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THE VISIONARY MODE IN ANGLOPHONE MODERNIST
FICTION

by

WEI WU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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by

Wei Wu

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

The Visionary Mode in Anglophone Modernist Fiction

by

Wei Wu

Advisor: Nico Israel

This study is a critical reexamination of descriptions of visionary experiences in the novels of Woolf and Lawrence. Its goal is twofold: first, to demonstrate that the visionary mode, when best practiced by the modernist novelists here discussed, can overcome the ideological liabilities that its supposed individualist stance seems to entail; secondly, based on an updated understanding of the visionary mode, to reconceptualize its relation with the ordinary. Through discussions of five important modernist novels, this study concludes that modernist practicing of the visionary mode, when contextualized and historicized, portrays the subject as situated in dynamic exchanges with otherness, subscribes to a sense of historical relativity that resists dubious forms of absolute ideologies, and puts forward a political imagination that is present-focused and collectively oriented. The transporting power of the visionary is understood as forming an ongoing interaction and exchange with the ordinary that imbues the realm of everyday experiences with transformative potential.

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The last parts of the dissertation were written during the pandemic, when I was kept in China and living with my parents. Their patience and understanding had everything to do with its eventual finish. My partner Sure and her parents have also been generous with their support. Her optimism helped keep at bay my occasional moods of uncertainty and self-doubt.

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A slightly modified version of Chapter 5 was accepted for publication by the *D. H. Lawrence Review*.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I want to give the whole of the present society—nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean, *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night & Day*. —Woolf on writing *The Years*. (*Diary IV* 151-2)

The unspeakable inner chaos of which we are composed we call consciousness, and mind, and even civilisation. But it is, ultimately, chaos, lit up by visions, or not lit up by visions. Just as the rainbow may or may not light up the storm. And, like the rainbow the vision perisheth. —Lawrence. (*Phoenix* 255).

Woolf's attempted combination of "fact" and "vision" and Lawrence's conception of our mental life as susceptible to rainbow-like visions stand as key self-reflexive expressions in the history of Anglophone modernist fiction that highlight the centrality of the visionary moments. They also reveal a fraught relation between the visionary moments and an aesthetics of the "ordinary." In Woolf's case it is signified by the vast stylistic discrepancies between the delicate interiority of *The Waves* and the conventional realism of *Night and Day*, and for Lawrence, the ordinary, the "inner chaos" of our daily consciousness, is in dire need of being "lit up," that is, enlightenment or illumination, by fleeting visions. This study is a critical reexamination of descriptions of visionary experiences in the novels of Woolf and Lawrence. Such descriptions take the form of what I call "the visionary mode." My aim is twofold: first, to demonstrate that the visionary mode, when best practiced by the modernist novelists here discussed, can overcome the ideological liabilities that its supposed individualist stance seems to entail; second, based on an updated understanding of the visionary mode, to reconceptualize its relation with the ordinary.

Long conceived in religious writings as the manifestation of the divine to the individual, visionary experiences acquired an increasingly secular use in the modern era. Since the 19th century, artists and writers have elevated the visionary almost to cult status: the Romantics extolled the Gothic and the sublime, as well as the godlike imaginative and creative powers in the

individual; during the Victorian period, Browning's idea of "infinite moment" serves as the basis for the perception of poetic truth, while Tennyson's "trances" produce an imaginative power that would induce sudden spiritual manifestations. Symbolists drew on the bizarre as a means to cut through the surface of the familiar world and to reveal the living spirit within. In the twentieth-century different forms of visionary experiences prevailed, from Yeats' theosophical spiritualism, to the Surrealist mining of the dream world for an alternative reality. As Christopher Reed writes, the modernist vision often seems to involve "a heroic odyssey on the high seas of consciousness, with no time to spare for the mundane details of home life and housekeeping" ("Introduction" 15).

1. The Visionary Mode under Attack

The study of the visionary moment in modernist literature can best be seen in the critical interest in Joyce's idea of epiphany, "a sudden spiritual manifestation," as Joyce expounds the concept in *Stephen Hero* (211). The idea of epiphany was one of the favorite concepts of the New Critics, presumably due to its avowedly non-ideological nature and its ahistorical tendency. With the rise of more historically and politically oriented literary theories since the 1970s, however, this predominantly formalist understanding of the visionary fell out of favor. In Herbert F. Tucker's words: "Epiphany may have fallen under theoretical suspicion and into academic neglect because currently popular definitions violate the postulates of much advanced scholarship" (1209).

What lies behind epiphany's fall of fortune is that with the rise of poststructuralism, the idea of a heightened, intensified state of consciousness located in an individual subject looks increasingly suspicious. Richard Rorty's warning— "not [to] think of our 'intuitions' as . . . more than the habitual use of a certain repertoire of terms" (22) sums it up. Various critics have taken issue with visionary experiences. John McGowan examines the implications of visionary moments in regard to questions of knowledge and subjectivity. He argues that the persistent use of epiphany in modernist literature "indicates that these modernists have not given up all desire to use art to gain

access to truths hidden to ordinary perception.” The result, as McGowan observes, is a reinforced “strong selfhood” that impedes the more urgent need to “deconstruct the self” (418). Arthur Saltzman interprets visionary, or epiphanic descriptions as symptomatic of a continuing psychological need for stasis and transcendence. He ironically remarks that “[s]canning the blunt horizon for God’s fingerprints, we establish epiphanies, then marvel at their ingenuity” (19). Saltzman sees epiphany as reifying “a focused, stabilized locus of meaning,” while contemporary reality “is decentered, multivalent, unsystematic, even nonsensical” (11). Therefore, he countenances a kind of “anti-epiphanic” fiction in which “[r]evelatory impulses are either absent or confessed to be literary conventions” (27). Minoli Salgado also exposes epiphany as “based upon a vast number of suppositions,” a significant one being “an aesthetic idealism that is immature and vacuous—the product of a highly romantic self-serving imagination” (105). She further points out that epiphanies extol a passive principle— “passive awareness in the character and passive acceptance in the reader,” which is “at odds with social commitments” (107-8). The most sustained critique of the visionary mode is offered by Paul Maltby, quoted here at length:

The visionary moment promotes the influential myth that there is a “higher” order of knowledge that can “save” or transfigure the individual by virtue of its singular attributes—that is, knowledge as *inter alia* intuitive, instantaneous, pure, permanent, and universal. This amounts to a paradigm of knowledge that implicitly downgrades “worldly” forms of knowledge that have real transformative potential. The paradigm also assumes the model of a self-sufficient (or atomistic) subject as the private source of knowledge. Ideological effects follow from these assumptions. Thus, in dissociating knowledge from public life and interiorizing it, the paradigm occludes understanding of the socially constituted nature of knowledge. Furthermore, it obscures the role of knowledge in constructing the positions from which the subject makes sense of his or her place in the world. In short, the political implications of knowledge are effaced. (5)

To sum up, the modernist visionary mode is charged with three main offenses: it is individualist and solipsistic, because it presupposes an autonomous, spontaneous subject, which makes it epistemologically untenable; it is ahistorical or anti-historical, since it aspires towards, or claims to have reached, a transcendent state of knowledge and being; and based on the first two points, it is

politically conservative or reactionary, because its individualist nature implies its exclusivist and self-isolated stance, and its ahistorical tendency leads to an occlusion of real social and political forces at work.

