

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Narrative Structures in Virginia Woolf's Shorter Fiction

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Anglistika a amerikanistika

Praha, June 2013

Declaration

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I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 24. června 2013

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Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

Acknowledgements

Above all, I am indebted to doc. Clare Wallace, PhD, MA for her invaluable critical support, advice, and kindness.

My sincere thanks are also due to MUDr. Janetta Andonova-Kovačeva for her moral support, to Bc. David Koranda for his practical suggestions, to Tereza Novická for her technical assistance, and to Tereza Sazamová for introducing me to Virginia Woolf.

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Permission	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	1
Chapter 1 Introduction	2
Chapter 2 Intertextuality	10
2.1. Ambiguity & Ellipsis: “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”	11
2.2. Epistemology: “The New Dress”	24
Chapter 3 Subverting the Genre	31
3.1. Verbal Painting: “Blue & Green”	32
3.2. Essay & Metafiction: “An Unwritten Novel”	36
Chapter 4 Conclusion	41
Bibliography	43
Thesis Abstract	46
Abstrakt práce	48
Key Words	50
Klíčová slova	51

Chapter 1 Introduction

The literary heritage of Virginia Adeline Stephen Woolf (1882–1941) is rich and involved; most of her works and professional endeavours seem nevertheless to be well interconnected. Nearly a century of Woolfian scholarship has shown that close reading of her work is for the most part incomplete if isolated from its contexts: from Woolf’s involvement in the Bloomsbury Group, to her firm rejection of the “materialists,”¹ to her feminism. Adrian Hunter, for example, sees Woolf’s being “imbedded in the cultural politics, as well as the aesthetic project, of high modernism”² as a crucial limitation to the freedom she wanted to achieve in the fictional form.

Woolf certainly did work on a kind of aesthetic project, or projects, many of which were either embodied in her fiction writing, or largely documented elsewhere. Together with the novel, the short story was one of her lifelong pursuits. Dominic Head has traced a general preoccupation on Woolf’s part with the relationship between “theoretical method” and “the modernist development of the genre.”³ Head points out that “Modern Fiction” and “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” are “frequently employed by critics attempting to establish a Woolfian manifesto for fictional composition,” and connects the ideas outlined in the two essays to particular short stories by Woolf.⁴ The relationship between form and content was of interest to nearly all Woolf’s literary contemporaries, and the eagerness with which they explored it became one of the driving forces of the cultural phenomenon of the first half of the twentieth century that was modernism.

Given the contradictions and complexities of modernism, an attempt to use it as a brief

¹ Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) 185.

² Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 71.

³ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 78.

⁴ Head, 80-81.

cultural background for the analysis of one of its key figures' work may prove audacious. The term has become, in Michael Levenson's words, "conveniently flaccid,"⁵ while Michael Bell observes that it is now often understood as "the assumed background against which to define postmodernism."⁶ Bell also advises that "translating modernist literature into ideas may be the way to miss the most fundamental point."⁷ It seems therefore more feasible to look at the influences under which the English short story was reconsidered, with regard to the alertness of the modernists to each other's work, and the resulting creative pressure to surpass and innovate.

The Bloomsbury Group was exemplary in this respect, partly due to its notorious exclusivity, but also because of the exceptional fluidity of artistic dialogue that went on between its writers, painters, and thinkers. Levenson believes that

much of the artistic passion of the period was stirred by questions of technique, where "technique" should not suggest attention to "form" as opposed to "content," but should imply rather the recognition that every element of the work is an instrument of its effect and therefore open to revision. Nothing was beyond the reach of technical concern: not the frame of a picture, not the shape of a stage, not the choice of a subject, not the status of a rhyme.⁸

Despite the post-Victorian stagnation of artistic development, or perhaps as a result of it, both critics and audiences failed at first to keep up with the emerging aesthetic debate and revolutionary forms of artistic expression. Never was this plainer than when Roger Fry tried for the first time to acquaint the English public with the paintings of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin. They were displayed at the Grafton Galleries, London, in 1910 and were dubbed

⁵ Michael Levenson, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 3.

⁶ Michael Bell, "The metaphysics of Modernism," *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 9.

⁷ Bell, 10.

⁸ Levenson, 3.

“Post-Impressionistic.” Years later Woolf recollected that “the name was struck out in talk with a journalist who wanted some convenient label, and the title, to be accurate, was ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists.’”⁹ The exhibition proved to be Fry’s artistic and professional suicide, as few were then able to envisage the pivotal status in art history it would acquire thirty years later. Fry, however, managed to enthuse several young artists, including Vanessa Bell, for whom the Post-Impressionists were a long-awaited spur. “The importance of the Post-Impressionist movement,” Woolf writes, “lay in the fact that it was a continuation and not a break” (Woolf 160).

Constance Garnett contributed in a similar vein to the development of English literature. Her translations of Anton Chekhov’s short stories, which appeared between 1916 and 1922, helped Woolf and others articulate their doubts about the genre as inherited from the late Victorians.¹⁰ Garnett enjoyed greater immediate recognition for her mediatory role than Fry but the nature of her work inevitably raised another question: in 1919 Woolf observed that “[o]f all those who feasted upon Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, and Tchekhov during the past twenty years, not more than one or two perhaps have been able to read them in Russian [...] We have judged a whole literature stripped of its style.”¹¹ Garnett nevertheless offered an alternative set of literary predecessors, from which Chekhov proved to be the natural one for modernist short story writers. By choosing ambiguity and implication over explicitness he had elevated the short story from being “a doll’s house, a fully realized world in miniature”¹² to an art form. Needless to say, the first responses to his technique were mixed, of which Ronald Hingley offers a suggestive account:

⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940) 153.

¹⁰ Adrian Hunter believes that “the course of European and American modernism was altered [by Garnett’s translations]” and mentions her unique influence on the stories of D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, A. E. Coppard, and H. E. Bates. See Adrian Hunter, “Constance Garnett’s Chekhov and the Modernist Short Story,” *Translation and Literature* 12 (2003): 69-70.

¹¹ Woolf, “The Russian Point of View,” *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) 219-220.

¹² Hunter, 1.

The Russian Master has a fascinating history. [Chekhov] had read out a draft of what is now Chapter I to members of his family, confiding in them his intention of providing a continuation in which he would blow his young couple's happiness to 'smithereens'. Only when these kind-hearted listeners had appealed to him not to spoil the ending did he agree to publish the story in truncated form. But the happily-ending *Mediocrities* of 1889 turned out too 'sloppy' in its author's view, and by 1894 he was ready with [a] very different version.¹³

Rethinking the short story was a gradual process, indeed another "continuation and not a break," at the beginning of which was an instinctive need for honest fiction. Chekhov's was a "cultural conviction"¹⁴ not unlike that of the later modernists. Woolf admired and praised Chekhov for his unwillingness to tie the loose ends of his narratives according to expectation. She saw this strategy as a truthful and therefore a successful artistic representation of life, and wrote:

There may be no answer to these questions, but at the same time let us never manipulate the evidence so as to produce something fitting, decorous, agreeable to our vanity. This may not be the way to catch the ear of the public; after all, they are used to louder music, fiercer measures; but as the tune sounded so he has written it. In consequence, as we read these little stories about nothing at all, the horizon widens; the soul gains an astonishing sense of freedom."¹⁵

Woolf gradually learned to write without taking into account public taste, although it should be noted that she wrote her "pot boiling stories for America"¹⁶ years after "Kew Gardens" and "The Mark on the Wall" were published. It was one of the contradictions of modernism that it

¹³ Ronald Hingley, "Introduction," in Anton Chekhov, *The Russian Master and Other Stories*, tr. and ed. Ronald Hingley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) vii.

¹⁴ Levenson, 2.

¹⁵ Woolf, "The Russian Point of View," 225.

¹⁶ Hunter, 63.

had to balance its alleged elitism with the practical advantages of aesthetic compromise.

On the whole, Woolf's theoretical approach can be said to fit the now conventional understanding of the short story as a narrative centred on a single action, event, or thought.¹⁷ Woolf's signature method is employing familiar narrative structures to explore themes or concerns that are, or were, less established as short fiction material. Head emphasises in his study that Woolf was as influenced by literary convention as by innovation, and sees her ability to combine these in writing as her chief contribution to the development of the genre. He believes that "where her short stories are productive, Woolf is always challenging and developing the capacities of the fictional form. Her fundamental compositional principle is to adapt fictional convention in the process of examining the need to transcend it."¹⁸ Several of Woolf's stories, "An Unwritten Novel" and "The Mark on the Wall" in particular, can in this light be read as metafiction, with the narrator commenting more or less openly on the writing process. Head aptly concludes that "Woolf's short stories often have an incomplete, investigative, 'workshop' quality."¹⁹

This brings forward the question of terminology and genre fiction in relation to the concept of the Woolfian short story. Woolf herself noted in her diary in 1924: "I am less and less sure that they are stories, or what they are."²⁰ The term "shorter fiction," used in the title of this thesis, was borrowed from Susan Dick, who in 1985 edited Woolf's *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, including only "those short pieces that are [...] clearly fictions, that is, works in which the characters, scenes and actions are more imaginary than they are factual,

¹⁷ "A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background." Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 307.

