

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis argues for a similar politics of style behind the aesthetic experimentation in the short fiction of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Clarice Lispector (1920-1977). By locating the two writers within the international trajectories of modernism, I contend that both Woolf and Lispector engage modernist experiments in consciousness as a basis to deconstruct and overhaul the gender dichotomies of language. I identify Lispector as a beneficiary of Woolf's iconoclasm. By examining Woolf's polemic in her essays "Modern Fiction" (1919) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), I consider the political rationale behind her experimental aesthetics, emphasizing her notion of a "women's sentence." I trace Woolf's polemic through "A Society" (1921), "The New Dress" (1927) and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" (1929), and locate moments of resonance in Lispector's "Love" (1952) and "The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman" (1960). This thesis uses feminist and poststructuralist methodologies to illustrate how both writers contribute to the ongoing feminist discourse on gender, language, and consciousness.

Key words: Virginia Woolf, Clarice Lispector, *A Room of One's Own*, *Family Ties*, short fiction, women writers, modernism, feminist literary theory, gender, language, consciousness

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Politics of Style: Modernist Embodiments of Gender and Consciousness

in the Short Fiction of Virginia Woolf & Clarice Lispector

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Jamee Asher, Author

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AROO*** *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf
- FT*** *Family Ties*, Clarice Lispector
- MF*** "Modern Fiction," Virginia Woolf
- CSF*** *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, Virginia Woolf
(Ed. Susan Dick)

POLITICS OF STYLE: MODERNIST EMBODIMENTS OF GENDER AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN
THE SHORT FICTION OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND CLARICE LISPECTOR

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I am considering modernist embodiments and explorations of gender, language, and consciousness that emerge through the short fiction of a modernist archetype, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), and a lesser-known canonical figure, Clarice Lispector (1920-1977). Against the wider debate surrounding modernism and the nature of a feminine literary presence, I want to locate moments in the short fiction of Woolf and Lispector in which both seek to create an immediate, living relation between language and gendered experience through which they introduce the possibility of an alternative to male-centered discourse. In pairing Woolf and Lispector, I hope to demonstrate how both writers pursue a similar politics of style in their short fiction as a means to illuminate and explode the gendered binaries of language and its effect on consciousness. Ultimately I argue, by way of feminist and poststructuralist methodologies, for a similar rationale behind their experimentation, a *political* rationale that represents a burgeoning feminist struggle to deconstruct the rigid definitions of gender identity.

In Part I of my thesis, I attempt to situate Lispector and Woolf within the modernist movement. Accounting for the relative unfamiliarity of Lispector and her work outside of Latin America, I first locate the Brazilian writer within the local and global trajectories of modernism. I approach this task somewhat provisionally, however, as some critics find her enigmatic writing style difficult to define critically and thus

hesitate to confine her to one literary movement. My analysis acknowledges that although many scholars consider her a “third-generation Brazilian modernist,” Lispector was not a self-proclaimed proponent of the movement itself. I instead envision her as a beneficiary and practitioner of modernism’s iconoclasm and experimental aesthetics, features that I link specifically to Woolf.

This thesis acknowledges Woolf’s multivalent involvement in literature as both a theoretician/polemicist and practitioner/fiction writer. In considering the political nature of her literary experimentation, I reference two of Woolf’s essays that demonstrate the principles of modernist revisionism and its relation to women and writing. First, I will consider her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919) as a manifesto meant to validate the modernist experiment in consciousness. Then I will draw on *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and Woolf’s envisioning of a ‘women’s sentence’ as an alternative to the rigidity of patriarchal discourse.

Part II of my thesis consists of a series of textual analyses from Woolf and Lispector’s short fiction. With reference to Woolf’s work, my use of “short fiction” instead of “short stories” is meant to acknowledge the structural complexity of her narratives, many of which are considered by critics like Susan Dick to be “reveries” or “sketches” rather than “stories” (*CSF* 1). The same might be said for Lispector as her short fiction, like that of Woolf, often treats the *moment* as a unit of composition in and of itself. In my attempt to compare their politics of style, I will begin by tracing Woolf’s polemic in “A Society” (1921), “The New Dress” (1927) and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” (1929). I will then explore Lispector’s similar stylistic endeavors in “The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman” and “Love,” two stories that appear in her short

story collection, *Family Ties* (1960). Finally, as a secondary objective I will consider to what extent the writers differ in their thematic treatment of gender and its significance in the context of modernism as an international movement.

PART I

American translator Gregory Rabassa famously remarked that upon his first encounter with Clarice Lispector, he was “flabbergasted to meet that rare person who looked like Marlene Dietrich and wrote like Virginia Woolf” (Moser 2). In Brazil today, her image is iconic. Lispector’s work, at one time repudiated for its ‘unintelligibility,’ has been popularized so much to the point that many of her texts are available in vending machines in subway stations throughout Brazil (Moser 2). Her writing represents an inimitable turning point in twentieth-century Brazilian literature, marking a move from the nationalism of her literary predecessors to an artistic mode, that though distinctly her own, represents a continuation of the modernist experiment in consciousness. Although the internet is ablaze with commentary on her life and work, her appearance in literary scholarship outside Latin America is a relatively recent development. A quick internet search on Lispector reveals a plethora of surface biographical bits, several of which relate her writing style to the likes of high modernists like Virginia Woolf. One might find that, despite the frequency of comments regarding Lispector and her Woolfian style, specific discussion on the commonalities linking the two writers is hard to come by and in need of contextualization within the local and global histories of modernism.

MODERNISM IN BRAZIL AND CLARICE LISPECTOR

As is generally recognized, modernism was an aesthetic movement that began as a series of avant-garde literary and artistic experiments throughout Europe and the United States over the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The movement itself was less a consensus than an interplay of diverse groups, ideas, and aesthetic tendencies. When considered cross-culturally, however, the temporalities of modernism in its global histories are uneven. When comparing Brazilian and Anglo-American modernism, the chronological unevenness between the movements testifies to the perception that the ‘modernization’ of Brazil was, by Western standards, a delayed development. By the 1950s, while much of Europe endured the bleakness of post-war recovery, the “sleeping giant of the Americas” enjoyed a golden age of unparalleled national confidence. In the context of Brazilian modernism, Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) participated in what some critics have termed a “third-generation” modernism in both chronological and stylistic terms. In this sense, as a third-generation modernist, Lispector not only looks back to her Brazilian modernist precursors, but also to the Anglo-American modernist vanguard of the early twentieth century.