Meanwhile, the fall of the visionary was accompanied by a rising critical estimation of the ordinary, the everyday. Two early notable theorists of the ordinary are Michel de Certeau and Charles Taylor. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), De Certeau challenges the idea that the everyday is complicit in the late-capitalistic colonization of modern life, and instead emphasizes the maneuvering space within the everyday for more active and rebellious exercising of individual agency. Taylor entitles a whole section of his magisterial *Sources of the Self* (1989) as “The Affirmation of the Ordinary,” in which he sees the ascension of the ordinary to the central place of modern identity as providing the modern subject with positive moral resources. The hidden virtues of the ordinary certainly partly explain its recent rediscovery: its stability and comfort, its restorative and tranquilizing effects, its particularity and concreteness. However, a critique of gender also underlies the interest in the ordinary. The domestic sphere of the household, the mundane task of housekeeping and daily chores had been traditionally associated with women. The exposure by contemporary feminist theories of the trivialized and degraded treatment of the ordinary in traditional literary representation opened up a long neglected political dimension.

This gendered political critique in studies on the ordinary, therefore, is hardly surprising. What is notable, however, is the way studies of the ordinary very often contain an implicit critique of the visionary, the assumption being that the ordinary can prove to be more politically efficacious than the visionary. In chapter five I discuss in greater detail critical opinions that tend to extol the ordinary at the cost of the visionary (Rosner, Randall, Olson, Russell). Here, it suffices to quote from Liesl Olson a representative position that “the conception [that modernism is preoccupied with extraordinary moments] fundamentally obscures modernism’s commitment to the ordinary, to

experiences that are not heightened” (4).

In this critical environment of suspicion and hostility, this study conducts a reexamination of the modernist visionary, in light of the double challenge it faces—questioning of its philosophical and political validity by poststructuralist critiques, and the critical valorizing of its supposed ideological rival, i.e., the ordinary. Through readings of novels by Woolf and Lawrence, I attempt to show that the modernist utilization of the visionary mode at its best is free of an epistemologically and politically suspicious ideology, that in fact the visionary mode embodies a reflexive critical spirit by questioning the idea of an isolated subject, by affirming historicity and relativity instead of absoluteness, and by envisioning alternative political possibilities in a collective manner. Based on this new understanding of the visionary, I present a theoretical model in which the visionary is not subsumed or negated by the ordinary, but the two form an unresolvable pair that bodies forth a unique tension-filled modernist rhythm which permeates the realm of everyday experiences. What follows is an attempt at delineating the distinctness of the modernist visionary mode.

2. Charting the Variety of Visionary experiences: Religious, Mystical, Romantic, and Modernist

I'll first specify what I mean by the visionary mode, as exemplified by modernist novels, by distinguishing it from other forms of visionary revelations. To start with, the modernist visionary mode bears crucial differences from religious and mystical visionary moments. The religious visionary moment, at least as a Christian phenomenon, usually results in an affirmation of an external agency, a divine grace as the cause of the experience, that is, the vision temporarily reveals the glorious being of the all-powerful God himself. Typical examples include Paul's sudden conversion on the road to Damascus, recounted in Acts (22:6–11), and the manifestation of Christ to the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12). The mystical vision presupposes the same kind of ultimate presence of a divine being, but the subject, in a moment of self-denial and willed passivity, refuses to reach for the divine cognitively, which paradoxically results in greater spiritual intensification. And since

the religious or mystical vision has a divine origin, its meaning is also divinely established, therefore definite and indubitable. The significance of the experience is predetermined—religious conversion or salvation. Ashton Nichols usefully observes that “religious experience always relies on a specific interpretation of the meaning of a perceptual event” (14).

By contrast, the modernist visionary moment, being a totally secular experience, assumes neither a definitive godly origin, nor divinely sanctioned meaning. Its personal and private origin in the emotional state of the individual subject entails an inherent indeterminacy. I argue that Woolf and Lawrence showed critical awareness of these differences and dramatized them in memorable episodes of their novels. The mystical vision finds its expression in *Mrs. Dalloway*, embodied by Peter Walsh’s dream “vision” of a siren-like goddess that induces cessation of struggle and loss of self, while the religious vision is conveyed in Will Brangwen’s ecstatic “vision” of eternity in the Lincoln cathedral episode in *The Rainbow*, only to be deflated immediately afterward by a *modernist* visionary moment of constructive destruction. I’ll discuss both episodes in detail in later chapters.

While the modernist visionary moment shows key divergences from religious and mystical visions, it is also important to differentiate it from the Romantic vision, since both are secularized versions of visionary experiences. In a way the Romantic visionary moment launched the move away from the religious and the mystical by locating the origin of the experience in the imaginative powers of the individual mind and by rendering the meaning of the experience ambiguous and indeterminate. However, I argue that the modernist visionary goes further in this differentiatinal effort, for to a certain extent the Romantic vision still retains two key features of the old religious and mystical visions—their supernatural, fantastic elements, and their prophetic, apocalyptic tendencies.

First, Romantic visionary descriptions very often employ supernatural or quasi-supernatural

scenarios, some famous examples including Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," and Keats's "Hyperion: A Fragment." The visionary descriptions of these key Romantic works, though not of a religious nature, present the protagonist as transported into a dream realm, a trance, or an outlandish setting where extraordinary occurrences, fantastic apparitions, or imaginary encounters lead to a sense of wonder and an intensified, revelatory experience. This residual supernatural side also represents the Romantics' bold attempt to walk the thin line between the "wondrous" and the "illusionary," the "unreal," as a means to expand human experiences. Secondly, the Romantic visionary sometimes also has a strong penchant for the prophetic, the vatic, and apocalyptic. This future-projecting poetic energy is by nature politically radical and utopian. Blake's great prophetic poetry represents this aspect of the visionary tradition of Romanticism, which is also found in Shelley's "Queen Mab." This sense of prophetic foresight is also familiar today by its popularized use which refers to an entrepreneur or politician that is far-sighted and future-savvy as a "visionary."

By comparison, the modernist visionary moment I'll discuss is neither a trance or a dream, nor primarily future-oriented (Lawrence's prose has often been called "prophetic," but his novels largely follow this distinction). The form it takes is usually introspective and present-focused, an intensified engagement with current experiences received by the mind. Its dramatic sense comes not from fantastic encounters with supernatural elements, but from the contrast between heightened awareness, defamiliarized sense of self-consciousness, and its habitual surroundings and mundane circumstances. In this sense, the modernist visionary is more Wordsworthian than Blakean, with the former's famous account of "spots of time" as the prototypical visionary experience that prizes the dramatization and intensification of ordinary experiences in a familiar daily setting.