¹⁸ Head, 105-6.

¹⁹ Head, 108.

²⁰ Quoted in Stella McNichol, "Introduction," Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973) 16.

and in which the narrator's voice is not necessarily identical with the author's."²¹ Dick's definition is well framed as it excludes texts such as *A Room of One's Own*, which could be read as an essay, a fiction, a metafiction, or even as a novella. In contrast, "An Unwritten Novel" reads partly as an essay on fictional representation, yet the fictional element prevails and there is no indication of a fusion between the narrator's and the author's voice. At the same time the term "shorter fiction" does not label the texts for the mere sake of categorization, nor does it invite genre expectations. It implies that the concerned texts are "short-er" than others, but that length is not the only decisive factor for their presence in the collection.

It is my belief that close reading of Woolf's texts is essential in order for their interconnectedness to be observed, understood, and appreciated. The present thesis focuses on four selected shorter fictions by Woolf. Chapter 2 traces the use of intertextuality in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and in "The New Dress," both of which appeared in *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (1973). The seven stories in the collection can be read separately but they also constitute a thematic whole. They have the same setting, and explore what Woolf referred to as "the party consciousness."²² Nena Skrbic writes that in the *Mrs Dalloway's Party* stories "the narrator does not stand in a position of obvious omniscience, but moves around and among the participants, allowing each one in turn to share his or her perception of events, no longer confident of the authenticity of reaching beyond his or her own consciousness."²³ While it is enticing to read the more sketchy stories in *Mrs Dalloway's Party* alongside the novel and see Clarissa Dalloway's party from different guests' points of view, I decided to focus on the said two stories as they are the most compelling in terms of their narrative

²¹ Susan Dick, "Editor's Introduction", in Virginia Woolf, *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction* (London: Vintage, 2003) 2.

²² Quoted in McNichol, 12.

²³ Nena Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom: Reading Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 144.

structure. They can both be read and analysed as completed short stories, having been revised for publication by Woolf: “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” appeared in *The Dial* in 1923, while “The New Dress” was published in *Forum* in 1927. Both were influenced by what Woolf read as she wrote them: in “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,” and later in *Mrs Dalloway*, she drew from Joyce, while “The New Dress” openly cites Chekhov. The aim of Chapter 2 is therefore to carry out a narrative analysis of the two texts that will take into account their intertextual nature as well as their affinity with the quintessential Woolf novel. Excerpts from “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” will be compared to their corresponding passages from the opening section of *Mrs Dalloway* in order to mark the transition from the story into the novel. The analysis of “The New Dress” will focus on the connection between characterization and epistemology as addressed by Woolf through the looking-glass trope.

Apart from various literary influences, Woolf also combines different genres in her work, mainly types of fiction and non-fiction. In a diary entry from 1931 she writes, “It is a good idea I think to write biographies; to make them use my powers of representation, reality, accuracy; and to use my novels simply to express the general, the poetic.”²⁴ Chapter 3 will deal with two texts in which Woolf examines the boundaries of the short story genre. “Blue & Green” is one of the most experimental texts Woolf wrote. It is fiction, it is shorter fiction, but it is not a short story. Woolf shows that a narrative can exist without its most basic components. When analysed in terms of its narrative structure, the missing elements become more prominent than those that are present. With its poetic language and visual imagery it can be considered an intersection between a prose poem and a verbal painting, and owes a debt to the visual arts in which Woolf had a keen interest.

In “An Unwritten Novel,” on the other hand, Woolf constructs a complex fictional narrative in order to make a point about fiction. To the stable structure of the story Woolf adds

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Selected Diaries* (London: Vintage Books, 2008) 303.

an essayistic element which destabilizes its authority. The story resembles “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” in several ways, and it also brings “The New Dress” to mind with its central quest for fictional representation.

The overall objective of the present thesis is to bring together two now established critical approaches to Woolf’s shorter fiction. The first one considers it to be of lesser literary merit than her novels. Patricia Craig, editor of *The Oxford Book of Modern Women’s Stories*, has even claimed that “[n]o one can be unaware that Virginia Woolf’s short fiction is mediocre in comparison with her novels.”²⁵ Dean R. Baldwin believes that “[Woolf’s] place in literary history [depends] on the novels, with the stories providing interesting sidelights.”²⁶ Christine Reynier argues against this, asserting that “such an approach implicitly reduces the short story to a minor literary genre without any value of its own.”²⁷ Several major studies have appeared, covering the stories from the 1985 *Complete Shorter Fiction*. The heterogeneity of the subject matter makes it difficult to entirely agree with either approach. It is my intention to show through close reading that the four shorter fictions should be assessed individually, rather than compared to Woolf’s novels in a competitive struggle for artistic quality.

²⁵ Patricia Craig, *The Oxford Book of Modern Women’s Short Stories* (Bath: Oxford University Press, 1994) xiii.

²⁶ Quoted in Christina Reynier, “The Short Story According to Woolf,” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 41 (2003): 55.

²⁷ Reynier, 55.

Chapter 2 Intertextuality: *Mrs Dalloway's Party*

Very few of Woolf's short stories appeared in print during her lifetime. *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*, edited by Stella McNichol, was published by the Hogarth Press in 1973. With Clarissa Dalloway's character appearing in all seven, it is the sole short story collection by Woolf in which the stories have been, in Christine Reynier's words, "arranged thematically."¹ The collection is further notable for McNichol's interesting editorial choice to arrange the stories as chapters 1–7 in the following order: "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," "The Man Who Loved His Kind," "The Introduction," "Ancestors," "Together and Apart," "The New Dress," and "A Summing Up." In this way she echoes Woolf's initial plan on dividing *Mrs Dalloway* into chapters while pointing to the thematic unity of the stories:

The plan fits perfectly the present volume of short stories. *Mrs Dalloway's Party* is a short book consisting of seven 'chapters', each complete separately and having [...] some sort of fusion, and all converging on or centering in the party.²

This fusion reaches beyond the common denominator of what Woolf called "the party consciousness." When read together, the stories offer a tantalizing scrutiny of the antagonisms that are forced to interact at Clarissa Dalloway's party: the collective and the individual, the masculine and the feminine, the public and the private; with emphases almost exclusively on the latter. Each story begins similarly, with a complex sentence, *in medias res*, introducing two characters. This shared narrative framework brings the stories together into a mosaic of voices and consciousnesses, from which "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and "The New Dress" stand out as quite different.

¹ Reynier, 55.

² McNichol, 15.

2.1 “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”

There was much in Good Society that she found hateful and frightening, but there was always something in it that she loved. To be at the centre of things, to know people who disposed of enormous power, who could take certain graces and prerogatives for granted, to mingle with the decorative and decorated world, to hear the butler announce a name that was old when Shakespeare was alive, these were things to which she could never be wholly indifferent.

Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*

In Bell’s *Biography*, the above quote is followed by accounts of Woolf’s early attempts to assume her place in upper-class Victorian society as she was expected to do by her living relatives. The ambivalence with which Woolf herself came to look at the social occasion of the party – as a fascinating yet superficial glorification of wealth and social status – seems to have found its way into her work quite soon.³ Clarissa Dalloway is one of Woolf’s most successful fictional embodiments of the contrast between the thoughts of a character and his or her verbal interaction with others, and can be therefore seen as a kind of extended literary project, as well as an investigation into the literary means of characterization.

Clarissa Dalloway makes her first appearance in Woolf’s fiction as early as 1915 in *The Voyage Out* as “a tall slight woman, her body wrapped in furs, her head in veils.”⁴ She and her husband are portrayed as a conservative, perfectly poised upper-class couple. Richard Dalloway expresses a wish to “be in [his] grave before a woman has the right to vote in England” (*The Voyage Out* 36) and Clarissa has an eye for home decoration: “She whipped a plush cover off a table. The appearance of the place was marvellously improved” (*The Voyage Out* 34). This shows that the more famous version of Clarissa Dalloway was developed at

³ Bell also reveals that “Mrs [Kitty] Maxse was certainly the original of Mrs Dalloway, but I do not think that the novel provides, or was meant to provide, an exact portrait.” Kitty Maxse was a maternal figure in Woolf’s teenage years who introduced her to society. Bell describes her as “smart [...] her blue eyes looked at the world through half-closed lashes; she had a lovely mocking voice; she stood very upright.” Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography vol. 1* (New York: Quality Paperback Bookclub / Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 80.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication: The Pennsylvania State University, 2009) 33.

stages. Dean Baldwin speaks of a *Mrs Dalloway's Party* period (1923–29) and confirms Woolf's interest in characterization at the time, as opposed to the preceding experimental period (1917–21) and the following "oddly conventional period" (1938–41)⁵. Similarly to Head, Baldwin connects Woolf's epistemological concerns with "Modern Fiction" and "Mrs Bennett and Mrs Brown," both of which were also written around that time. In "Modern Fiction" Woolf makes her famous case against the "materialists" who in her view "write of unimportant things" and "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" ("Modern Fiction" 147). As Head observes, it is legitimate to think of Woolf's essays as critical manifestos – her views concerning "the proper stuff of fiction" ("Modern Fiction" 149) were shared by many of her generation, including Joyce, about whom she says:

Mr. Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see. ("Modern Fiction" 150)

In the above passage, which brings to mind her discussion of Chekhov, Woolf emphasises Joyce's disregard for public opinion, an attitude which she herself sought to build. It was believed for years that Woolf completely dismissed *Ulysses*, and this assumption can still be easily supported by passages from her diary in which she criticises the novel's "indecenty."⁶

⁵ Quoted in Kathryn Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, eds, *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 2.