While the modernism of Europe and the United States had reached its zenith by the 1920s, the movement had just begun to take hold in Brazil. In 1922, avant-garde modernism made its official debut in Brazil during the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (the Week of Modern Art), a week-long international art exhibition held in São Paulo. At the fore of the Brazilian modernist movement were writers like Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954), whose experimental novels *The sentimental memoirs of João Miramar* (1924) and *Seraphim Grosse Pointe* (1933) were regarded for their psychological sophistication and

technical innovation. Despite their iconoclastic manifestation by way of importing modernist techniques from abroad, the products of Brazilian modernism were passionately nationalistic (Armstrong 109). Writers of the period effectively adapted modernist methods to conform to their own regionalist and propagandistic tendencies, which was likely attributed to the political turmoil of this era. Over the course of the late 1920s and into the 1930s, factions of Brazilian modernists adopted and accommodated various political agendas in their writing. The political directions of the movement varied substantially, as some fervently embraced fascism while others, like Oswald de Andrade, used their fiction to promote ideals of communism. The political enterprise of Brazilian modernism during this period marks a significant departure from the original precepts established by the likes of Anglo-American modernists, whose literary objectives typically stressed ethics of individualism and aestheticism rather than harboring specifically political or nationalistic aims. This essential divergence points to the diversity of modernism as an international phenomenon, as its differing geographical coordinates unquestionably affect the nature, purpose, and execution of the modernist experiment. Brazilian modernism, in its early stages, effectively used the resources and tools of Western modernism to fulfill aims specific to Brazilian culture.

Critics and historians typically characterize Brazilian modernism as a literary movement divided into three distinct phases—the third of which being the phase most reflective of the early twentieth-century movement championed by Woolf and her contemporaries. The second phase of modernism in Brazil emerged in the 1930s and marks a departure from the nationalistic aims of the regionalist novel. Realist novelists from the Northeast stood at the fore of this group, and, according to Piers Armstrong's

essay, “The Brazilian novel,” the writers of this generation ostensibly “undertook a more culturally authentic and socially responsible artistic representation” (Armstrong 110). Writers such as Raquel de Queiroz (1910-2003) and Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953) produced work that, for the first time in Brazilian literary history, sought to represent the subaltern. In showing a genuine concern for the traditionally disempowered, their fiction illuminated the psychological experiences of characters and the difficulties created by material circumstances (Armstrong 110). The third phase of modernism in Brazil, also referred to as the “Generation of 1945,” followed the political overthrow of President Getúlio Vargas and the fall of the Estado Novo in 1945. It is within this period of Brazilian literary history that critics typically locate Clarice Lispector, although she had already achieved wide-spread fame with the enormous success of her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, in 1944. Leading writers of this phase aspired to an aesthetic virtuosity that transcended the world of realist dramas, abandoning their predecessor’s preoccupation with the socio-historic. Armstrong’s identification of this stage of modernism as “a cosmopolitan, mid-century plateau in Brazilian fiction” suggests that this third phase represents the most veracious effectuation of the modernist objective to “make it new” (Armstrong 113).

Clarice Lispector was born in 1920 into a poor Jewish family in Chechelnyk, a *shtetl* located in the Ukrainian province of Podolia. A short time following her birth, the Lispector family fled their pogrom-ravaged homeland, arriving in Brazil in 1921. Despite her foreign birth, Lispector would always identify with her adoptive country, clarifying at one point, “I am Brazilian and that is that” (qtd Moser 7). The writer spent most of her childhood in northeastern Brazil, first in Maceió and later Recife. As a young

girl in Recife, she attended Colégio Hebreo-Idisch-Brasileiro where she became well-versed in both Hebrew and Yiddish. In 1937, she entered law school at the University of Brazil, and shortly thereafter began her writing career as a journalist. The success of her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, in 1944 catapulted the young Lispector to near-instant fame. Following her marriage to a Brazilian diplomat, Lispector spent nearly a decade and a half living abroad, until her final return to Brazil in 1959.

Upon her return to Brazil, Lispector struggled to find a publisher for *Family Ties*, a text that had languished in its manuscript form for nearly five years before its long-awaited publication in 1960. Editor Paulo Francis recalls that, although Lispector was well-known by Brazilian intellectuals and writers throughout the country, “publishers avoided her like the plague” (qtd Moser 243). According to Francis, their motives were apparent: “she wasn’t a disciple of ‘socialist realism’ or preoccupied with the little dramas of the little Brazilian bourgeoisie” (qtd Moser 243); she instead engaged writing as a means for experimentation. Despite the onset of the Latin American literary ‘Boom’ in the 1960s, her work would not gain widespread recognition outside of Brazil until the late 1970s, following the first translations of her texts and her ‘colonial’ recognition by French feminist Hélène Cixous.

Although Lispector’s style certainly bears a resemblance to that of Woolf, one cannot accurately assume that her aesthetics originated directly from Woolf’s literary creations. In fact, according to biographer Benjamin Moser, Lispector did not encounter Woolf’s work until after the publication of *Near to the Wild Heart*, a novel inaccurately identified by contemporary critics of the time as a strategic endorsement of writers like Woolf and James Joyce (Moser 135). In her later career, however, Lispector displayed

an outward interest in Woolf with her publication of “Shakespeare’s Sister,” a short piece based on the hypothetical Judith Shakespeare of Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (Moser 199). Though perhaps not unequivocally deriving from the Woolfian tradition, Lispector’s writing undoubtedly enacts a stylistic experimentation with language that is very much a part of the modernist tradition, a tradition with Woolf at the forefront.

WOOLF’S POLEMIC: “MODERN FICTION” AND *A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN*

Unlike most other major literary movements, Anglo-American modernism of the early twentieth-century was represented not by a uniform style and structure in writing, but by the search for a style and structure that was newly individual. This revisionism was, in part, prompted by a newfound interest in human subjectivity and a suspicion of systems that fail to acknowledge the forces of the unconscious, the prehistoric, and the mythic on consciousness and language. As a polemicist, Woolf sought to take modernism’s iconoclastic energy back to the level of language—an endeavor she simultaneously championed in her critical essays and experimented with in her nonfiction.