3. Choice of Term: The Visionary Moment vs. Epiphany

Interestingly, a secular revelation that focuses on the present instead of the future has long been

studied under the rubric of “epiphany,” the famous Joycean term that appears in *Stephen Hero*. It is a significant choice of term by Joyce to name this temporarily illuminated state of mind as “epiphany,” not “vision.” Through his definition— “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself” (211)— epiphany is dissociated significantly from the two features of the “visionary” tradition I discussed above, i.e., the supernatural or fantastical on the one hand, and the prophetic or utopian on the other. The distinct character of the Joycean epiphany lies in its very power to connect the mundane, insignificant everyday, with heightened, revealing luminosity. The epiphanic experience turns to the trivial and the ordinary for spiritual illumination and elevation, with no attempt to invoke godly or mystical beings, and its emphasis on the unique individual sensibility invested in the immediacy of the present moment also precludes a dimension of futurity on which utopian thinking is predicated.

Which brings us to the question: why the term “the visionary mode” instead of simply “epiphany”? One reason is that the latter has certain restrictions and established associations that do not fit well with the intensified experiences I’ll discuss in Woolf and Lawrence.

First, the term epiphany requires a specific triggering mechanism, a common object, incident, or phrase, to act as the cause of the subsequent heightened experience. Following Joyce’s dictates, studies of “epiphany” tend to devote too much attention to the “trivial,” “ordinary,” or “insignificant” details, objects, phrases, or scenes, and insist upon their necessity to give rise to the visionary experience. This restriction would have left out most of the visionary descriptions in this study, for which no apparent cause of the experience can be ascertained. Hence my preference for the more inclusive, encompassing term “visionary.” Insistence on the insignificant origin of the experience also tends to make it seemingly inexhaustible. After all, Wordsworth himself represents his “spots of time” as “moments / [which] are scattered everywhere” (*Prelude* 12.208, 223–24).

The visionary moments I identify, describe, and analyze in Woolf and Lawrence are significantly rarer.

Additionally, studies of epiphany sometimes manifest an excessive preoccupation with time. Morris Beja's otherwise useful and informative study serves as an example here. Though the temporal factor is crucial to visionary experiences, in both its specificity and brevity, Beja's extensive focus on the "past-redeeming" capacity of the epiphany suggests an exclusive valorization of experiential interiority. He divides epiphanies into two types, solely based on their relations to temporality— "retrospective" epiphany and that of the "past recaptured" (15). Unsurprisingly, memory features as a key faculty in both kinds of experiences for its potential power to defy time and reach transcendence. Redemption of the past serves as a vindication of life's meaning.

These epiphanic retrospective urges, valuable in themselves as strategies to disrupt linear temporality, may mask an introspective propensity. Using the intensified moment mainly as a device to multiply, diversify, or recover experience, they may be seen as espousing an aesthetics that dramatizes experiences for the sake of more, varied experiences. One is easily reminded of Walter Pater's famous words in his "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* – "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself" (219). This exhortation to enjoy experience for its own sake has since been characterized as the self-indulgence of an aesthete or hedonist.

Since my aim is to show that the modernist visionary moment, as exemplified by Woolf and Lawrence, exhibits tendencies to overcome its centripetal inclinations, and to engage with pressing ethical, historical and political issues in its continued employment of the visionary mode, the term "visionary mode" helps to distance this study from associations with the sometimes too personally focused perspective of epiphany.

An equally important reason that I opted for the term "visionary mode" instead of "epiphany" is

simply that “vision” is the word that modernist novelists themselves have frequently used (with the exception of Joyce, of course). I’ll thereby defend my choice of the term by briefly sketching a distinct “visionary” lineage in the modernist novel.

“Moments of vision,” the title of a 1917 poem by Hardy, abound in the works of Henry James, Thomas Hardy, and Joseph Conrad. James places great importance on “that moment” in the creative process of the novelist— “when the mind is imaginative...it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations” (31). Hardy’s famous “moment of vision” is perhaps best seen in Woolf’s personal take on it. She writes, in a reflective piece on Hardy’s novels:

His own word, “moments of vision,” exactly describes those passages of astonishing beauty and force which are to be found in every book that he wrote. With a sudden quickening of power which we cannot foretell, nor he, it seems, control, a single scene breaks off from the rest...Vivid to the eye, but not to the eye alone, for every sense participates, such scenes dawn upon us and their splendour remains. (*Essays V* 564)

“Moments of vision” feature in an even more prominent way in Conrad’s novels. One memorable expression comes from *Lord Jim*, when Marlow’s mind is transported by a plain phrase from a French officer:

And suddenly...he pronounced, “Mon Dieu! How the time passes!” Nothing could have been more commonplace than this remark; but its utterance coincided for me with a *moment of vision*. It’s extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts...Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much—everything—in a flash... (*Lord Jim* 104; my italics)

Elsewhere, the moment of vision constitutes for Conrad the goal of the literary endeavors:

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding *vision* of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile—such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished—behold !—all the truth of life is there: a *moment of vision*, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest. (*Narcissus* xvi; my italics)

With the moment of vision occupying such a central stage in the early modernists, it is only natural that the generation of Woolf and Lawrence carried on the visionary tradition. In Woolf's novels, for example, explicit references to the "vision" recur with frequency. One famous instance appears at the end of *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily Briscoe proclaims that "I have had my vision" (198). Also, in her final novel, *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe, in a moment of self-doubt, seizes upon the redemptive power of momentary vision: "still for one moment she held them together—the dispersing company. Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony...one moment" (60).

It is this visionary tradition in modern fiction, repeated in explicit terminology, that Woolf and Lawrence inherited and felt comfortable in. It also makes the choice of the term "visionary" seem appropriate for this study.

4. Characteristics of the Modernist Visionary Moment

By no means as definitive and absolute criteria, I propose three distinct elements that characterize the visionary mode. First and foremost, my focus is on the visionary experiences of the fictional characters situated within dramatic narratives. In other words, the visionary moment is individually based, happening firmly in the individual consciousness, characterized by temporal and local specificity, not generalization or abstraction. Therefore, this study does not engage with issues phrased as Woolf's "artistic vision," or Lawrence's "prophetic vision," which invokes a too-general use of the word. Neither does it explore at length the potentially "visionary" effect on the reader, in the sense that Robert Langbaum uses to assert that "Wordsworth and Coleridge . . . create structures that produce epiphanies in the reader" (40), mainly because the possibility that the reader can have an "epiphanic" experience triggered by a seemingly ordinary, commonplace description in the novel is potentially limitless. Conceived in the broadest way, even barely, minimum textual traces, effects can be interpreted within certain contexts by some readers as "revelatory." Thus, I

follow Zack Bowen in confining the moment of insight firmly within the characters— “all epiphanies, some more subtly than others, are really, even if unstated, the epiphanies of the characters themselves” (106).

Secondly, the visionary mode is characterized by a heightened awareness, an intensified state of consciousness, and enriched affective reactions; it also tends to involve multiple senses, that is, it is synesthetic; and since an intensified state by nature can't last forever, the visionary moment is naturally short. In a word, what distinguishes it from mere reflection, observation, or direct statement is its unmistakable affective or experiential intensity. A third feature is the ambiguity of its meaning, the indeterminacy of its significance, as opposed to certainty and absoluteness. This indeterminacy is very often coupled with a great difficulty to articulate, verbalize the experience, in spite of the somatic and affective intensity. Here I agree with Nichols's statement “the moment of revelation is absolute and determinate, but the meaning provided by the inspiration is relative and indeterminate” (xii). Ambiguity and indeterminacy arise mainly as a result of the personal, individual nature and manner of the revelatory experience.