⁶ Quoted in Suzette Henke, "Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce: The *Ulysses* Notebook", *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, ed. Philip Herring et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986) 39.

In 1986, Suzette Henke's critical re-reading of Woolf's unpublished notebooks was the first to suggest that Woolf's attitude to Joyce in general and *Ulysses* in particular might not have been that one-sided. Henke summarizes Joyce's influence on Woolf as follows:

Surprisingly, Woolf was one of the first critics to recognize the cinematic techniques of *Ulysses*. [She] would go on to create her own acts of aesthetic revolution by giving us a "new form" in every novel she wrote after *Jacob's Room*. There is no question that her reading of *Dubliners*, *Portrait*, and *Ulysses* made an indelible impression on her artistic sensibility.⁷

This influence was never officially recorded or acknowledged by Woolf. Drawing on Henke's conclusions, James Heffernan sets the opening sentence of *Mrs Dalloway* against that of the final chapter of *Ulysses*, observing that the former

begins with a sentence that unwittingly evokes the final chapter of *Ulysses*: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." By sheer coincidence (since I don't believe that Woolf ever read the final chapter of *Ulysses*), the sexually frigid heroine of Woolf's novel echoes what the sexually overheated Molly says near the end of her monologue: "Ill go to Lambes there beside Findlaters and get them to send us some flowers to put about the place"⁸

A number of parallels could be drawn between *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, a fact that connects with the idea of the modernists being after similar experiments in representation, and, of course, both were originally conceived as short stories. Most importantly, however, Woolf was reading *Ulysses* as she wrote her story "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street."⁹

It would take an effort to justify a narratological reading of "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street"

⁷ Henke, 41.

⁸ James Heffernan, "Woolf's Reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*, 1922-1941" Dartmouth College, The Modernism Lab at Yale University: http://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/Woolf%27s_Reading_of_Joyce%27s_Ulysses,_1922-1941, 2010, 13 March 2013

⁹ Heffernan, *ibid.*

that would not consider its affinity with *Mrs Dalloway*, the opening section of which is modelled very closely on the story. The novel is perhaps the best documented of all Woolf's works in terms of its genesis. The resemblance begins with the opening sentence:

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself.¹⁰ ("Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" 19)

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. (*Mrs Dalloway* 3)¹¹

The two sentences can, according to Daniel Ferrer, be thought of as *variants*, that is, elements that are equivalent and can substitute one another in a given context. The *variant* is to be distinguished from *variation* – variations are rather "similar but different elements [...] juxtaposed in space and time."¹² There was in fact a third variant of the opening sentence which Woolf briefly considered and which Ferrer quotes, thus proving the genetic connection between the two texts:

For an instance of genetic variant, we can look at the genesis of the first sentence of [*Mrs Dalloway*], for which there are three extant versions. Virginia Woolf first wrote, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the silk herself." Then, she crossed out the word "silk" and inserted the word "gloves" in its place, and later on, the sentence became "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself."¹³

Unlike the rest of *Mrs Dalloway's Party*, the story focuses exclusively on Clarissa Dalloway and does not take place indoors but in the streets of Westminster, thus foreshadowing the novel's central setting. Based on Ferrer's definition, the other stories in *Mrs Dalloway's Party*

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973) 19. All subsequent citations from the story are from this edition.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 3. All subsequent citations from the novel are from this edition.

¹² Daniel Ferrer, "Variant and Variation: Toward a Freudo-bathmologico-Bakhtino-Goodmanian Genetic Model?", *Genetic Criticism and the Creative Process: Essays from Music, Literature, and Theater*, eds. William Kinderman and Joseph E. Jones (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2009) 35.

¹³ Ferrer, 36.

can be read as free variations on Clarissa Dalloway and the “party consciousness.” What brings “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” even closer to the novel is that it was to be the opening chapter. When Woolf sent it to T.S. Eliot she was already determined to expand it. Susan Dick writes that

[Woolf] sent T. S. Eliot the first chapter, “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,” in June 1923, saying “Mrs Dalloway doesn’t seem to me to be complete as she is—but judge for yourself” (L3 45). [...] The story probably seemed incomplete to Woolf because by the time she sent it to Eliot her plan for the book had undergone a major change: the linked chapters had been replaced by a complex chapterless design.¹⁴

In “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,” Woolf employs conventional narrative strategies. The story begins *in medias res*. Compared to other stories by Woolf, it is much more linear rather circular. This is a structural characteristic which appears to be popular among critics as it serves as a good starting point for narrative analysis. Head observes that “visual metaphors” are often employed in short story theory as they emphasize the “‘spatial’ aspect of the genre.”¹⁵ This distinction could, however, be misleading as modernist short stories in particular are often difficult to pigeonhole. “Moments of Being” or “The Mark on the Wall” would be examples of the circular story in that only a few minutes of story time elapse between the beginning and the end, and at the end the story virtually returns to the beginning. The circular story is not defined solely on the basis of temporality. There is often a central concern around which the narrative revolves. Johannes Hedberg sees Joyce’s “The Dead” as an example of this strategy.¹⁶ Given the complexity of “The Dead,” it can be clearly seen that it has both linear and circular features. The distinction is only useful when two or more stories

¹⁴ Dick, Foreword to *Trespassing Boundaries*, xvii.

¹⁵ Head, 10.

¹⁶ Head, 10.

are to be compared or grouped together. It is true that the *Mrs Dalloway's Party* stories are mostly linear and that the gap between story and discourse time is negligible in comparison with Woolf's "circular" stories, where an analeptic or a digressive passage typically forms the main story. In both cases, *what* is said is of lesser consequence than *how* it is told. In "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," Clarissa goes out to buy a pair of gloves. On her way, she meets an old friend and thinks about the people she passes and the things she sees. All her senses are employed on her walk and they trigger memories. Clarissa contemplates life and death, war and peace, youth and old age. At the shop she buys a pair of gloves and meets an acquaintance whose name she barely remembers.

This plot summary would suggest that the story is of very little importance compared to the discourse. On the other hand, the subject matter – Clarissa's mind – makes it almost impossible to determine where action ends and reflexion begins. What happens is inseparable from how it is perceived by and focalised through Clarissa. The little action that takes place is but a narrative framework. In his 1978 study *Story and Discourse*, Seymour Chatman outlines the main difference between traditional and modern narratives:

In the traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem-solving, of things being worked out in some way, of a kind of ratiocinative or emotional teleology. [...] "What will happen?" is the basic question. In the modern plot of revelation, however, the emphasis is elsewhere; the function of the discourse is not to answer that question nor even to pose it. Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same. It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed. Thus a strong sense of temporal order is more significant in resolved than in revealed plots. Development in the first instance is an unravelling; in the second, a displaying. [...] Whether Elizabeth Bennet marries is a crucial matter, but not whether

Clarissa Dalloway spends her time shopping or writing letters or daydreaming, since any one of these or other actions would correctly reveal her character and plight.¹⁷

Chatman does not deal with the specifics of the short story form. Still, his study is of relevance here as it is the purpose of this subchapter to trace the changes that Woolf made to the fibre of the story when she adapted it into the opening section of the novel. The above quote, of course, applies to both story and novel.

A structural feature of the two *Mrs Dalloway* texts that might not be entirely unrelated to Joyce is the film-like technique Woolf tries out in the story and then develops in the novel: the smooth transition between present time and memory, as well as between narrative voices, that copies Clarissa's train of thought:

MRS DALLOWAY said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she would hear now, she *had burst open the French windows at Bourton* into the open air. (*Mrs Dalloway* 1, my emphasis)

Opening the front door of her house reminds Clarissa of Bourton, where she opened the windows of her room years ago to be pleasantly surprised by a similarly fresh June morning. The present switches to the past without using any verb like “remember” or “recall” marking the transition. In the film *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa opens the front door of her house and instantly remembers her eighteen-year-old self, who is then shown opening the French

¹⁷ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) 48.

windows at Bourton and saying, “What a plunge!”¹⁸

All contributes to the sense of plunging into the narrative and of life going on before and after the text. The novel too begins *in medias res*, in the middle of the preparations of Clarissa’s party. According to Chatman, “the narrator effaces himself by marking the characters and setting as *faits accomplis*, depriving the reader of the comforts of formal introduction.”¹⁹ For, Chatman continues, it is not clear whether the sentence about Lucy having her work cut out for her is meant to be reported speech, if so, who the speaker is, or whether it is already part of Clarissa’s inner monologue.