Scholarly commentary on Woolf’s theories surrounding topics of modernism, language, writing, and women’s relation to the aforementioned is vast and overwhelmingly available. Her rhetoric lends bases to various strands of feminist discourse, spanning from the political frontier of American feminism to the cultural problematics of post-structuralism and the likes of French feminism. For this analysis, in attempting to account for the politics behind the stylistic experimentation of Virginia Woolf and Clarice Lispector, I will consider Woolf’s envisioning of the “proper stuff of

fiction” in her essay “Modern Fiction” alongside her notion of gendered language in *A Room of One’s Own*. Through both ideas, Woolf employs the iconoclastic vigor of modernism as a means to revolutionize fiction and deconstruct language. She effectively obliges her audience to consider how cultural interpretation of gender invades and facilitates literary production—an issue brought to life through the unconventional content and experimental features of style displayed in her short fiction.

The rhetoric of “Modern Fiction” is foundational to the politics of style Woolf engages in her fiction. She calls for a revolution in style, content, and structure, summoning a departure from the literary tradition purveyed by her “Edwardian” predecessors. The essay presents a rhetorical validation of technical features typical of Woolf, like her use of *stream of consciousness* and free indirect discourse. As a primary tenet, Woolf defines the mere ebb and flow of human subjectivity as “the proper stuff of fiction” (MF 108). Accordingly, the writer stresses the inclusion of “every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit” within a mode of writing unconstrained by syntax and linearity (MF 111). She seeks to make literature less of an art form to be understood chronologically, and more of work to be experienced simultaneously in terms resonating with the Bergsonian flux. In doing so, Woolf opens up the rigid rules of the traditional narrative to a fluidness that operates outside of the subject-other narrative relationship. Textually, she enacts this ethic in her fiction by depicting her characters as variable centers of interaction, engaging with everything from subtle immediate stimuli to influences that reach beyond the spatial and chronological continuum of the plot sequence.

Woolf continues her rhetorical validation of her politics of style in *A Room of One's Own*, an essay at the fore of her contributions to feminism. In the essay, Woolf argues for both a literal and figurative space for women writers within a literary tradition dominated by patriarchy. A primary component of her argument involves her illustrious notion of a 'women's sentencing,' in which she conceives of an alternative to the logocentrism of male language. Her urging for a female literary authority entails an earnest effort to revise the process of the signifying system, a process felt to have historically subordinated women. According to Woolf, because the experience of women differs from that of men, a different type of sentence is needed to contain the shapes of their experience. She identifies the lack of a female literary tradition and the political nature of language, writing with regard to the woman writer: "The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully...Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use" (*AROO* 76). Woolf, in turn, advocates for a porous, elastic sentence with which she associates the instincts of feminine writing. In contrast to the perorational nature of a man's sentence, she promotes a mode of writing that "explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas," imparting on its readers the "secret of perpetual life" rather than imposing upon them a "nugget of pure truth" (*AROO* 76, 4). Yet in spite of her attachment to the feminine, Woolf promotes an androgynous ideal of self-formation with which she relates Coleridge's claim "that a great mind is androgynous" (*AROO* 98). "Perhaps," she writes with regard to the gendered nature of language, "the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion

without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (*AROO* 98).

A Room not only promotes a distinct style of writing, but also employs this style as a conscious rhetorical strategy. A system of equivocations, digressions, and disclaimers, Woolf’s argument appears to ramble and wander aimlessly. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman notes that this stylistic undertaking alerts us to the fact that “we are reading a kind of cover story or palimpsest” reflective of the history of women’s writing in which meanings are constantly veiled and hidden within (Rosenman 96). Perhaps the most significant stylistic endeavor occurring throughout the essay is Woolf’s destabilization of the subject. She identifies the ‘man’s sentence’ as arid and appropriative, always operating according to hierarchical binaries in which the subject is superior to the object. Woolf stresses the politics of gender making up this relationship as she notes, “one began to be tired of ‘I,’” for “in the shadow of the letter ‘I’ all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman” (*AROO* 100). The essay, like much of her fiction, remains unconcerned with “I” the subject and instead registers order according to an inner stream of thought and perception. Subject and object, in this sense, interpenetrate as the subject becomes part of what it sees. Accordingly, Woolf’s fashioning of a fluid “I” is meant to include various possible voices and identities. She not only assumes the role of writer and narrator in the essay, but also becomes the characters about whom she writes, explaining, “Call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance” (*AROO* 5).

PART II

My decision to examine the short fiction of these writers, as opposed to their widely-celebrated novels, is due to the fact that their short stories have been somewhat overshadowed by the literary commotion surrounding their novels. In the context of literary criticism, their novels have attracted a blanket feminist readership that has generated a wealth of scholarship and debate on the topic of women and writing. Scholarly interest in their short fiction, however, in being a product of more recent times is by comparison a lesser phenomenon. When considering the common stylistic and thematic threads running throughout their short fiction, the coherence of this pairing is palpable even at face-value. With the exception of Woolf's strategic conventionality in "A Society," the selected texts are experiments wherein nothing and everything occurs at the same time. Their narratives implicate middle- and upper-class women in urban, domestic spaces to tell stories of gentle and charming domesticity, of outward seamliness and inner angst that unravel to reveal that the small-scale should not be overlooked. Structurally, events occur insofar as they are registered through sensation and perception. Stylistically, both writers invoke the variable and fluid nature of consciousness in their writing as a strategy to expose and overhaul the gendered binaries found to be inherent to language itself.

In accounting for Woolf's stylistic experimentation in her short fiction, I am considering three of her texts that were composed and published between the years 1921 and 1929, a period that has come to represent the paramount phase of Anglo-American modernism. I will trace Woolf's polemic as well as the evolution of her aesthetic experimentation with language in "A Society" (1921), "The New Dress" (1927), and

“The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929) with regard to the chronological order in which they were written. Though Woolf’s stylistic innovation is carried out to varying degrees throughout the selected texts, each narrative comments on the ways in which the deconstructive and interrogative strategies of modernism complemented the development of feminine artistic practices. In regards to Lispector’s short fiction, I will consider her stories “Love” (1952) and “The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman” (1960) in order to locate moments of resonance that occur between the writers.