Here I offer two examples where the use of the concept of visionary moment differs from mine. When Sharon Kim in her recent study on literary epiphany writes that the “Time Passes” section in *To the Lighthouse* presents “night revelations of a material world that are seen without eyes and without a singular subjective consciousness” (28), her understanding of the visionary (“night revelations”) is significantly different from mine, for while the visionary moment can surely be experienced “without eyes,” it emphatically can't do without “a singular subjective consciousness.” Annette Oxindine's study of Woolf's novels offers another example. In her discussion of the “vision” in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years* (the two works that I treat respectively in Chapter One and Two), she takes it for granted that the enigmatic song by the blind woman near the tube in *Mr. Dalloway* constitutes a visionary experience; so does the equally baffling singing of

the children on the street at the end of *The Years*, which both amuses and bemuses the Pargiters leaving the party early in the morning (33-4). Admittedly, both songs are unsettlingly strange, mysteriously fascinating even, and open to a variety of interpretations. However, in the novels, they produce no significant reactions, or emotional intensities, on the immediate hearers in the novels, i.e., the characters who are present.

These two cases evidence the fact that while it is perfectly legitimate to write about the “visionary” effect from an authorial or readerly point of view, the interpretive copiousness or possibilities can potentially make any phrases, descriptions, or scenes of a work trigger a “visionary” moment. Therefore, I limit my focus only to contextually settled, undisputed unusual states of consciousness in the *characters*, while acknowledging the visionary depiction of interiority in these novels eventually serves to get beyond mere interiority.

5. An Outline of the Chapters

Woolf’s pervasive use of the visionary mode presents the perfect occasion for putting it to the test of recent theoretical developments. Since 1970s, feminist criticism has reclaimed Woolf and helped produce a body of critical literature focused on her conceptions of gender, subjectivity, and history (Moi, Minow-Pinkney, Bowlby, Caughie). By reading the visionary moments in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*, I attempt to show that Woolf’s use of the visionary mode demonstrates a sensibility that questions the transparency and self-evidence of the individual subject, ruptures the habitual sense of linear temporality and historicity, and gestures towards political possibilities firmly anchored in collectivity.

In Chapter One, I examine the ways in which the visionary mode in *Mrs. Dalloway* signals Woolf’s decisive departure from traditional conceptions of subjectivity as a stable, self-enclosed, and transparent entity. Sudden visionary intrusions radically unsettle, if not dissolve, Clarissa Dalloway’s idea of a singular and isolated self—through her vision of an afterlife immersion in a

living fabric that spreads over her material surroundings (9), her androgynous realization of her own limitations as a woman (31), her recurrent glimpses of the old lady that embodies the other, and of course, the climactic telepathic moment of her understanding the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith (179). In Chapter Two, I draw on the last section of Woolf's *The Years*, "Present Day," to show that the visionary mode can have unique political valences. I argue that Woolf situates the last section of the novel in a "synchronic" temporality that is distinct from the "diachronic" temporality that encompasses the previous sections. And in this synchronic temporality, Woolf employs the visionary moments of three characters, Peggy, North, and Eleanor, to imagine a political potentiality inhabiting the immediate present, the here and now, that is communally situated and preserves positive possibilities despite menacing historical circumstances.

The two following chapters explore the mixed legacy of Lawrence's use of the visionary mode in his novels. In Chapter Three I examine Lawrence's visionary moments in *The Rainbow* to demonstrate that when he adheres to an embodied, situated, and contextualized use of the literary device, Lawrence is capable of utilizing its subversive potentials and using the moment to historicize or problematize ideological absolutes. The cathedral scene in *The Rainbow* (187) presents a visionary moment of "constructive destruction," during which Will's momentary glimpse of religious transcendence, a form of ideological absolutism, is quickly shattered by a wholesome sense of worldly relativity. Consequently, Will is forced back to a more publicly active, communally purposive way of life. Ursula's visionary experience of seeing in a microscope the infinity and mystery of life (408) confronts and refutes another form of the ideological absolute, the philosophical mechanism of Dr. Frankstone's materialist understanding of life. The affective and conative energy generated during the moment carries on into the last scene of the novel, where Ursula famously has a glimpse of the rainbow and sees in it the renewing and regenerating powers it promises.

Chapter Four engages with Lawrence's notorious turn to the idea of "power" in two of his so-called leadership novels, *Aaron's Rod*, and *Kangaroo*. My analysis suggests that Lawrence's own ideological bias in the form of an authoritarian politics leads him to overlook the artistic and critical benefits of the visionary mode, i.e., its experiential immediacy and affective efficaciousness. I present three visionary moments that implicitly call into question the viability of the power idea—Aaron's experience of a "maskless and invisible" self, his transportive flute-playing with the Marchesa, both in *Aaron's Rod*, and in Somers's "non-human" encounter with the full moon by seaside in *Kangaroo*. The three visionary moments can be seen as each problematizing one of the three key components of Lawrence's idea of power—a human figure as the authoritarian leader, a substitution of voluntary obedience to the leader for individual initiative and potentiality, and a hierarchical structure that inaugurates a relation of inequality. Through my analysis, Lawrence's power is exposed as experientially diminishing and prohibitive, compared with an open-textured receptivity, a relation of participatory equality, and a communion between a single self and non-human elements, all three of which are respectively embodied in the visionary moments. I will end the chapter by arguing that Lawrence's artistic impatience in forfeiting an embodied visionary mode deprived him of a dialectical engagement with and critical contemplation of his own radical political ideas.

In Chapter Five, with the definitional capaciousness of the ordinary fully in mind, I examine the fraught relation between the ordinary and the visionary. I challenge the recent critical favoring of the ordinary over the visionary. Against the idea that the visionary, due to its transitoriness and precariousness, is politically suspect and tends to be assimilated and subsumed into the ordinary, I would argue such a subsumption both neutralizes the radical insights offered by the visionary moment and deprives the ordinary experience of possibilities for change. What I see instead is that they form a dynamic alternating pattern of ongoing flow, unpredictably rhythmic, inscrutably

sequenced, and, since they usually do not succeed each other in equal textual spaces, intrinsically syncopated. The unpredictable, pulsational interspersing of the visionary visitations into the ordinary tempo effectively rupture any teleological end, or hierarchical structure of the two that a temporal axis may entail. I take this alternating pattern of the ordinary and the visionary as embodying a quintessential modernist stance, its hesitation towards unconditional affirmation, its suspicion of metaphysical certainty, and its caution about the tendency towards resolution in rationalistic thinking. Most centrally, I see the visionary and the ordinary as forming a unique modernist rhythm that charges the everyday experience with transformative potential.

Through discussions of works by Woolf and Lawrence, this study concludes that modernist practicing of the visionary mode, when contextualized and historicized, portrays the subject as situated in dynamic exchanges with otherness, subscribes to a sense of historical relativity that resists dubious forms of absolute ideologies, and puts forward a political imagination that is present-focused and collectively oriented. The transporting power of the visionary is understood as forming an ongoing interaction and exchange with the ordinary that imbues the realm of everyday experiences with transformative potential.