In this respect the story is, in Woolf’s own words, much more “incomplete.” The first shift from the present to a memory in the story occurs in the second paragraph and it is based on association rather than on a spontaneous flashback:

Only for Mrs Dalloway the moment was complete; for Mrs Dalloway June was fresh. A happy childhood—and it was not to his daughters only that Justin Parry had seemed a fine fellow (weak of course on the Bench) ; flowers at evening, smoke rising; the caw of rooks falling from ever so high, down down through the October air—there is nothing to take the place of childhood. A leaf of mint brings it back: or a cup with a blue ring. (“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” 19)

The passage is quite Proustian in that it is constructed very carefully to convey Clarissa’s childhood memories. Still, there remains a descriptive note which disrupts the impulsive nature of remembering. Also, the distinction between past and present is clearer in the story. It was not until *Mrs Dalloway* that Woolf found a way to portray a consciousness without a sense of time, most fully in the character of Septimus Warren-Smith.

Woolf makes various uses of ellipsis in her fiction, from the synthetic middle section of *To*

¹⁸ *Mrs Dalloway*, prod. Bayly/Paré Productions, Bergen Film & TV, dir. Marleen Gorris, 1998, 35 mm, 97 min.

¹⁹ Chatman, 222.

the Lighthouse to the ambiguity of Rhoda's death in *The Waves*. Chatman writes that “[t]he whole effect [of ellipsis in *Mrs Dalloway*] is of an ever-growing discontinuity between discourse-time and story-time.”²⁰ In “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” ellipsis is not used to omit sections of dialogue, or to truncate the narrative. It is used together with figurative language to add layers of meaning, or possible interpretations, to what is being said. The following passage, in which Clarissa Dalloway talks to her childhood friend, is an instance in point:

‘We’ve just come up,’ said Hugh Whitbread. ‘Unfortunately to see doctors.’

‘Milly?’ said Mrs Dalloway, suddenly compassionate.

‘Out of sorts,’ said Hugh Whitbread. ‘That sort of thing. Dick all right?’

‘First rate!’ said Clarissa.

Of course, she thought, walking on, Milly is about my age—fifty—fifty-two.

So it is probably *that*. (“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” 20)

The demonstrative pronoun “that” which Woolf herself italicised complicates the otherwise clear narrative situation. Clarissa’s thoughts are put into words that are in fact euphemisms and substitutions. This is telling of the character – Clarissa Dalloway has, with a typical upper-middle class tact, interiorised the social protocol so that her mind blocks out what cannot be discussed in respectable society. Still, the passage is much more explicit than its corresponding section in the novel:

Evelyn was a good deal out of sorts, said Hugh, intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court) that his wife had some internal ailment, nothing serious, which, as an old friend, Clarissa Dalloway would quite understand

²⁰ Chatman, 71.

without requiring him to specify. Ah yes, she did of course; what a nuisance; and felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat. (*Mrs Dalloway* 5)

Here Woolf decided on a different narrative strategy in order to add emphasis to the encounter without changing the meaning. Instead of direct speech and Clarissa's subsequent reflection and evaluation of it, everything is mediated in free indirect speech; the dialogue is reported through Clarissa who is the focalizer. Mimesis gives way to diegesis. Clarissa's subjective judgment of Hugh Whitbread appears in brackets, a device which is often used to the same purpose in both story and novel. Evelyn's "ailment" here is unspecified. Being an "old friend" of the family, Clarissa could know of troubles that would be kept from the reader.

The shop scene is the central point of the narrative. Ruth Hoberman includes "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" among Woolf's stories about collecting, and shopping for, objects,²¹ for which there are several reasons. To begin with, Clarissa Dalloway is a woman of independent means. The very first sentence, "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself," clearly suggests the possibility of someone buying the gloves for her, implying her material status. Going shopping at eleven in the morning, and on Bond Street, is indeed an "errand of happiness" that sets from the start the impression of Clarissa Dalloway as an upper-class woman. This outward carelessness and recurrent images evoking youth ("children on a beach," "June was fresh") are contrasted with Big Ben as the reminder of time, ageing and death, and of the fact that nothing Clarissa can afford will save her from old age. She is already "strangely white-haired for her pink cheeks." Big Ben makes her reflect and remember: "The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Pride held her erect, inheriting, handling on, acquainted with discipline and with suffering. How people suffered, how they suffered, she thought" ("Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" 20). Clarissa's familiarity with suffering does

²¹ Hoberman, "Collecting, Shopping, and Reading: Virginia Woolf's Stories About Objects," *Trespassing Boundaries*, 81.

not necessarily spring from personal experience. She is sensitive to other people's misery but she manages to remain perfectly poised. Hoberman observes that "Mrs. Dalloway's oyster-like consciousness responds imaginatively to all she sees, but is also itself haunted by thoughts of death, aging, and World War I."²² In her ability to notice and contemplate her surroundings she resembles

the flaneur Baudelaire and Benjamin describe: the connoisseur of street life with his mobile, distracted gaze. While the flaneur, like the collector, is traditionally male, a number of recent theorists have argued that with the development of department stores, a female version, the flaneuse emerges.²³

A conservative Edwardian, Clarissa nevertheless has traits of character that can be seen as modern. She is also, in Hoberman's words, "exquisitely responsive to goods displayed for sale," evaluating them as well as the people who sell them, the people she passes, the people she talks to, particularly younger women, "as a customer weighing her fashion choices."²⁴

A different reading of the shopping scene in the story, carried out by Krystyna Colburn, argues that it can, in contrast to the simplicity of the plot, be read as a "sensual subplot of two women recognizing each other's erotic potential," with the reader "in the position of watching Clarissa slowly unbutton, watching her gaze at the shop-woman. In addition, the syntax leaves just what is being unbuttoned ambiguous."²⁵ Woolf switches from her signature lyricism to a more straightforwardly sensual language. Time slows down: "They waited; a clock ticked." The pleasure of purchasing luxury goods might as well be, in Colburn's words, "delight in women-relatedness" ("Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" 25, 79). The ambiguity of the scene, however, seems to be more figurative than elliptic, and the connection between sexual desire and shopping more complex, as can be seen in the following excerpt: "There was only one

²² Hoberman, 91.

²³ Hoberman, 91.

²⁴ Hoberman, 91.

²⁵ Krystyna Colburn, "The Lesbian Intertext of Woolf's Short Fiction," *Trespassing Boundaries*, 73.

other customer, sitting sideways at the counter, her elbow poised, her bare hand drooping vacant; like a figure on a Japanese fan, thought Clarissa, too vacant perhaps, yet some men would adore her” (“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” 25). Woolf presents the marketplace as a feminine space, and connects financial independence with women’s personal freedom. Katherine Simpson explores this connection in *Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf*, arguing that

with their focus on shopping and consumption, the interrelated texts of Woolf’s short story ‘Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street’, *Mrs Dalloway* and ‘The Hours’ in many ways encapsulate Woolf’s ambivalence about consumerism, capitalism and commodity culture. Shopping in these texts is a self-consciously performed activity that puts into question the heteronormative expectations that women’s participation in the market economy seems to endorse.²⁶

As Woolf substituted gloves with flowers in *Mrs Dalloway*, she substantially rewrote the shop scene, which concludes the novel’s opening section. In Miss Pym’s flower shop, Clarissa chooses flowers for her party. Again, the passage reaches beyond lyricism and impressionism. Interestingly, it is also less about the act of shopping. Money or change is never mentioned and there are no other customers present in the shop. What prevails is a kind of lingering sensuality and erotic floral imagery:

Ah yes – so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness [...] and it was the moment between six and seven when [...] every

²⁶ Katherine Simpson, *Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 50.

flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey-white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when – oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!

“Dear, those motor cars,” said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars, those tyres of motor cars, were all *her* fault. (*Mrs Dalloway* 11-12)

Through metaphor and implication Woolf again creates a distinctly feminine scene, at the core of which is a strong homosocial bonding between Clarissa and Miss Pym. The language does suggest an erotic element that could be identified as a “lesbian continuum,”²⁷ however Woolf never provides enough evidence for any interpretation. She herself believed that “once a book is printed and published it ceases to be the property of its author; he commits it to the care of other people.”²⁸ Woolf would always meticulously rewrite and rethink phrases, usually making them more equivocal than disambiguating them. One of her chief objections to Joyce, for instance, she wrote down in her diary: “When one can have the cooked flesh, why have the raw?” (*Selected Diaries* 146). This remark seems to be aimed chiefly at Joyce’s open descriptions of what Woolf would usually hide beneath the surface in her own work. Using biographical criticism, this could easily be dismissed as insufficient authorial distance. Woolf

²⁷ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15.3 (1980, 2003) 11-48.

²⁸ From *Essays, IV*. Quoted in David Bradshaw, “Introduction,” Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 3.

seems, however, to have had a very clear objective in mind: namely, to create a narrative that would invite and endorse any interpretation. The choice to capture in words the human mind and to employ it at the same time as the chief focalizing medium appears to be quite strategic.

2.2 “The New Dress”

“No one knows the real truth.”