“A SOCIETY”

Written in 1920, “A Society” first appeared in *Monday or Tuesday*, a collection of short stories published in 1921. An uncharacteristically traditional narrative for Woolf, “A Society” employs a first-person narrative perspective and adheres to a chronologically linear plot structure. Although the story represents an exercise in convention, “A Society” is an important point of departure when examining the evolution of Woolf’s early experimentation. One might find that elements of the narrative predate the themes and rhetorical strategies of *A Room of One’s Own*. In accounting for the rather political trajectory of the story, Susan Dick notes that the text was likely a fictional response to Arnold Bennett’s *Our Women*, a work commenting on the intellectual inferiority of women (*CSF* 300). Woolf’s narrative, in this sense, reflects the writer’s habit of using fictional situations as a forum to espouse and defend ideas. In her essay, “‘What fools we were!’: Virginia Woolf and ‘A Society,’” Dick identifies an “overt didactic thrust” within the story that “makes it unlike any other work of fiction that Virginia Woolf wrote” (Dick 5). For we find that the frustration felt by the women of “A Society” is prompted by their

realization that their own assumptions concerning women in the intellectual sphere are those propagated by a patriarchal society. In realizing this, Woolf's women seek to expose and challenge these assumptions by forming their own society, "a society for asking questions" (*CSF* 125). Such destabilizing strategies reveal a potential to disrupt and interrogate prevailing modes of viewing and reading. By questioning what had hitherto been taken for granted, Woolf exposes the political character of representation and thus lays groundwork for the fashioning of an alternative mode of representation through the process of writing.

The story opens with a group of young upper-middle-class women restlessly "sitting one day after tea." The narrator stresses their complacency in the conventions of their social place as they expend their energies idly "gazing" into shop windows "where the light shone brightly upon scarlet feathers and golden slippers" and listlessly "building little towers of sugar upon the edge of the tea tray" (*CSF* 124). Though told from the point of view of Cassandra, the narrative perspective of "A Society" is similar to the method Woolf employs in *A Room*. Cassandra ambiguously refers to the group as made up of "some six or seven" women (*CSF* 124). The narrator does not set out to detail characters through all-purpose personality delineations, but instead casually references each woman by her first name as a means to stress her temperament in the moment. Much like Woolf's all-encompassing "I", the women of the group represent a consensus rather than well-defined characters or subjects. "After a time," Cassandra recalls, "we drew around the fire and began as usual to praise men" (*CSF* 124). Here Dick identifies a "subtle irony" in Cassandra's use of the phrase "as usual." The expression, according to Dick, foreshadows the trajectory of the narrative as the young women "are about to begin

questioning the ‘usual’ assumptions of their society” and thus “enact the process through which...new societies evolve” (Dick 5). As the discussion on the greatness of men continues, Poll, whose father has left her a fortune in his will “on condition that she read all the books in the London library,” suddenly bursts into tears. Though “half, or perhaps only a quarter, way through” the library’s collection of books, Poll finds that “she could read no more.” “Books,” she declares, “are for the most part unutterably bad” (*CSF* 124). In an attempt to convince her skeptical companions, she begins reading passages of prose and poetry aloud. The women are stunned by the “rubbish” contained by the books, so much to the point that one of them responds to the “verbose, sentimental foolery” of the poetry by claiming, “It must have been written by a woman!”. The group is shocked, however, to learn that the poem “was written by a young man, one of the most famous poets of the day” (*CSF* 125). Devastated by their discovery, the women react passionately:

‘It’s all our fault,’ [Clorinda] said. ‘Everyone knows how to read. But no one, save Poll, has ever taken the trouble to do it. I, for one, have taken it for granted that it was a woman’s duty to spend her youth in bearing children...We have gone on all these ages supposing that men were equally industrious, and that their works were of equal merit...We have populated the world. They have civilised it. But now that we can read, what prevents us from judging the results?’. (*CSF* 125)

It is here that Woolf’s women realize the destructive nature of their own assumptions, assumptions belonging to the institutions and inventions of men. As Poll notes early on,

the women discover that they had indeed “been well taught” (*CSF* 124). Historically, Woolf stresses, social ideologies have been lived out both materially and psychologically. The women realize that, by way of the “perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue,” they have lived out naturalized conventions of gender, adopting the gender-specific “duty” of “populating the world” rather than “civilizing” it (*AROO* 75).

The women resolve to form a new society, “a society for asking questions.” Together they pledge to “find out what the world is like” before continuing their ‘duty’ of “bringing another child into the world” (*CSF* 125). In conceding to the axiom that “the objects of life [are] to produce good people and good books,” the group conspires to determine “how far these objects were now attained by men” (*CSF* 126). For the next five years, the women take to disguise and infiltrate the world of man. The objective of their ventures resound of *A Room* when Woolf writes, “whatever the value of unmitigated masculinity upon the state, one may question the effect of it upon the art” (*AROO* 103). And thus, in their efforts to investigate the achievements of “unmitigated masculinity,” some go to the Royal Academy and the Law Courts, while others venture to the grounds of Oxford and Cambridge, the British Museum, and the theater. Convening on occasion to compare observations and notes, the women remain unconvinced that men have achieved anything to indicate their superiority. Though the society’s activities are abruptly ended by the declaration of war, an interruption alluding to the destructivity of male values, its mission endures. Following a five-year intermission in which the war takes place, the narrative resumes with Cassandra and Castalia reflecting on the past while browsing through old minute books. Their decision to designate Castalia’s young daughter, Ann, as the society’s future president establishes what Dick refers to as “a

matrilineal line of descent” in which Ann inherits the task of destabilizing the patriarchal and validating the feminine (Dick 10). After all, as Woolf notes in *A Room*, “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (*AROO* 76). For if women are to make a place for themselves in literature, they must provide their posterity with literary tools suitable for expressing a woman’s experience and thus safeguard female intellectual claims to kinship.

“THE NEW DRESS”

Whereas “A Society” interrogates gender from the outside through its practice in conventional methods, “The New Dress” evokes gender from the inside through Woolf’s exploration of what she called, “frock consciousness.” Writing in her diary in 1925, she seems to have been considering “The New Dress” as she noted: “I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness & c. The fashion world at the Becks...is certainly one; where people secrete an envelope which connects them & protects them from others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies” (qtd Skrbic 67). Through her “investigation” of “frock consciousness,” Woolf portrays gender as a constructed ‘frock’ to illustrate the ways in which the ideological is internalized and thus lived out in everyday life.