CHAPTER 2 *Mrs. Dalloway*: The Visionary Interrogation of Selfhood

In this chapter I use Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to demonstrate that successfully realized visionary moments in the novel call into question the conception of a stable, isolated, hermetic selfhood, set in motion a process of self-questioning, and bring about self-adjustments and expansions within the individual. The visionary mode achieves this connective and expansive self in two ways: first, by throwing self-consciousness off balance and bringing it in dialogue with other forces—material or situational, subconscious or psychologically layered, interpersonal or relational; and secondly, by showing a critical awareness of the problematic nature of an anachronistic kind of “vision.” The novel's engagement with the visionary mode, therefore, consists of two aspects—Woolf's extensive delineation and deployment of a positive visionary mode, and her exposure of the treacherous and deceptive nature of false “visions.”

The visionary mode is usually taken to be an insulated moment of solipsism, in which the character in point shuts themselves in self-glorified individual consciousness, projects false solutions to real problems, and derives satisfaction from imaginary fulfillment of their desires; it is thus seen as signaling a withdrawal from the social, interpersonal world, reinforcing the sense of an isolated self. My reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* will show that her subtle and effective use of the visionary mode achieves the very opposite of such a picture of fortified self-absorption.

1. Snobbish Socialite or Empathetic Heroine?

Usually regarded as the first mature work of her experimental style, *Mrs. Dalloway* is an important milestone in the Woolf oeuvre because it consolidates the unique way of representation through multiple perspectives and interiorized consciousness that she had previously explored. Nonetheless, doubts and reservations had been expressed about the protagonist Clarissa Dalloway since its publication. Woolf's diary chronicled her acute reactions to responses by close friends and

reviews from both sides of the Atlantic, notably among which is Lytton Strachey's complaint of Clarissa as "disagreeable and limited" (*Diary III* 32). Woolf's distinctive style of narration in the novel that withholds explicit authorial judgments upon her characters is very often interpreted as an implicit satirical treatment of Clarissa Dalloway. And Woolf's diary entries chronicling the permutation of her creative process and her supposed modeling of the character on her friend Kitty Maxse do little to challenge the view. In fact, the few remarks Woolf made on the character's origin in her diary reinforce the impression that she withheld her full sympathy and deliberately chose a stance of reticence that implies ironic distancing (*Diary III* 32).

Therefore, negative assessments tend to see Clarissa Dalloway as a self-delusional middle-class hostess, who is severed from reality and buoyed by assumed self-importance, easily falling prey to cheesy sentimentalism and privately rehearsed histrionics. Such views direct on Clarissa Dalloway the full force of Woolf's once hinted intention of conducting a "social critique" in the novel (*Diary II* 207, 272), and Clarissa's faults are interpreted as symptoms of the dysfunctional hypocrisy and complacent narrow-mindedness of the upper-middle British society. An early reading by A. D. Moody views Clarissa not as an individual character but as a reflection of the social codes of her shallow world (69). John Hessler puts it more strongly by calling Clarissa's identification with Septimus at the end "absurd." He also insists upon Clarissa's complicity, along with others at her party, in both sending Septimus off to war and in his postwar trauma (135). Deborah Guth sees Clarissa as defined by her "self-deception" (18). Hermione Lee, who wrote the critically acclaimed Woolf biography, also seems to accord with this view, regarding Clarissa as "indicted with her society" (*Novels* 104).

One can see how this preference to read *Mrs. Dalloway* as social satire was tied in seamlessly with the more politically inflected and informed critical trends rising during the latter half of 20th century, but the tendency to bash Clarissa continued well into recent years. There has been

increasing interest in reading the character in terms of subject formation and performativity of identity, and unsurprisingly, such readings tend to see the character through a negative lens. For example, Shannon Forbes remarks that Clarissa's desperate performative efforts to establish for herself a Victorian self "result in emptiness, a lack of fulfillment, and ironically, virtually no self at all" (39), while Christina Delgado Garcia claims that the "connectedness" embodied by Clarissa is in fact an illusion, and individuals in the novel remain limited and isolated (21).¹

With such critical alacrity to provide negative readings of the character, it is useful to remember J. Hillis Miller's cautioning that "Woolf's attitudes toward upper-class English society of the nineteen-twenties are ambiguous, and to sum up the novel as no more than negative social satire is a distortion" (179). Our contemporary promptitude at class-based social criticisms may obscure the real evil Woolf inscribes unmistakably in the novel—the philosophy of Proportion and Conversion, i.e. suffocating emotional reductionism and forceful religious and imperialist aspirations, the opposite side of which Woolf makes Clarissa unwaveringly stand. Her melodramatic self-pity and naive optimism aside, Clarissa Dalloway embodies positive qualities and beliefs.² The novel, upon a more careful reading, presents a more tolerant view of the title character and the social scene, Woolf's attitude being more fondly humorous and sympathetic than stringently disparaging and satirical. The course of development of the character and Woolf's increasingly sophisticated representation of her, from *The Voyage Out*, through "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" and *The Hours*, to *Mrs. Dalloway* (Zwerdling, *Real World* 137), indicate the growing sympathy Woolf felt towards the character, expanding from merely toning down Clarissa's faults to positively

¹ It should be said that even Clarissa as the socialite hostess has received positive, affirmative reading. James Sloan Allen, for example, champions the ethic of the novel, which he takes to be "to behave like a lady," and sees Clarissa's cultured manners as endowing "social life with pleasing grace and deliberate kindness" (591).

² There are also recent studies on the novel that adopt a more positive assessment. Christina Stevenson and Candis E. Bond, both drawing upon space studies, respectively use "the room" (112) and a "bye-street aesthetic" (63) in the novel to propose a distinct model of female subjectivity.

embodying in her values that the author herself might subscribe to.³ In one critic's words, Clarissa has catapulted from an "object of social satire into an existential heroine" (Ruotolo 99).

Examining Woolf's depiction of the visionary mode in the novel can provide us a crucial way to evaluate whether those moments of Clarissa's heightened consciousness are untimely acts of retrospection that signify her detachment from social reality and her entrapment in a self-elevated state, or, as I attempt to show below, they are Woolf's way of complicating, to the point of empowering, the character to confront reality and envision alterity, by equipping her with a sensibility and perspicacity that enables her to see beyond, and feel outside of, the confining chrysalis of her social status. I suggest that in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf uses the visionary mode to forcefully rupture the traditional realist texture of the novel form. Amid a familiar-sounding, even-paced domestic narrative that seems to promise an intimate peek into the daily life and mental makeup of a middle-aged woman, sporadic interventions of intensified moments descend unsolicited, revealing to Clarissa her material continuity with the physical surroundings, a sense of mental fluidity or malleability that leads to self-expansion, and the immensely intricate social web in which we are all inevitably meshed. Thus, instead of creating a consistent seamless flow of consciousness in her characters, Woolf punctuates, or rather, punctures, her medium with effective pulsations that open it up to admit multiple dimensions and rhythms of human existence. The result is hardly a hermetically sealed self, reaffirmed or reinforced, but a substitution of the stable, autonomous ego with a dynamic, porous, fluctuating temporary congregate of sensations, feelings, and insights.