A. P. Chekhov, “The Duel”

In *Mrs Dalloway*, much to the hostess’s annoyance, a character named Ellie Henderson comes to the party. Having invited herself, she arrives with the purpose of admiring the richer guests’ clothes and the luxury of Clarissa’s home so that she can “tell Edith” (*Mrs Dalloway* 146). Sally Seton says to Peter Walsh that “Clarissa was very hard on [Ellie]. She was a cousin, very poor. Clarissa was hard on people” (*Mrs Dalloway* 162). At the same time Ellie Henderson is shown to be rather nosy and sympathy seeking. She “stand[s] by the curtain all the evening, without speaking” (162) and is the last guest to leave the party.

Ellie Henderson was rewritten and reintroduced as Mabel Waring in “The New Dress”, a story that can be considered the exact opposite of “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” in terms of its textual genesis. Based on a number of dated diary entries and letters, it seems that Woolf wrote the story as she was putting the finishing touches to the novel, that is, in the spring of 1925. Woolf had developed an interest in what she decided to call

the *party consciousness*, the frock consciousness etc. The fashion world of the Becks [...] is certainly one; where people secrete an envelope which connects them and protects them from others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies. These states are very difficult (obviously I grope for words) but

I'm always coming back to it.²⁹

The term “frock consciousness” applies even more directly to Mabel Waring, whose old-fashioned yellow dress deepens her social anxieties instead of boosting her self-esteem.

The influence of Chekhov’s novella “The Duel” is present in “The New Dress”, even though the two stories have little in common. The basic plot of “The Duel” revolves around a man and a woman whose relationship is falling apart, as opposed to Mabel Waring’s crisis which she experiences alone, physically and mentally apart from other people. “The New Dress” is not an adaptation of Chekhov’s story. Woolf seems rather to have been intrigued by specific phrases and imagery in “The Duel,” and to have decided to incorporate them in a different context. The allusions to Chekhov are not made by the covert narrative voice but by Mabel herself through free indirect speech. It is revealed that “tags of Shakespeare, lines from books she had read ages ago, suddenly came to her when she was in agony.”³⁰ She fails to remember the names of the books and authors. In an attempt to get to the bottom of her growing feeling of alienation she compares herself to an ugly insect:

‘I feel like some dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy old fly,’ she said [...] And, of course, Robert Haydon answered something, quite polite, quite insincere, which she saw through instantly, and said to herself, directly he went (again from some book), ‘Lies, lies, lies!’ (“The New Dress” 58)

Both quotes come from “The Duel,” where Chekhov’s protagonist Layevsky realizes towards the end of the story, in a moment of painful epiphany, that he has lived his whole life in self-deception, having considered himself superior to others:

Never in all his born days had he rescued so much as a fly, he had dealt solely in destruction, ruin and lies, lies, lies. [...] He had not done a thing for his

²⁹ McNichol, 12.

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, “The New Dress,” *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Vintage, 2003) 58. All subsequent citations from the text are from this edition.

fellows but eat their bread, drink their wine, steal their wives and borrow their ideas, while seeking to justify his despicable, parasitical existence in the world's eyes and his own by passing himself off as a higher form of life. It was all lies, lies, lies. ("The Duel" 96)

This is the point of connection between the characters Mabel and Layevsky: both feel at the same time superior and inferior to other people. Envy and contempt make it impossible for them to build healthy relationships with others. Both feel they have failed as members of society. Interestingly, Chekhov opted for a rather traditional, happy ending for his story, leaving the door open for Layevsky and his lover Nadezhda's relationship. Mabel, on the other hand, does not overcome her inner conflict and feels humiliated as she leaves the party.

Woolf also borrowed from "The Duel" the image of a fly trying to crawl from a pool of liquid. Katherine Mansfield used it in her story "The Fly" as well, in a context that is closer to Chekhov's original idea. In "The Fly" and in "The Duel," the image of the insect trying to escape while being observed works a naturalistic metaphor for the human condition and human nature. In Chekhov's story, Nadezhda, who has been unfaithful to him, feels fear and remorse over her actions and imagines herself as a helpless fly:

She felt as if all her bad memories had left her head and were marching by her side, breathing heavily in the darkness. Meanwhile she, like a fly fallen in an ink-pot, could barely crawl along the road, and was smudging Layevsky's side and arm with black. ("The Duel" 80)

In "The New Dress", Mabel first begins by imagining all people as "flies trying to crawl over the edge of the saucer" (57). Subsequently she feels the metaphor only works for her: "But she could not see them like that, not other people. She saw herself like that—she was a fly, but the others were dragonflies, butterflies, insects, dancing, fluttering, skimming, while she alone dragged herself up out of the saucer" (58). With this image in mind Mabel concludes that she

is not “like” other people, but she is left with no sense of what constitutes her identity.

Traditionally, the setting of a narrative may function as a means of implicit characterization. In her work Woolf acknowledges the importance of setting, but she strongly disagrees with the notion of the detailed “materialistic” descriptions of setting substituting for characterization. In “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” Woolf dismisses Arnold Bennett’s fiction because she finds there a tendency to construct characters solely on the basis of their social background:

Mr Bennett [...] is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there. With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr. Bennett has never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner.³¹

Woolf’s ambition with “The New Dress” was an extension of her quest for Mrs. Brown, or true characterization. The story’s setting – Mrs Dalloway’s drawing room, the occasion of the party – works as anti-characteristics of Mabel Waring. It embodies everything she is not, and the contrast is made even more pronounced by her new dress. Mabel avoids eye contact with the party guests as much as she avoids a direct look in the mirror. In Nena Skrbic’s words, Mabel “leads a frightened animal’s existence trying to avoid the public eye.”³² Her movements in the story are very few, always quick and uneasy. On her arrival she immediately looks for a shelter: “[S]he went straight to the far end of the room, to a shaded corner where a looking-glass hung” (“The New Dress” 56). She spends most of the narrative time standing in the corner, next to the mirror. Later on, having persuaded herself that her dress is ridiculous and that everybody is making fun of her, she

faced herself straight in the glass; she pecked at her left shoulder; she issued out into the room, as if spears were thrown at her yellow dress from all sides.

³¹ Woolf, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” *Collected Essays Vol. 1* (London: Hogarth, 1980) 326.

³² Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, 79.

But instead of looking fierce or tragic [...] she [...] slouched across the room, positively shrinking, as if she were a beaten mongrel [...]. ‘Now the fly’s in the saucer,’ she said to herself, ‘right in the middle, and can’t get out, and the milk [...] is sticking its wings together.’” (“The New Dress” 60)

Finally, shortly before leaving for good, Mabel sits on a blue sofa, “punching the cushion in order to look occupied” (63). Mabel’s movements can be contrasted with Clarissa Dalloway’s who in the first story walks down Bond Street, in and out of three different settings, enjoying her walk with a freedom that stems from her self-confidence. Mabel Waring’s physical stasis reflects her psychological state of paranoia and paralysis. Her inner conflict is taken apart by Woolf: her anxieties about money, gender, class, clothes, conversation, are all given space in the story and are all symbolized by the image of the drowning fly. At the core of Mabel’s existential and epistemological crisis is a fear that she will never get hold of reality and of her true self. Mabel believes that she has to choose between two realities that are in her view mutually exclusive: the reality of Miss Milan’s workroom and of Mrs Dalloway’s drawing room. Her introspection revolves around the denotations “true” and “false.” During her initial feelings of horror she rebukes herself for “giving herself up, no doubt about it, to an orgy of self-love” (“The New Dress” 57). The reality of the workroom is renounced together with Mabel’s former belief that her new, deliberately old-fashioned dress would stress her originality. She decides that “[t]his was true, this drawing-room, this self, the other false” (58). At the same time, however, she tries to rationalize her earlier appraisal of the dress. Miss Milan’s workroom is described using adjectives which evoke concrete, pungent sensations: “terribly hot, stuffy, sordid. It smelt of clothes and cabbage cooking” (59). The reality of the workroom remains alive and kicking in Mabel’s mind as she tries to convince herself of the opposite. Miss Milan’s looking-glass shows something different from Clarissa Dalloway’s:

[T]here looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a grey-white,

mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself; and it was not vanity only, not only self-love that made her think it good, tender, and true. (“The New Dress” 59)

In Woolf’s fiction, the mirror has the power to change or overturn completely a character’s self-perception. It can reflect or distort objects. Skrbic observes that Woolf often employs mirrors as metaphors for the difficulties of characterization. She also argues that

there is a feeling that we are being denied a full-on experience since the mirror is interesting, not for what it reflects, but for what it cuts out—that is, “truth or reality” (Collected Essays IV: 160). What is central is how the mirror is treated as a metaphor for the short story. By excluding the extrinsic, the rigid frame of the mirror serves to abridge and curtail what is recorded, segmenting the story by exclusive and selective cutting. In this way, the author is constricted by what the mirror reflects.³³

Woolf’s aesthetic pursuit of true representation makes its way into what is supposed to be Mabel’s personal, fictional reflexion. At certain moments Woolf modifies her “cutting” strategy a little by making the mirror reflect people as “dots,” thus diminishing their life size. This is also presented as part of Mabel’s imagination as she projects onto the mirror her realization that the social exchange at the party is false and insincere: “it was impossible that the black dot, leaning forward, gesticulating, should make the yellow dot, sitting solitary, self-centred, feel what the black dot felt, yet they pretended” (“The New Dress” 62). The mirror simultaneously fragments reality. At times Mabel does not see her whole body reflected in the mirror but only parts:

she tried to answer [...] and all the time she could see bits of her yellow dress in the round looking-glass which made them all the size of boot-buttons or

³³ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, xx.

tadpoles; and it was amazing to think how much humiliation and agony and self-loathing and effort and passionate ups and downs of feeling were contained in a thing the size of a threepenny bit. (“The New Dress” 61-2).