In recognizing that form and content are wedded, Woolf engages a more experimental style to write the inner life of the narrative’s heroine, Mabel Waring. “The New Dress” was the first of a sequence of short stories set in the context of Mrs. Dalloway’s party, a series composed as a supplement to her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Based on the differing perspectives of various party guests, the collection reflects

Woolf's interest in the subjective nature of experience. In "investigating the party consciousness," Woolf meant to explore an individual's experience of a shared event by dramatizing from within the minds of her characters. As readers, we find ourselves positioned in Mrs. Dalloway's drawing-room, amidst the world of high-society London. Rarely, however, are we allowed access to the 'reality' that underlies the scene. Instead, the objects and people in the drawing-room are conveyed through the consciousness of Mabel, whose sensations, emotions, and impressions ricochet about, producing mere glimpses into her hidden depths that fuel instead of satisfy our curiosity. With Woolf's enactment of flows and streams of consciousness, the narrative at times appears to be driven by Mabel's irrationalism. We are thereby forced to acknowledge the many conflicting forces invading Mabel's consciousness, forces that we might associate with those ideological structures of gender that Woolf interrogates in her nonfiction.

In "The New Dress," Woolf addresses the peculiar dynamic of the party and the concept of fashionability with an element of satire, depicting it as a province wherein self-presentation jeopardizes, impedes upon, and distorts self-conception. The narrative depicts gender as a constructed "frock" in order to explore the different ways in which gender is internalized and enacted through consciousness and language. Through the agonizing effects of Mabel's self-consciousness and bodily awareness, we find Woolf's own interest in the ways in which the body is engaged in and limited by the social world.

From the moment she arrives, removes her cloak, and catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, Mabel is immediately overwhelmed by the "misery which she always tried to hide" and the "profound dissatisfaction" "of being inferior to other people" (*CSF* 170). She accepts the fact that a woman of her age and of her position in society could not be

fashionable—“fashion meant cut, meant style, meant at least thirty guineas at least—but why not be original? Why not be herself, anyhow?”. So, in trying to mimic the more “womanly” and “dignified” women from the time of the Empire, Mabel settles on a modest yet “charmingly old-fashioned” dress taken from a French fashion book that once belonged to her mother (*CSF* 170). Upon first seeing herself in the looking-glass while in the privacy of Miss Milan’s workroom, she finds that “suffused with light, she sprang into existence. Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there—a beautiful woman.” There in the mirror, “just for a second...there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a grey-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself” (*CSF* 172). Later, “woken wide awake to reality” in Mrs. Dalloway’s drawing-room, Mabel finds her image “repulsive” and “sordid,” now seeing her plan “unutterably silly, paltry, and provincial.” The image of the “core of herself, the soul of herself” as “a beautiful woman” “had been absolutely destroyed, shown up, exploded, the moment she came into Mrs. Dalloway’s drawing-room” (*CSF* 170). We find that Mabel’s self-image is renegotiated under the social pressures of the party.

She finds truth in this social re-visioning of herself: “*This* was true,” Mabel affirms, “this drawing-room, this self, the other false” (*CSF* 172). One would assume, however, that Mabel’s dress would not undergo much change over the time that elapses between the conclusion of its production and its public unveiling at Mrs. D’s party. It becomes apparent that the only actual change to occur is a psychological one, a transformation that is dependent on Mabel’s changed self-perception as a result of her internalized gender insecurities.

“THE LADY IN THE LOOKING-GLASS: A REFLECTION”

The sophistication of “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” marks a continuation of Woolf’s effort to implement her polemic into her fiction. The narrative reflects the “prose style expressive of the mind” that Woolf so avidly campaigns for in her nonfiction (*AROO* 95). A lyrical sketch of a domestic interior, the narrative interrogates traditional modes of representation by invalidating convention both stylistically and thematically. Woolf puts to practice the fluid and porous sentence she promotes in *A Room* as the narrative lives out the modernist “failures and fragments” of “violated grammar” and “disintegrated syntax.” “The Lady” incorporates Woolf’s impressionism to the extent that it conveys time through sensation and perception in order to create a living relation between language and experience, rather than registering events through subject-object opposition. The action is dictated by the flux of thoughts belonging to an unnamed narrator who, in likening herself to “one of those naturalists...covered with grass and leaves,” looks upon the scene and probes the inner life of Isabella Tyson, the mistress of the house (*CSF* 221).

From the opening scene, the narrator forewarns the reader of the danger the looking-glass poses, advising in the opening line that “people should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms any more than they should leave open cheque books or letters confessing some hideous crime” (*CSF* 221). The narrator goes on to draw a stark contrast between the wild obscurity of the drawing-room and the rigid stillness of the scene reflected in the hall mirror. Replete with “shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling—things that never happen, so it seems, if someone is looking,” the room takes on a life of its own. The narrator likens the room to the

enigmatic variability of “a human being,” making note of “its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it” (*CSF* 220). Conversely, the image projected by the looking-glass is artificial. Once Isabella finally steps fully in front of the mirror, the reflection shows her as “perfectly empty:” “She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody” (*CSF* 225). The looking-glass image reduces Isabella to that of a mere *sign*, stripping from her any signified meaning and alluding to the patriarchal appropriation of woman in the symbolic order. “Women,” Woolf writes in *A Room*, “have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (*AROO* 35). She goes on in *A Room* to address how the feminine is caught up in the conventions of representation itself, explaining of women in literary language:

Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history...Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (*AROO* 44).

The discrepancy Woolf draws between woman as sign and woman in history points to the ways in which social ideologies are manifested through language and literature. The looking-glass, in this case, represents Isabella much like the conventions of language represent women. In only being able to reflect the exterior, the mirror is unable to access the inner life and is therefore unable to transmit consciousness sans impediment.