2. Clarissa's Four Visionary Moments

A pivotal trait of a more mobile and fluid conception and practice of the self is its readiness and openness to constant revision and rewriting. Underlying this view of selfhood is the notion that

³ For example, See *Diary II*, 292.

one's self is scattered, dispersed, yet connective; it is joined with other forms of existence by invisible but inescapable ties. Critics have long identified the tendency in Woolf's works to disrupt a coherent, walled-in conception of the self and offer alternative representations of subjectivity as porous and multi-layered. Toril Moi argues that Woolf's aesthetics "radically undermine[s] the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism" (3); recently, Emily Blair draws attention to the way Woolf's works convey a sense of the female subject as spiritually "dispersed" (9); more specifically, Ben Wang illustrates how in *Mrs. Dalloway* the self-divided, even schizophrenic unconscious that underlies the conscious subject enables it to disrupt and escape from the ideological control of the state and the symbolic order (184). Woolf's own writings confirm such a radical understanding of the self—she calls the modern mind "that queer conglomeration of incongruous things" (*Essays IV* 436) and the soul "the vessel of this perplexed liquid, this cloudy, yeasty, precious stuff" (*Essays IV* 182). This unconventional sense of the self is usually demonstrated to be the textual effects of Woolf's linguistic, structural, or stylistic innovation. To examine a dispersed yet connective self through the visionary moment, however, allows us a sense of the experiential authenticity through the unmediated first-person perspective of the subject itself.

The first significant visionary moment of the novel conveys just this sense of a connective self. The moment is characterized by both its expansiveness in feeling, and its situatedness in concrete daily objects and scenes, precipitated by Clarissa's at-homeness with her milieu. On her way to the florist during her morning round Clarissa Dalloway is suddenly overwhelmed by a felt connection to the myriad things surrounding her individual existence:

[D]id it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid

out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself (9).

Though an ostensible attempt at overcoming her fears of death, this seems more a positive reaffirmation of the connective and extensive nature of the self than a defensive need to stave off notions of mortality. The overwhelming impression is an embedded sense of her life in this world, not a projection of consolation in the next one. In other words, she does not *become* part of her surroundings in an afterlife, she already *is*. This strong sense of effortlessly continuing into a material “post-life” is conveyed through Woolf’s telling grammatical choice— “survived,” not “would survive,” declarative past instead of future conditional. Christine Froula’s suggestion that this grammatical shift creates the effect that Clarissa is “already dead” doesn’t seem to be congruent with Clarissa’s ebullient, energetic, and uplifting mood amidst the freshness and liveliness of the morning (95). At a later point of the novel, another character, Peter Walsh terms Clarissa’s belief in afterlife as her “transcendent theory” (149), but it may be more accurately described as an immanent rather than transcendent view of life, for Clarissa posits no spiritual entity that transcends time and space and beyond the realm of material changes. Instead, she freely relishes in her connection with the material world and her affinity with other people in it.

The moment of the connective self does not come completely out of the blue. It arrives almost as a culmination of the feelings and thoughts that have preoccupied her since the start of the morning, all centering on an invisible rapport that runs through all beings, carrying her along and charging her with energy and fresh hopes. This borderless interaction between self and its surroundings puts forward a version of selfhood that is not sealed but driven by the same vital stream that animates other forces and planes of existence, putting them in constant clash and exchange. By enumerating the variety of people, activities, things she encounters on the way, Woolf highlights the affinitation and continuity between Clarissa and her surrounding, as well as the

unmistakable materiality that constitutes the fabric of her reality:

For Heaven only knows why one loves it [tolling of the Big Ben] so...but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same...they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.
...And everywhere...there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats...the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins...discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery... (4-5)

Admittedly, this casual but intrigued mental note-taking along her way by Clarissa is hardly elevated or intensified, but it hints at what really triggers the visionary moment that follows: her felt intimacy with other forms of being. In a sense, the seemingly sudden, unprompted visionary moment is prefigured by Clarissa's famous "plunge" at the beginning of the novel, into the thick of life. Her embrace of and immersion in the heart of life, this shared source of vitality that constantly renews itself, is symbolized by the tolling of the Big Ben, which affects her and Londoners of all classes in profound and mysterious ways.⁴

This vital life force is shown as dispersed, distributed among all forms of being—"In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs..." Similarly, her visionary belief of life's continuity that comes later also exhibits a comparable diffusive, expansive sense of the self's dissolution in other forms of life—"the streets of London...the trees at home...the house there...part of people she never met..." One may add that Clarissa here is not merely imagining a beatified version of reincarnation in the next life, for the house of which she becomes a part is "ugly, rambling bits and pieces." And to become people one never meets requires courage as well as resignation for the unknown.

In this way, Woolf portrays a version of selfhood characterized by its willingness to allow

⁴ This is, admittedly, the positive side of the symbolic meanings of the Big Ben, for it can also embody authoritarian and normalizing forces, as various critics have rightfully pointed out.

extraneous incursions and alien intimations, to make connections and interactions with its immediate environment, not one with rigidly fenced and demarcated space within. As a result, it creates a sense of buoyancy, potency and unresolvedness, for the dynamic interchange between the self and its environmental extension forbids static self-enclosure. Clarissa, in all her flair for plunging, constantly weaves and unweaves her provisional self that is the nodal point of the incessant process of rebuilding, the intersecting site of fraught sensibility and emotionality. As Woolf wrote in an essay titled “Poetry, Fiction, and the Future,” “Every moment is the centre and meeting-place of an extraordinary number of perceptions which have not yet been expressed. Life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it” (*Essays IV* 428).

After her first visionary moment during her visit to the florist, Clarissa comes home, where she finds an invitation for her husband Richard to Lady Bruton’s lunch party that does not include her. She begins a melodramatic bout of self-pity, but it soon turns into something else, and she has another visionary experience, a crucial, prototypical visionary moment that is worth quoting at length:

[S]uddenly there came a moment... [that] she had failed him... She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For that she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident-like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over—the moment. (31)

Self is gendered self. In the same way that her first visionary moment is more about life than about

death, the second one is more about an exploration of fluid sexual identity and gender-crossing emotional possibility than about Clarissa's sense of failure and self-doubt concerning her relationship with her husband. After all, we learn later from Richard Dalloway's feelings about Clarissa after his lunch with Lady Bruton that he is quite happy and still very much in love with Clarissa; he wants to tell her that "he loved her...it was a miracle that he should have married her" (112-113).

Clarissa's realization of her natural deficiency could have easily taken the more predictable form of seeing her husband, or other men reacting to women who have what she lacks, i.e., a kind of feminine warmth and charm, but her visionary moment enables her to momentarily assume the male perspective and vicariously partake of experiences of the other sex: "she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt." Thus, for a brief moment, her lacking actually turns into a blessing, an expansion and enrichment of her emotional experiences. This does tend to remind the reader of her earlier, more mercurial and ambiguous gender position in her relationship with Sally Seton, which is often seen as negated or suppressed by her later choice of heterosexuality in marrying Richard Dalloway. The novel, however, doesn't really portray Clarissa's transition from a youthful homoerotic attachment to a heterosexual courtship with any mental conflicts or struggles. It seems mostly natural, effortless, and unself-conscious, evidencing her instinct to allow her sexual impulse to run its natural course.