The above excerpt points to Mabel’s intuitive understanding that reality can never be fully grasped. Therefore, it is no use relying on mirrors to provide basis for self-appreciation. What a character sees in a mirror is always the product of subjective perception at a point in space and time. The mirror reflects physical reality which is then accepted or distorted in the mind of the character. In other words, it works as a “device of self-objectification” for Mabel.³⁴

“The New Dress” is, according to Reyinier, “centred on a moment of intense emotion.”³⁵ Unlike “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,” the circular narrative returns back to its point of departure. Mabel’s “serious suspicion that something was wrong” (56) never goes away. She returns to the safety of the “Chinese cloak she had worn these twenty years,” (65) and leaves the party early. Woolf furnishes the story with a closure which leaves the question of Mabel’s nature unresolved.

³⁴ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, 64.

³⁵ Christine Reyinier, *Virginia Woolf’s Ethics of the Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 39.

Chapter 3 Subverting the Genre

The two texts discussed below – “Blue & Green” and “An Unwritten Novel” – were both written before the *Mrs Dalloway Party* stories, and they also predate *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf’s first experimental novel in which she felt she had found “[her] own voice” (*Selected Diaries* 144). What the two texts have in common is Woolf’s apparent decision not so much to disregard the specifics of the short story, but rather to use them to her advantage. Both texts are combinations of various literary genres. In “Blue & Green” Woolf experiments with the use of basic narrative tools such as the narrator and the setting, which are blurred or even non-existent. In “An Unwritten Novel” these tools are employed only to question their own stability and purpose. “An Unwritten Novel” develops a different epistemological interrogation from that of “A New Dress,” but the elusive nature of reality and the difficulties of capturing it are stressed with equal prominence. In “Blue & Green” there is no story; at the end of “An Unwritten Novel” the narrator rebukes herself for failing to construct one.

The subchapter on “Blue & Green” will read the text as a prose poem and as a verbal painting, drawing on selected critical interpretations as well as on Woolf’s probable sources of inspiration, mainly the visual arts. “An Unwritten Novel” may not be as radically experimental as “Blue & Green,” but in bringing together essay, metafiction and short story it is an equally successful interrogation of the genre. The aim of the chapter is not to compare and contrast the two stories but rather to look at two narrative strategies which Woolf typically employed when working at the short story: opting for an entirely new form, and creating a fusion of genres. Both “An Unwritten Novel” and “Blue & Green” were included in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), a collection notable for “reformulating the definition of ‘story’ to eliminate its orientation toward an event.”¹

¹ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, 49.

3.1 Verbal Painting: “Blue & Green”

There is very little information available on the genesis of “Blue & Green.” After its publication in *Monday or Tuesday*, it was “never reprinted” until 1985.² In his introduction to *A Haunted House* (1944) Leonard Woolf explains that his chief reason for not including “Blue & Green” in the collection is the belief that Woolf herself would not have done so.³ Still, when faced with the question of positioning “Blue & Green” among Woolf’s short fiction, there are certain clues about Woolf’s inspiration and influences, and the story is certainly one the most radically experimental of all Woolf’s short fictions in terms of its narrative structure as well as the breaking of genre boundaries. Critical readings of “Blue & Green” are comparatively scarce, possibly because it is even less identifiable as a short story than the famous and hybrid “Kew Gardens” or “An Unwritten Novel.” It is, however, included in recent comprehensive studies on Woolf’s short fiction carried out by Nena Skrbic, Christine Reyinier and Kathryn Benzel. These critics agree on the most prominent feature of the story, which is the absence of plot and its replacement by a lyrical, painting-like structure. With “Blue & Green” Helen Simpson’s observation that “most of Woolf’s short pieces [are] not really [stories] at all”⁴ is once again confirmed to be true.

In “Blue & Green” Woolf sets out to capture the essence of colour in words. The text is divided into two short sections (nine and eight sentences, respectively), with the headings “Green” and “Blue” standing for the respective paragraph. Dominic Head describes “Blue & Green” as a prose poem, and argues that it is a “[fiction] which ha[s] no point of contact with convention.”⁵ He also observes the same inconsistency in Woolf’s innovative uses of the form as the one Baldwin has described, namely the fact that her experiments “[do] not indicate any

² Dick, 294.

³ Shortly before her death Woolf was in the process of selecting stories for the collection. Leonard Woolf, “Introduction,” in Virginia Woolf, *A Haunted House* (London: Triad Grafton Book, 1988) 1.

⁴ Woolf, *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, vii.

⁵ Head, 80.

kind of chronological progression.”⁶

In comparison to Woolf’s other shorter fictions, “Blue & Green” is radically experimental. In 1937 Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth, “Green and Blue and the heron were the wild outbursts of freedom, inarticulate, ridiculous, unprintable mere outcries.”⁷ However, when compared to similarly hermetic modernist works such as Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (1914), it still bears tangible traces from “the touchstone of its literary heritage.”⁸ There is no evidence to suggest that Woolf had read *Tender Buttons*, although it is known that she did meet Stein who had an essay published by the Hogarth Press, and therefore her familiarity with the text is quite probable. Formally, “Blue & Green” slightly resembles *Tender Buttons*. Stein’s strategy of naming each of the short sections in “Objects” according to what they represent is similar to Woolf’s in “Blue & Green.” Unlike Stein, however, Woolf does not deliberately break up logical associations in order to substitute them with subjective abstraction. “Blue & Green” still follows a detectable pattern that revolves around the two colours that are represented.

Like “Blue & Green,” *Tender Buttons* has been understood to have the features of a “prose poem,”⁹ a genre pioneered by Baudelaire. In her study of the prose poem, Marguerite S. Murphy argues that it “has a capacity for subversion beyond purely formal considerations.”¹⁰ Like all other genres and arts, the prose poem was adopted by the modernists in order to be innovative. Murphy places *Tender Buttons* among the experiments in the genre:

While the prose poem remained a minor and marginal genre, some important experimental prose poems did emerge during the period of high modernism [...] *Tender Buttons* is [a] radical experiment: prose pieces juggle syntactic

⁶ Head, 80.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Selected Letters* (London: Vintage Books, 2008) 275.

⁸ Head, 79.

⁹ Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick, *Modernist Women Writers and War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011) 93.

¹⁰ Marguerite S. Murphy, *A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 4.

units into near nonsense while superficially masquerading as the simple prose of the enclosed world that stylish women inhabit.¹¹

Drawing on Murphy's definition, "Blue & Green" can be considered a prose poem in the broader sense of the term, having the length and lyricism of a poem and being written in sentences that make it prosaic. Woolf experimented with poetry and poetic language in many of her works, most prominently in *The Waves* (1933). What is achieved in "Blue & Green" is an immensely packed unity, imagery centring on a particular idea, possibly unsustainable in its intensity at a novel length. Woolf does, however, use the same technique in sections of "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*, trying to "give color physical form."¹²

Evening comes, and the shadow sweeps the green over the mantelpiece; the ruffled surface of the ocean [...] he sinks, heavy with water, and the blue closes over him. ("Blue & Green"¹³)

[T]he light which mellows the energy of labour, and smooths the stubble, and brings the wave lapping blue to the shore. (*To the Lighthouse*¹⁴)

As a text "Blue & Green" implicitly questions the necessity of events and existents in a work of fiction. The verbs Woolf uses in the "Green" paragraph, though dynamic and expressive, are all in the simple present tense, which creates a sense of regularity. The dynamics of the text is therefore transferred to its imagery, to its words and phrases. The narrative progression is linear, supported by syntactic structures. These mostly consist of short phrases divided by semicolons. In her fiction Woolf typically uses the semicolon in descriptive passages, often employing it instead of the comma. In "Blue & Green" everything is condensed: the semicolons divide portions of text that are equal in length. This creates a rhythmic sequence

¹¹ Murphy, 7.

¹² Skrbic, 50.

¹³ Woolf, "Blue & Green," *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Vintage, 2003) 136. All subsequent citations from the text are from this edition.