“LOVE”

In contrast to the more express manner in which Woolf’s women display mobility in their encounters with conventions of representation, Lispector’s women appear deeply enmeshed in familial structures and domestic spaces, entangled in the conflict between internal chaos and external repression. In “Love,” published in both *Some Stories* (1952) and *Family Ties* (1960), the character of Anna represents a manifestation of the ideal domestic, a woman who mechanically and complacently lives out her gender. Stylistically, we encounter a writing style that echoes of Woolf’s notion of a “woman’s sentence” as we follow the stream of thoughts belonging to an ordinary woman on a seemingly ordinary day. Like Woolf, Lispector stylistically and thematically seeks to expose the ways in which gender is lived out. The character of Anna exemplifies how ideologies of gender are adopted and reproduced in everyday life. We are told by the narrator:

All her vaguely artistic aspirations had for some time been channeled into making her days fulfilled and beautiful; with time, her taste for the decorative had developed and supplanted intimate disorder. She seemed to have discovered that everything was capable of being perfected, that each thing could be given a harmonious appearance; life itself could be created by Man. (*FT* 38)

Anna finds purpose in appearances and creations, tidy structures that she “perfects” in order to “supplant” the “intimate disorder.” She is constant in her role as wife and mother, finding within familial structures a neatness of “harmonious appearance[s].” Instead of resisting social constructs, she has pacified, internalized, and reproduced them by taking comfort in knowing that “life itself could be created by Man.” Anna has

succeeded in achieving a so-called “woman’s destiny with the surprise of conforming to it almost as if she had invented that destiny herself” (*FT* 38). We find that although this is the life “she had wanted and chosen,” it is not her own. Even though the ‘action’ of the narrative is contained within the frame of one day, we are made aware of thoughts that look back to Anna’s past with the narrator’s use of present-perfect tense. For instance, we are informed that “she had gradually emerged to discover that life could be lived without happiness” and she had “no opportunity to cherish her fears—she suppressed them with that same ingenuity she had acquired from domestic struggles” (*FT* 38, 39). This departure from the temporal continuum of the narrative serves to emphasize the historical nature of Anna’s gendered repression.

We first encounter Anna on a train, returning home after a day of shopping. It is amidst this seemingly ordinary setting that Anna experiences a sudden awakening. Quite strangely, the epiphanic moment for Anna is initiated by the jolting sight of a blind man chewing gum. The blindness and stasis of the man, in perhaps serving as a testament to Anna’s own complacent existence, arouse her senses and impart upon her consciousness new points of awareness. As Anna steps away from her pacified life, the language of the narrative takes a sudden turn, shifting from a retrospective analysis to a focus on her rhythms of thought in the moment. Lispector’s sentences appear curt, yet freckled with an explosion of loaded words: “The damage had been done. But why? Had she forgotten that there were blind people? Compassion choked her. Even those things which had existed before the episode were now on the alert, more hostile, and even perishable. The world had once more become a nightmare” (*FT* 41). Chronological time is blurred upon

the cataclysmic site of the blind man as she realizes that the train “had passed her stop ages ago” (*FT* 42).

“Through her compassion,” the narrator notes, “Anna felt that life was filled to the brim with a sickening nausea” (*FT* 42). She becomes increasingly aware of “an absence of law” as the “crisis had come at last” and everything “gained new power and a stronger voice.” The absence of *law* invokes in her a “mysterious excitement” and a “mood of compassion” (*FT* 41). After getting off the train, Anna spontaneously enters the botanical garden. As she passes through the garden’s gates, feeling simultaneously “nauseated” and invigorated by its primordially and detachment from the regulations of language and law, she realizes that the “wholesome life she had led until today seemed morally crazy” (*FT* 44). “Like the resistance that precedes surrender,” Anna finds, “it was fascinating; the woman felt disgusted, and it was fascinating” (*FT* 33). This notion of a “resistance that precedes surrender” suggests a state of consciousness that predates ideological constructs of being. The primordially of the garden thus exposes to Anna the repressive nature of her existence as wife and mother.

This sudden intuitive leap of understanding for Anna is, however, a mere momentary occurrence as she abruptly reverts back to her former static state of being upon her return home. Her desire to turn away from the “threshold of a dark, fascinating world” is prompted by an imposing sense of guilt: “But when she remembered the children, before whom she now felt guilty, she straightened up with a cry of pain.” She thus “pass[es] through the gates of the botanical garden” and begins her journey home (*FT* 42). By the end of the narrative, “after the giddiness of compassion had spent itself,” she returns to the domestic space of her bedroom. It is Anna’s husband who initiates and

facilitates her return to her place within the ‘created-by-Man’ system. “In a gesture which was not his, but seemed natural,” Anna’s husband takes her by the hand and leads her back to the bedroom, removing “her from the dangers of living” and bringing the narrative to its close (*FT* 48). The seeming naturalness of her husband’s gesture is suggestive of how the ideological, similar to Woolf’s idea on the powers of the “eternal pedagogue,” is to an extent a learned and naturalized production. Lispector’s emphasis on the ostensible verism of the husband’s appropriative impulses comments on the ways in which, as Woolf notes, “the patriarch, the professors” remain “driven by instincts which are not within their control.” The defectiveness of such instincts, Woolf holds, “are bred” and thus perpetuated through everyday action (*AROO* 38).

“THE DAYDREAMS OF A DRUNKEN WOMAN”

“Is this me, this no-body that is dressed up, wrapped in veils, carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside?” (69).

– Hélène Cixous, “Sorties”

As an overture to Lispector’s “The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman” (1960), one might consider Cixous and her above-cited reflection on the systematic repression of women’s experience. Cixous’ interrogation of the repressive systems of patriarchal discourse embodies the anxiety and alienation felt by the female characters of Woolf and Lispector’s fiction. Be they dressed in frocks or clothed by class-identity, the women indeed find themselves “wrapped in veils” and “pushed to the side.” Like Isabella and her looking-glass reflection, Cixous’ notion of no-body-ness comments on the ways in which woman signifies nothing for herself while facilitating the circulation of signs that

reinforces communication among men. Similarly, in “Daydreams” issues of linguistic inadequacy run throughout the uninhibited internal dialogue that occurs within the story. Lispector’s use of modernist strategies facilitates what might be seen as a uniquely feminine account that pits a woman’s consciousness against the restrictions of patriarchal language.