The intensity, vividness, and piquancy of her visionary understanding of the sexual charms of her own sex do resonate with the experiences and memories from her more sexually fluid past self (e.g., the famous kiss 35). And the emotional gains those past experiences accrue for her could persist in the form of retrievable layered deposits, such as an experientially sophisticated understanding of attraction, and awareness of the arbitrary nature of social mores. These mental resources may help bring about her gender-crossing visionary moment, one of experiential

extension by an affective and imaginative leap that transcends the limitations of fixed sexual identities.

Additionally, this episode also presents itself as a prototypical visionary moment in that it is not only triggered by spiritual intensity, but also imbued with a variety of sensory simulations and metaphors. The physiologically concrete nature of her imagination asserts itself in the forms of the emotional (“it was pity, or their beauty”), olfactory (“a faint scent”), and auditory (“a violin next door”), the conveying of all of which results in a kind of global ambiguous effect that permeates the meeting ground of bodily and mentally activated states—“a tinge like a blush, which one tries to check and then...yielded to its expansion.” Note the intensely physiological reflex (though in a metaphorical instead of literal sense) it produces in the bodily awareness— “some pressure of rapture, which splits its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores!” The extraordinary description continues to include the visual sense (“a match burning in the crocus”), highlighting the quintessential synesthetic nature of the visionary moment.

The visionary moment ends with its characteristic brevity and its ambiguity: “an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdraw; the hard softened. It was over—the moment,” staying true to another crucial characteristic of the visionary mode, its indeterminate significance. The “inner meaning” is felt and conveyed through the authenticity and pure intensity of the experience itself, rather than by any explicit verbal message, or revealed scripture. Paradoxically, its “almost” but never expressed meaning intensifies its poignancy. Its withdrawal also depends on the senses of tangibility and vision, for the seemingly touchable proximity, “the close” ebbs away, and the temporarily formed visual solidity becomes blurry, “softened.”

To further contest the accusation that such visionary reverie induces self-isolation, one can cite as proof its immediate positive effect—the affective contrast it forms with the bathetic aftermath when Richard, Clarissa’s husband, coming home late in the dark, curses when he drops the hot-

water bottle:

Against such moments (with women too) there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt. Lying awake, the floor creaked; the lit house was suddenly darkened, and if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed! (31)

Instead of feeling an anticlimactic disappointment of thus being dragged back into the ordinary, unseemly, daily incident, a possible huge letdown after the intensity and luminosity of her previous visionary experience, Clarissa is prompted to a hearty inner laugh. The visionary intensity, instead of dulling, numbing her sensitivity to ordinary experiences and making mundane details of life more insipid, positively enhances her ability to relish them at ease, and to alternate with comfort between drastically different states of mind. One could say that the visionary mode creates a momentary opening of the mind, a perspective suspension that can take in different registers, colors of felt experiences, making them compatible and mutually reinforcing and holding in check tendencies of exclusion.

The third visionary moment under discussion here touches on the relation between self and the other. Emmanuel Levinas sees the relation between self and the other as foundational for all ethical thinking. He believes that self must regard the other as “infinitely foreign” as the first step to constitute an authentic version of itself (*Totality* 194); usurpation or assimilation of the other is thus detrimental to the well-being of the self, for “being must be understood on the basis of being’s other” (*Otherwise* 16). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the recurrent image of the old woman across the street is the ultimate embodiment of that impenetrable, unassimilable otherness, which Clarissa has a glimpse of through a visionary moment.

The old lady first appears when Clarissa is left alone mulling over damages to the privacy of the soul that narrowly conceived and practiced notions of love and religion can do, after her daughter

Elizabeth is enticed away by Ms. Kilman in their conspiratory religious zeal:

Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her...gain her bedroom...and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it--but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it. (123-124)

This is not exactly a visionary moment. The fortuitous appearance of the old woman provides a handy occasion for Clarissa to embody her belief in something beyond coercive spiritual bullying and conversion. This hearkens back to her contemplation on the sacred nature of privacy, both between her husband Richard and herself, and crucial in any meaningful relationships (117). Yet Clarissa's meditation shortly morphs into the visionary territory:

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string...Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn...Why creeds and prayers and mackintoshes? when, thought Clarissa, that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant...She could still see her. And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love? (124-125)

The other is the ultimate miracle, the supreme mystery. No religious fervor or an egotistical sublime allow for the partaking of this miraculous sense, for neither respects the singularity and inviolability of the other. There is something sacred about the division between one room and another, i.e., between one being and another. But there is also something refreshing, both inviting and challenging, for space and distance also engender possibilities, and by approaching with awe and respect, by gingerly managing one's curiosity and honoring the difference, one may reach out and establish, however briefly, some kind of rapport or relation with the other being. This sense of enthrallment by the other returns towards the end of the novel. Immediately after Clarissa's visionary communion with the now dead Septimus Smith, the old woman appears again, this time

getting ready for bed: “She parted the curtains; she looked. How, but how surprising! –in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her!” (181).

First of all, the old woman is not a *vision*, but a crucial part of Clarissa’s *visionary* experience, for in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as I will demonstrate later, Woolf uses “visions” to refer specifically to an image or entity that is endowed with a definite (and by implication, fixed and ossified) meaning—the church with its promises of certainty and salvation that the man in the street is temporarily tempted with (28), the disembodied voice that speaks to Ms. Kilman and converts her to Christianity (130), or the Siren-like goddess figure made of branches and sky that induces in Peter Walsh the solitary traveler a peaceful yielding of struggle and lures him to a profound immobile simplicity (56). The old woman that Clarissa sees here across the street and who stares back at her is nothing of the sort. She is not a “vision,” but a real presence that evades being pinned down in meaning, fascinating as well as baffling. She functions exactly as the other, a being that both invites interpretation and defies a fixation, consolidation of meaning. The recurrent image of the old woman throughout the novel functions as a constant stimulation of the sense-making process, affirming not enclosure, but unsettlement of meaning.

Therefore, these moments are characterized not only by their extraordinary intensity, but also by their strangely disruptive effect, their frustration of any effort to pinpoint and label its significance. Meanwhile, its emotional rippling effect on Clarissa is strong and palpable. “It’s fascinating to watch her,” she keeps repeating. Her exclamatory tone accompanies her discovery of the most mundane details of the old woman’s moves— “There! The old lady had put out her light!”

In her irreducibility and unassimilability, the old woman does not *symbolize*, but *is* the other, with all its palpability, tangibility and gesturality. Despite its impossibility to be reified as an object of desire, the presence of the old woman both invites and discourages contact—with the singularity and domesticity of her physical proximity as well as the unbridgeable distance, the temporarily

framed image as well as the unstable spatial uncertainty, the potently evocative power of the scene as well as the state of suspense and postposed resolution. What informs this vivid bodily awareness of the other for Clarissa is her receptivity to the calling of different forms of being, her innate sensibility to extract herself from gregarious conviviality (the ongoing party and her duties as the hostess) and then project her affective attention into a bordering state.

