeva, "Revolution in poetic Language," *The Kristeva Reader*. 122.
7. Jonathan Culler illustrates Derrida's concept of *différence* as an effective tool to

- deconstruct the superiority of presence to absence, speech to writing in Western logocentrism. Christopher Norris also provides an illuminating reading of Derrida's strategies. Hélène Cixous, on the other hand, uses the concept of *différance* in deconstructionism as a theoretical basis for feminist writing. See Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 101. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982). and Toril Moi's illustration of Cixous in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985).
8. Norris, 28.
 9. Cixous, in *New French Feminisms*, 253.
 10. See Elaine Showalter, "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny," in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 263–297.
 11. Moi, *Sexual/Textual/Politics*, 9.
 12. Leon S. Roudiez, in introduction to *Desire in Language*. 6.
 13. See Maria Diabattisti, "To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf's winter's Tale," in Ralph Freedman, ed., *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 161–188. Diabattisti holds that Mrs. Ramsay "incarnates. . . the aspect of eternal femininity;" While Mr. Ramsay is taken as "a male principle."
 14. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), p. 70. The page number of further quotations from this book will appear parenthetically in the text.
 15. See Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 97. Culler summarizes Derridian *différance* as follows: "The verb *differer* means to differ and to defer. *Différance* sounds exactly the same as *différence*, but the ending *ance*, which is used to produce verbal nouns, makes it a new form meaning "difference-differing-defering." *Différance* thus designates both a "passive" *différence* already in place as the condition of signification and an act of differing which produces differences.
 16. David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*, (London Melbourne Auckland: Edward Arnold, A division of Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 180.
 17. See Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, 187–213. Moi's introduction explicates the two kinds of women's time: "According to Kristeva, female subjectivity would seem to be linked both to cyclical time (repetition) and to monumental time (eternity), at least in so far as both are ways of conceptualizing time from the perspective of motherhood and reproduction. The time of history, however, can be characterized as linear time: time as project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival. This linear time is also that of language considered as the enunciation of a sequence of words."
 18. This is Kristeva's idea of monumental time. See "Women's Time," *The Kristeva*

- Reader*, 191.
19. Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1987), 112–13.
 20. Cixous, 250.
 21. Cixous, 246.
 22. Cixous, 170.
 23. Cixous, 251.
 24. Moi, *Sexual/Textual*, 114.
 25. Cixous, “Medusa” 252.
 26. Moi, 117.
 27. See note 16.

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