The plot structure of Lispector’s “Daydreams” is rather simple. Its main course of action is divided into two parts: a defiant housewife devotes an entire day to her thoughts while lying in bed; then some days later, she spends a drunken evening out in Tiradentes Square with her husband and his business associate. Lispector’s linguistic experimentation relies, in part, on her use of free indirect discourse and subject-destabilization, which configures the narrative as an interior monologue based on its central character, Maria Luisa Nunes. In typical Lispector-fashion, “Daydreams” incorporates existential questioning and a shifting of narrative control to produce a structural fluidity that echoes of Woolf and her modernist strategies. Like Woolf, Lispector integrates a plurality of voices in Maria’s dialogue with herself. This element is alluded to from the very beginning of the narrative, as we first encounter Maria staring at her image in a mirror, her “open dressing gown” revealing “in the mirrors the intersected breast of several women” (*FT* 28).

The story opens with Maria, an affluent housewife, lounging in a domestic interior. As she lies in bed, the narrator stresses the seemingly mundane domestic details of her surroundings: “She clutched the bedsheet, inhaling its odor as she crushed its starched embroidery with her red-lacquered nails.” “Curious and impatient,” the narrator tells us, “she listened to the vibrations of the china cabinet” as passing trolley cars shake

the street outside her window (*FT* 28). Deeply absorbed in the “succulent room,” Maria awaits “her next thought with open eyes” (*FT* 28-29). As she lies in bed, “thinking and thinking,” her actions take on an air of defiance (*FT* 30). She consciously neglects her duties as wife and mother, duties that would usually prohibit her from indulging in her inner thoughts. We are enlisted in Maria’s reflections and her lingering sense of guilt: “‘My day for washing and darning socks...What a lazy bitch you’ve turned out to be!’ she scolded herself, inquisitive and pleased...shopping to be done, fish to remember” (*FT* 30). Maria’s guilt takes on a form of self-degradation, a sentiment that pervades the entirety of the narrative.

Imagery relating to pregnancy and fleshiness abounds in the story. As she sits at the table of the fine restaurant with her husband and his business associate, Maria’s sense of isolation reaches its zenith. Surrounded by the apparent fashionability of the people and objects in the room, Maria is overwhelmed and enraged by their superficiality: “How sad it really all seemed. How she despised the barren people in that restaurant, while she was plump and heavy and generous to the full.” In her isolation Maria realizes the vacuousness of those around her, noting that “everything in the restaurant seemed so remote, the one thing distant from the other, as if the one might never be able to converse with the other. Each existing for itself” (*FT* 33). Maria’s linguistic anxieties and resentment of false representation immediately resurface once again when she catches sight of a woman whom she “instantly detests” from “the moment she enters the room.” “All dolled up in a hat and jewelry,” the woman “glitters like a false coin.” Maria bitterly charges the stranger with fraudulence, claiming that she is “nothing more than a fishwife trying to pass herself off as a duchess.” “A fat lot of good her hypocrisy would do her,”

she goes on to silently vent, “and she had better watch out in case her airs and graces proved her undoing!”. As a final act of offense, Maria claims that the woman, in all her superficiality, probably “couldn’t even bear her man a child” (*FT* 33). This fixation with the woman’s maternal attributes reveals the ways in which Maria remains wrapped up in gendered modes of thinking.

We find that Maria has internalized the ideological prescriptions of her gender, prescriptions reducing her to the functions of child bearer and sexual object. She seeks out the root of her discontent: “Ah, what’s wrong with me! she wondered desperately. Have I eaten too much? Heavens above! What *is* wrong with me!” (*FT* 36). For Maria, her drunken state serves as a sort of enlightening force, described at one point as “a beacon that sweeps through the dawn while one is asleep” (*FT* 32). It appears, furthermore, that it is only through her drunkenness that she becomes dimly sentient of her inner struggle, a struggle that she is only able to speak of symbolically. While in the restaurant, her self-image takes on the form of a lobster: “Her white flesh was as sweet as a lobster, the legs of a live lobster wiggling slowly in the air.” Maria subsequently becomes sickened by this comparison that equates her to an object of passivity and consumption. Instead, she attempts to reaffirm herself as a sovereign, active creature. This endeavor generates a rather different vision in her mind: “She was no longer a lobster, but a harsher sign—that of the scorpion” (*FT* 32). Through metaphorical musings such as these, the reader is granted access to the inner toil Maria experiences during a seemingly ordinary event.

The display of her obsessive awareness of her physicality contrasts sharply to the emptiness she finds in language:

Naturally she talked, since she lacked neither the ability to converse nor topics to discuss. But the words that a woman uttered when drunk were like being pregnant—mere words on her lips which had nothing to do with the secret core that seemed like a pregnancy. (*FT* 31)

Maria later finds herself obsessing over the utter dullness of language, silently exclaiming, “Ah, words, nothing but words, the objects in the room lined up in the order of words, to form those confused and irksome phrases that he who knows how will read. Boredom...such awful boredom...How sickening!”. She goes on to question silently, “What was one to do? How can I describe this thing inside me?” (*FT* 35). Language ultimately acts as a source of oppression for Maria, a mode of representation that fails and results in discrepancies between existence the symbolic expression of existence.

Maria is obsessed with the procreative potential of her body. While others are described as fake and “barren,” she is “pregnant,” “swollen,” and “gigantic.” The apparent emptiness that Maria identifies of the people in the restaurant contrasts greatly with the images evoked by her self-proclaimed “plumpness” and “fullness” of being. Upon returning home from the restaurant, Maria experiences a sort of transformation. Accustomed to thinking in terms of her body, Maria becomes engulfed by imagery of the corporal. Her own body, in addition to the objects in the room, takes on an exaggerated fleshy appearance: “She was becoming larger, more unsteady, swollen and gigantic. If only she could get closer to herself...Each of her arms could be explored by someone who didn’t even recognize that they were dealing with an arm” (*FT* 35). Her self-envisioning is consistently linked to images of the bodily and the maternal as she attempts to justify her existence by way of internalized social ideologies. Maria’s anxieties appear at odds. Much like the women at the beginning of “A Society,” her self-identity is based on ideals of motherhood; however, her search for an alternative mode of

representation, a language to “describe this thing inside” her, illuminates the ways in which gendered identities in language and consciousness ultimately fail. Maria’s sprawling internal dialogue appears to derive from her encounter with the “secret core” within. In this light, by way of the narrative’s stylistic elasticity and structural fluidity, Lispector promotes an alternative subjectivity through her politics of style that transcends the ideological constructions of gender and language.