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1981) 127.

in the middle of “Green”:

But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand; the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them; weeds clog them; here and there a white blossom; the frog flops over; at night the stars are set there unbroken. (“Blue & Green” 136)

According to Skrbic, the combination of these “visual frames” with the repeated pronoun “them” invites the reader to “read spatially.”¹⁵ She makes the logical link between “Blue & Green” and post-impressionism: “[W]hen applied to literature, [the post-impressionist canvas] challenges the idea that art should have a story.”¹⁶ The first editions of Woolf’s works sometimes incorporated a strong visual element as she collaborated with Vanessa Bell. In 1919 Bell provided the illustrations for *Kew Gardens* which was printed alone, and then reprinted in 1927 with emphasis on “the visual.”¹⁷

Christine Reynier sees the covert narrator of the text as impersonating its “painter.”¹⁸ Once again the text is not a clear-cut example of verbal painting, which typically transforms the page into a pictorial space. Woolf keeps “Blue & Green” within the margins of the page, relying on the reader’s imagination to transform the linear text into a painting. The “Blue” paragraph is syntactically smoother, employing fewer semicolons and also sustaining the image of the “snub-nosed monster” for most of the narrative. Reading “Blue & Green” as (a) verbal painting connects it to its literary and artistic heritage and context – for example, the growing popularity of the post-impressionists and the emergence of Imagism in the field of poetry. Woolf’s text in fact follows the famous Imagist “manifesto”, its first two points in particular: “1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing’, whether subjective or objective. 2. To use

¹⁵ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, 54.

¹⁶ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, 49.

¹⁷ Colburn, 76.

¹⁸ Reynier, *Virginia Woolf’s Ethics of the Short Story*, 27.

absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.”¹⁹ This is the intersection between prose and poetry in “Blue & Green” – it is a carefully constructed text in which every word contributes to the presentation of the two colours, and there are no diversions from their direct description. Still the text is more verbal than *Tender Buttons* – while Stein refuses to provide a key to its meaning, Woolf’s sustained use of referential pronouns and the definite article creates a unity that brings the whole text together quite like a painting, and much less like the fragmented and abstract poetry of her contemporaries.

3.2 Essay & Metafiction: “An Unwritten Novel”

“An Unwritten Novel” is a crucial text in terms of Woolf’s thoughts on fictional composition and epistemology. Published in the London Mercury in 1920²⁰ and reprinted in *Monday or Tuesday* as well as in *A Haunted House*, it is more straightforward in terms of plot and narrator, and it also makes a more explicit statement about fiction than “Kew Gardens”, for example, which is subtle and shows rather than tells what Woolf was after. Woolf’s main strategy of expression in “An Unwritten Novel” works to prove the author as well as the narrator unreliable. In accordance with her views on the purpose of fiction, Woolf asks questions but never gives answers as she does not believe there are any. In an anti-epiphany, the narrator in “An Unwritten Novel” learns this by the end of the story: “What do I stand on? What do I know? [...] Who am I? Life’s bare as bone.”²¹ Head observes that this “moment of reversal, in which the fictional account is apparently discredited, forces the narrator to assess the value of the imagined story.”²² Woolf interweaves her discourse into the unstable, “unwritten” story.

¹⁹ Glenn Hughes, *Imagism and the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry* (New York: Stanford University Press, 1931) 26.

²⁰ Dick, 293.

²¹ Virginia Woolf, “An Unwritten Novel,” *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Vintage, 2003) 106. All subsequent citations from the text are from this edition.

²² Head, 85.

Anyone who has read both “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” and “An Unwritten Novel” will readily see the parallels between them: from the points they make about the elusive nature of life to the “scenario of fellow travellers [which] offers an archetypal story situation in which personal histories may unfold.”²³ In “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” Woolf conjures a train compartment with a female passenger whom she arbitrarily names Mrs Brown, and imagines what the three famous “Edwardians” would write if they travelled in the carriage with Mrs Brown and were asked to create her character. Woolf thus includes a fictional element in her essay (which was originally a lecture) as an illustrating example. In “An Unwritten Novel” she does the same: the story has an essayistic undertone. It begins with the agnostic postulate that the knowledge of life, if gained, remains incommunicable – and this realization alone can be shared:

Life’s what you see in people’s eyes, life’s what they learn, and, having learnt it, never, though they seek to hide it, cease to be aware of – what? That life’s like that, it seems. Five faces opposite – five mature faces and the knowledge in each face. (106)

Nevertheless, the narrator is lured away from this initial thought, and begins to construct the life and character of the woman sitting opposite. Her first impression that the woman is “unhappy” is followed by the possibly objective observation that “the bitterness of her tone was like lemon on cold steel.” There is also the characteristic “shudder and the twitch of the arm” (107). Woolf then lets the narrator fall into the same mistake of which she accuses the Edwardians: the belief that a writer’s guess on a character is infallible. Based on a few observations of the woman, now referred to as “Minnie Marsh,” the narrator goes on to construct a history for her involving among others an old guilt, insecurity, and difficult financial situation. At the same time Woolf variously insinuates that the narrator will be

²³ Head, 86.

disappointed at the end. In naming Minnie's imagined sister-in-law "Hilda," for example, Woolf makes an allusion to Hilda Lessways, the protagonist of Bennett's eponymous 1911 novel, who according to Woolf is drowned as a character in long chunks of text that have nothing to do with her true characterization.²⁴ The Hilda of "An Unwritten Novel" is in the narrator's head and the grounds upon which her existence is based are proven non-existent. As the story progresses, the narrator invests the imagined life story of Minnie Marsh with more and more details: "Eggs are cheaper!' That's what always happens! [...] [P]oor Minnie Marsh [...] never utterly unconscious of the cheapness of eggs" ("An Unwritten Novel" 110-111). Shortly afterwards, she convinces herself that her guess is right:

There she is, [...] opening her hand-bag, from which she takes a hollow shell – an egg – who was saying that eggs were cheaper? You or I? Oh, it was you who said it on the way home, you remember [...]. And now you lay across your knees a pocket-handkerchief into which drop little angular fragments of eggshell – fragments of a map – a puzzle. I wish I could piece them together! If you would only sit still. She's moved her knees – the map's in bits again. (111)

The eggshell metaphor works for the futility of the laborious task the narrator has set herself: what appears to be true is back "in pieces" the next moment. Minnie Marsh's life is constructed out of sequences of familiar, probable situations, possibly from the narrator's own empirical knowledge of life, by the way of projection. The narrative also switches from "you" to "she" in what appears to be an artist feeling chagrined that her work is ruined, while "sit still" evokes a painter's voice. This is the obvious paradox of the egg metaphor and by extension of the whole story: the composition may be ruined for the narrator, but had it been completed it might have been untruthful. At first the ending comes as a disappointment, then the narrator seems to realize that nothing has changed: she has merely reaffirmed her initial

²⁴ Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924) 16.

impression that “life” is not that easy to share. This connects to Head’s conclusion that “‘An Unwritten Novel’ is about the potential value of fictional narrative, a value which may reside above and beyond its real-life stimuli.”²⁵

In many of her works Woolf employed the strategy of adopting an unnamed, fictionalized “I” in order to make a statement. In *A Room of One’s Own* this is done before the eyes of the reader or listener: “I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence [...] ‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being.”²⁶ In her introduction to Woolf’s *Selected Letters*, Joanne T. Banks includes an interesting fact about Victorian women and the use of “I”: “In turn-of-the-century handbooks on how to write a proper letter, women were advised to be self-effacing. Ladies, they were told, do not begin a letter with ‘I’. They begin instead with something that will interest their correspondents, chiefly themselves.”²⁷ Woolf uses “I” freely in her lectures and essays, but it does not always have an obvious referent. In “An Unwritten Novel,” the narrator is unnamed. Presumably it is a woman, but the “I” is not a warranty of information about her. Woolf subverts the authoritative “I” of the narrator.

In addition to this, Woolf makes an implicit statement about the short story genre in the very title, which reads “An Unwritten Novel.” Why not “An Unwritten Story”? Is the narrator merely brainstorming ideas about Minnie Marsh which she believes she may put into order, expand, and present as a novel? Is “An Unwritten Novel” to be considered incomplete because it is not a novel? A possible reason lies in the aforementioned essayistic quality of the story. As a statement on novel writing the title is well-chosen as it establishes the link between the nature of the modernist novel and what the narrator learns in the story. As Woolf wrote about the novel form much more than she did about the short story, it has become common practice in short story criticism to extend the validity of her statements onto her short fiction.

²⁵ Head, 86.

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own; Three Guineas* (Aylesbury: Oxford University Press, 1992) 5.

²⁷ Joanne T. Banks, “Introduction,” in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Letters* (London: Vintage, 2008) xi.

It is of course difficult not to do so:

I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character – not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved. (*Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* 9-10)

At the same time it was “An Unwritten Novel” that apparently enabled Woolf to arrive at this and other conclusions about what a novel should do. In the famous 1937 letter to Ethel Smyth Woolf also wrote: “‘An Unwritten Novel’ was the great discovery, however. That – again in one second – showed me how I could embody all my deposit in a shape that fitted it – not that I have ever reached that end” (*Selected Letters* 274). Even though short story criticism mentions the importance which the short story had for Woolf, her statements about the genre are always somehow related to the novel. The “shape” Woolf describes does not seem to refer to the short story, but rather to the narrative itself.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

This thesis described selected techniques and narrative strategies Woolf commonly used in her shorter fiction. Ranging from single quotations to passages and tropes, however, intertextuality can also be found in any major Woolf novel. In *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf cites authors from Shakespeare to Shelley and includes characters from her own previous works, which creates a sense of a creative continuum and reaffirms the interconnectedness of her oeuvre. It also shows that Woolf is never far away from discussing literature and “the proper stuff of fiction” (“Modern Fiction” 149) in her written or spoken discourse. Similarly, Woolf worked flexibly with different genres in her novels. She wrote several fictional biographies, from *Orlando* and *Flush* to the short “fictional portrait”¹ of Miss Willatt in “Memoirs of a Novelist”. In other works Woolf “attempt[ed] to replace the reported event by a reported image.”² These include “Kew Gardens” and “Monday or Tuesday.” Woolf further deployed her knowledge of the visual arts in *The Waves*, which is notable for its sustained poetic use of the present tense, as well as in *To the Lighthouse* through Lily Briscoe’s character.