MOMENTS OF DIVERGENCE

As previously acknowledged, there are many different sides to Woolf. I have drawn on the divide that separates Woolf as a polemicist and Woolf as a fiction writer, and then traced her theories as they appear in her short fiction. This envisioning of Woolf as both a critic and artist marks an important point of contrast in the context of this thesis. For unlike Woolf’s fervent involvement in public affairs, the leading Brazilian writers of Lispector’s era generally did not participate in social or historical criticism. Armstrong identifies “the preferred professional path” of Lispector and her contemporaries as one of “diplomacy” (Armstrong 113). He writes that diplomacy for these leading writers “conveniently demanded neutrality or discretion, which was indirectly compensated in their development of magical or alternate realms” (Armstrong 113). One might attribute the tentativeness that Lispector often displays in her writing to this “diplomatic” tendency. Her female characters remain deeply enmeshed in the social structures in which they live, faltering and staggering at the threshold between constructed and deconstructed subjectivities. The women of “Love” and “Daydreams” are apprehensive; their anxieties lead to variable degrees of self-repression and

autophobia. Lispector's tentativeness, when compared to Woolf's often satirical playfulness, suggests a darker, more dismal treatment of self-identity under patriarchy. Giovanni Pontiero, the translator of *Family Ties*, notes of the collection: "In these powerful stories, the women discover that they are free to conform or rebel, but all the options are hazardous" (Pontiero 75). Lispector's women find themselves in an unfavorable dilemma, a dilemma in which they must choose to conform to social structures and forfeit individuality or pursue individuality and be condemned to solitude.

Lispector's technical experimentation exposes the effects of gender constructs on consciousness by eliciting the anesthetizing consequences of existing under patriarchy. The mobilities of her female characters appear rather restricted. While Woolf's women of "A Society" roam about the streets of London, storming the likes of *Oxbridge* and the Royal Academy incognito, both Anna and Maria remain entangled in familial relations and domestic spaces as they simultaneously resist and indulge in the "crisis" associated with an "intimate disorder" (FT 38). Woolf, on the other hand, appears to write with a greater sense of optimism. In addition to exposing the duplicitous nature of male-centered discourse, Woolf looks to experimentation, to unconventional alternatives as a promising mode to revise ideological and linguistic structures. In "A Society," the women fashion a new alternative society in which they conscientiously investigate and deconstruct systems of patriarchy. Their mission, however onerous it may be, is strategically passed on to the future generation of women. In "The New Dress," Mabel's bodily self-consciousness elicits her appreciation of those rare and "divine moments" of being that transcend beyond social forces (CSF 174). Conversely, in "Daydreams" Maria's self-hatred and seeming descent into madness derives from her rage against

language. Woolf's task of *re*-representing in "The Lady" stresses the spasmodic nature of consciousness and the incapability of traditional modes of representation to encapsulate it. Whereas Mabel and the women of "A Society" not only reach but sustain new points of awareness, Anna relapses back into the self-effacing patriarchal structure. Her inner and physical escape from her confines is only temporary. By the end of the narrative, we find that she has returned to her conventional place as a woman: in her home, sitting in front of her bedroom mirror "without any world for the moment in her heart" (*FT* 48).

CONCLUSION

In her article, "Thinking Back through Our Mothers," Jane Marcus opens by referring to Woolf as a "guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt" (Marcus 1). Envisioning Woolf an ideologue of feminism and socialism, Marcus claims:

Writing, for Virginia Woolf, was a revolutionary act. Her alienation from British patriarchal culture and its capitalist and imperialist forms and values, was so intense that she was filled with terror and determination as she wrote. A guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt, she trembled with fear as she prepared her attacks, her raids on the enemy. (Marcus 1)

If taken literally one might argue, as Toril Moi has done in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, that Marcus' image of Woolf as a revolutionary is unconvincing in its "historical-biographical" reliance (Moi 16). Yet when employed metaphorically, Marcus' claim is true to the extent that the polemicist in Woolf participated in a modernist battle of the sexes in which she "prepared her attacks, her raids on the enemy" from within the very

culture of patriarchy. However, to characterize the artist in Woolf as a “guerilla fighter” would be somewhat extreme when considering her politics of style. As a fiction writer, Woolf experimented linguistically by reconstructing subjectivities to produce a mode of writing that was by nature *non*-oppositional. I have thus approached her experimentation as a potentiating basis for feminist approaches to gender in the face of patriarchy.

In this thesis, I have promoted both Woolf and Lispector in terms echoing the above-mentioned characterization of Woolf’s task as an artist. I have used “politics of style” as an umbrella term that refers to the tactical and embryonic nature of their experimentalism. In comparing the two, I have not argued for a definitive characterization of Lispector as a disciple of modernism, but instead identified her as operating within the movement’s iconoclastic legacy by way of her politics of style. My pairing of the two writers relies on the assumption that both practice a ‘deconstructive’ form of writing, one that engages and thus exposes the duplicitous nature of male-centered language. Such a post-Derridean reading holds that both women writers, through their conscious exploration of the sensual, fluid nature of language, promote the feminine in writing and interrogate the rigidity of patriarchal discourse—a discourse that appeals to the Father, the Law, or the phallus as its *transcendental signified* (Moi 9). Both writers’ emphasis on the ordinary, through narratives that privilege a woman’s everyday life, acknowledges the multiple and intersecting structures that combine to create the variable and spasmodic nature of the conscious self. For as consummate stylists, both suggest that it is not only unconscious drives that make up these structures, but also material, social, political, and ideological factors (i.e. gender) that succeed in covertly shaping consciousness.

Perhaps what is most gained from my pairing of Woolf and Lispector is not only a substantiation of the popular claim linking their experimental styles, but also, in the context of feminist criticism, an enhanced awareness and appreciation of the political value that their aesthetics yield. In my reading of their politics of style I have not attempted to ascribe their efforts to the politically progressive arena of the feminist movement. For, although the contribution of their textual foray to the feminist struggle does not appear overt in its call for reform, its political clout relies precisely on its intangibility, which importantly manifests to transform our understanding of the nature of the feminist struggle.

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