In the *Mrs Dalloway’s Party* stories, characterization was of a greater importance to Woolf than “dramatic interest,”³ closure, or the innovation of the short story genre. However, the Clarissa Dalloway of the story is still a character sketch, a work in progress. Helen Simpson makes a comparison between the story and the novel, asserting that

[t]he story has a more garish tone altogether, and the character of Mrs Dalloway appearing here is almost a parody, a broad satirical outline of the woman described in the novel. [...] The novel’s prose is far more complex, subtle and beautiful than the story’s. [...] It is a perfect example of how she

¹ Dick, 290.

² Adrian Velicu, *Unifying Strategies in Virginia Woolf’s Experimental Fiction* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1985) 23.

³ Craig, xiii.

needed space in which to linger and expand, unlimited acreage ahead of her and no constraints.⁴

The importance of the *Mrs Dalloway's Party* stories lies in their influence on the novel. Susan Dick believes that in “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” Woolf “first found a way to place her narrator within her character’s mind and to present that character’s thoughts and emotions as they occur.”⁵ They are therefore innovative in terms of their subject matter and their treatment of character rather than in terms of the short story form.

Contrarily, both “Blue & Green” and “An Unwritten Novel” are true “experiments in genre.”⁶ Skrbic includes them into a group of Woolf texts which “[b]y virtue of their brevity and economy of dialogue [...] emphasize notions of the unrealized, unfinished, and unwritten, underscoring the elision between feelings, thought, and their expression in words.”⁷ This connects to Head’s notion of the “workshop” quality of Woolf’s stories, which, it seems, can be found at various levels of the narrative.

The two themes of the thesis – intertextuality and the subversion of genre – are deliberately not complementary. They were selected as two examples of what Woolf did with the short story form, and as two distinct features of Woolf’s shorter fiction. This does not, and should not, imply that they are not present in her novels. Even though the short story is a very different genre from the novel, it would be artifice to make a convenient, inclusive statement about Woolf’s shorter fiction, or to claim that she developed it separately from the novel. In her work she sometimes fought the constraints of the constant need to innovate, but she was not limited by genre expectations. Woolf’s short story will perhaps always be dealt with in connection to her novels and not vice versa – it is hoped however that the present thesis helped to show that it is at the very least equally diverse.

⁴ Woolf, *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, xi.

⁵ Dick, 3.

⁶ Head, 79.

⁷ Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom*, xx.

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Thesis Abstract

One of the basic principles of modernism was to evaluate existing traditions and cultural norms, to innovate them, and to get rid of them if necessary. The need and urge to innovate proved to be immensely productive in the short story genre. The short story is now perceived as independent of other prose forms precisely thanks to the modernists. Virginia Woolf was one of the most enthusiastic innovators of the form, her work in the genre is nevertheless often overlooked in comparison to her novels, or even in comparison to other short story writers, such as Katherine Mansfield or James Joyce.

This thesis deals with selected narrative structures in Virginia Woolf's shorter fiction. It works with the basic assumption that when Woolf's short stories are read, her novels have to be taken into account as well due to numerous thematic and other affinities. However, it is also of importance to evaluate Woolf's short fiction without measuring them against her novels as these are two distinct genres.

The thesis introduction presents an overview of the literary and cultural context of the times in which Woolf lived and wrote, with emphasis on her familiarity with the Russian writers, primarily Chekhov, and the first Post-Impressionist painters. The thesis then carries out four separate analyses of four of Woolf's shorter fictions: "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," "The New Dress," "Blue & Green," and "An Unwritten Novel."

The first half of Chapter 2 focuses on the intertextual nature of "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street." Woolf was influenced by Joyce more than she would publicly admit, however the story has an affinity with the famous 1925 *Mrs Dalloway*, and this connection serves as the basis for the narrative analysis carried out in the subchapter.

Subchapter 2.2. comments on the influence of Chekhov on "The New Dress." It also analyses the epistemological concerns Woolf projected onto the character of Mabel Waring, whose self-perception is facilitated and at the same time distorted by the mirror in Clarissa

Dalloway's drawing room.

Chapter 3 presents two strategies Woolf used when she worked at the short story genre. "Blue & Green" is not really a story: it can be read as a verbal painting or as a prose poem. "An Unwritten Novel" questions the limits of the genre by fusing essayistic elements with features of metafiction into a story which interrogates its own existence.

Abstrakt práce

Jedním ze základních principů modernismu bylo zpochybňovat existující kulturní normy a tradice, překonávat je, či se jich zcela zbavovat. Potřeba inovace se dotkla i žánru povídky. Virginia Woolf patřila mezi průkopníky modernistické povídky, přestože je její žánrová tvorba často přehlížena v porovnání s jejími romány či s jinými autory povídek, např. Katherine Mansfield či Jamesem Joycem.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá narativními strukturami v krátké próze Virginie Woolf. Opírá se o předpoklad, že kvůli vzájemné tematické propojenosti není možné číst, pochopit a docenit povídky Virginie Woolf zcela odděleně od jejích románů, zároveň je však potřeba umět vnímat jejich kvalitu nezávisle na týchž románech, jelikož se jedná o dva rozdílné literární žánry.

V úvodu je představen kulturně-literární kontext doby, ve které Woolf žila a tvořila, s důrazem na její obeznámenost s Čechovem a prvními postmoderními malíři. Náplní kapitol 2 a 3 je pak naratologická analýza čtyř povídek – “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” (Paní Dallowayová na Bond Street), “Nové šaty,” “Blue & Green” (Modrá a zelená) a “Nenapsaný román.”

První část druhé kapitoly se zabývá intertextualitou v “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,” Cílem je porovnat povídku s úvodní částí *Paní Dallowayové*. Oba texty jsou geneticky propojené a na změnách, které Woolf provedla, když z povídky vytvářela úvod románu, je možné pozorovat, které pasáže jsou nosné pro celý příběh a jak Woolf pracovala s ellipsis, aby schválně otevřela prostor pro čtenářskou interpretaci. Povídka byla navíc ovlivněna Joycem, který Woolf celkově ovlivnil zřejmě víc, než sama veřejně přiznávala.

Druhá část druhé kapitoly se zabývá epistemologií v “Nových šatech.” Woolf zde klade důraz na prostředky charakterizace; cílem zájmu je Mabel Waring a její sebepoznání, zprostředkované a zároveň pokřivené zrcadlem, u kterého po většinu času stojí. Tato povídka

byla ovlivněna Čechovem, konkrétně jeho novelou “Souboj.” Tento autorský vliv je zde daleko víc znát, Woolf Čechova přímo cituje, i když jej nikdy nejmenuje.

První část třetí kapitoly se zaměřuje na “Blue & Green,” text, který lze číst jako báseň v próze či jako verbální obraz. Woolf se nepochybně nechala inspirovat vizuálním uměním, text má však velmi blízko i k imagistické poezii a je navíc možné, že odkazuje na své daleko experimentálnější současníky, například na Gertrude Stein. Tento text v práci figuruje zejména jako důkaz, jak daleko Woolf zašla ve svých experimentech. Nelze o něm říct, že by to byla povídka, přesto je mezi povídky zařazován.

Druhá část třetí kapitoly se zabývá “Nenapsaným románem.” Woolf v této povídce spojila prvky eseje a metafikce s fikcí. Povídka má velmi blízko k eseji “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” oba texty jsou tudíž částečně porovnávány s cílem zjistit, jak Woolf převádí svůj pohled na účel a náplň fiktivní tvorby přímo do samotné povídky.

Key Words

Virginia Woolf

James Joyce

Anton P. Chekhov

modernism

the short story

short fiction

the modernist short story

narrative structures

narratology

“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”

“The New Dress”

“Blue & Green”

“An Unwritten Novel”

A Haunted House

Mrs Dalloway

ellipsis

intertextuality

epistemology

verbal painting

prose poem

metafiction

essay

Klíčová slova

Virginia Woolf

James Joyce

Anton P. Čechov

modernismus

povídka

krátká próza

modernistická povídka

narativní struktury

naratologie

“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” (Paní Dallowayová na Bond Street)

“Nové šaty”

“Blue & Green” (Modrá a zelená)

“Nenapsaný román”

Strašidelný dům

Paní Dallowayová

ellipsis

intertextualita

epistemologie

báseň v próze

metafikce

esej