The revelatory content seems to fall far below the threshold of the utterable; a fraught mutuality continues beyond the linguistic dimension. It defies mere curiosity (possible speculations such as “Who is she? What’s her life like?”); transcends standard social courtesy and protocols (“What a respectable old lady! I’d love to pay her a visit sometime”); harnesses the scattered power of fortuitous random feelings, and condenses them into a moment of memorable, even haunting, vividness, an affective impression with both liberating and restraining provisionality.

Maria DiBattista believes that the inviolate individuality symbolized by the old lady may complicate Woolf’s effort in the novel to create a human community, which “more often than not exists by virtue of an enforced or passive conformity” (*Major Novels* 46). Yet it is possible that the ideal mode of human interaction Woolf envisions, here and elsewhere, is premised on the very notion of inbuilt otherness and distance. The shared neighborly place both makes possible their contact and keeps them apart, maintaining both intimacy and distance. One critic observes that the novel holds in balance both “the desire to know the other and the limits intrinsic to an external other’s knowability” —other minds are not “transparent,” but “neither are they inaccessible” (Edmondson 26). What also comes to mind is Martha Nussbaum’s more general observation that Woolf’s work dramatizes “both our epistemological insufficiency toward one another and our unquenchable epistemological longing” (731). The interaction between Clarissa and the old lady, therefore, fragile and ambiguous as it is, constitutes an intersubjective possibility that valorizes differences and diversity over consensus and uniformity. Critics have frequently categorized this

moment as an “ethical encounter” (Berman 60; Reichman 61). One might add that the ethical nature lies less in any obligatory sense, but more as a form of awareness or recognition necessitated by the other.

The presence of the old lady as the other also serves another, more immediate purpose. In her telepathic moment with Septimus Smith, which precedes the last appearance of the old woman, Clarissa goes through the emotional stages of vicarious imagination and profound empathy, and is eventually in danger of settling upon a sense of restored security and to a certain extent, self-congratulatory smugness (“She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away... He made her feel the beauty. He made her feel the fun.”182). At the moment, she is almost ready to return with satisfaction to her party, fully composed, to resume her role of the perfect hostess.

Yet the appearance of the old woman ruffles the newly gained equanimity, the mental adroitness that is a prerequisite of a socialite, the unperturbability that blunts her responsiveness to alternative whispering of interpersonal imagination. Alternative, not oppositional, for the temporary forging of social and personal ties that she achieves through organizing a party and the liminal relationship she establishes transiently with the old woman amplify the distinctness of each other. The comfortable familiarity of the one accentuates the strange bemusement of the other, and *vice versa*. Her visionary encounter with the old woman generates a wondrous sense of unsettlement that will stay with her after her return to the party and prevent her from using the young man’s death for any self-serving purposes.

The last visionary moment I’d like to discuss here probably stands as the most famous and important one in the novel—the moment of telepathic communication near the end when Clarissa imagines and attempts to understand Septimus Smith’s suicide. Woolf designed the moment of understanding as the structural, emotional, and thematic pivot of the novel (*Diary II* 260, 305). However, Woolf’s non-committal style and her abstinence from authorial comments engender

interpretive difficulties that have been repeatedly noted by critics. Molly Hite remarks that different readings of “the nature of the climactic scene” have resulted in “a history of strikingly divergent interpretations that conflict on the value and role assigned to the title character” (250), while Julia Briggs suggests that Clarissa’s reaction to Septimus’s suicide can be read either as “an impulse of sympathy for the outcast, or else as a confirmation of it, in which she accepts his death as the sacrifice that enables the party to go on” (198).

In her sustained and thoughtful reading of the novel Hite sees the lack of authorial directions, what she calls “affective” or “tonal cues,” as resulting in an ethical uncertainty in the reader’s response to the events and characters in the novel. Our judgments oscillate between “decision and reconsideration, affirmation and rejection, sympathy and revulsion, prioritizing and subordinating” (268). This engaged readerly experience of dialectical movement, Hite believes, is more intellectually and affectively equipped to understand and confront “the most ethical problems” of our times (269). Hite’s position is echoed by that of Vicki Mahaffey, who states more generally that “[m]odernist literature erodes the sharp distinction between writer and reader, and in so doing presents readers with interpretive ethical dilemmas.” By forcing readers to make interpretive choices themselves, the text “helps readers to come to terms with the meaning of those choices” (7). While in full agreement with their positive appraisal of this cognitively more challenging and therefore ethically more sophisticated way of reading, I believe it would apply more properly to texts marked with interpretive ambivalences and difficulties, while Clarissa’s visionary communion with Septimus, by contrast, though allowing indeterminacy as to its *content*, should be read in an unambiguously positive light to best appreciate its ethical implications.

In the first place, it is an extraordinary moment of reaching out, of going beyond the self and attaining a momentary glimpse of another being. What has been stated in the old lady’s episode concerning the other still holds true for Clarissa’s visionary communion with Septimus. Yet this is

a more complex moment than merely a reimagining of the relations between self and the other. It is a series of painful renegotiations within the self that change its texture. The moment happens amidst the merriment of the bustling party, when the news of a patient's suicide, conveyed by Dr. Bradshaw's wife to Clarissa, stirs up such tumultuous emotions in her that she has to seek solitude in a quiet room in order to process them:

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

...Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage --forcing your soul, that was it-if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

...there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself. (180)

The visionary moment starts with Clarissa overcoming the confinement of selfhood by imagining the actual physical experiences of another person's dying—the flashing up of the ground, the “blundering, bruising,” rusty spikes (179). Developments in neuroscience and consciousness studies have repeatedly revealed the indivisibility between the body and the mind in rational thought, for the simple reason that rationality requires feeling, which is conditioned by sensory stimuli from the body (Park 113). Clarissa's unique way of intuiting another person's dying experience through bodily, or physiological imagination has been recognized by critics as conveying a more holistic form of empathetic outreaching. One critic sees it as “a sensationalist understanding of experience” that Clarissa uses to imagine “something outside her own body's experience” (Martin 102); another critic terms it as “supra-empathetic,” since “it transcends mere

mental identification” (Russell 358). The gory details of the vicarious experience thus contribute to Clarissa’s recognition of the significance of this total stranger’s action. She realizes it is motivated by the urge to preserve something more important than the mere continuation of physical existence—a desperate act of “defiance” and “an attempt to communicate.” But defiance against what? And what is he trying to communicate?

The figuring out of the content of Septimus’s defiant communication is therefore a test for Clarissa as well as for the reader, and Woolf presents Clarissa’s visionary empathy with Septimus in the form of a series of reconsiderations, readjustments, and revisions of her former beliefs and feelings. These adjustments come as a result of her being forced to face Septimus’s radical action of self-destruction. The first major act of self-revision occurs when she tries to grasp the immense inconceivability of an act such as throwing away one’s life by conjuring up memories in her own past of throwing away a shilling into the Serpentine. Yet this act of comparison proves to be desperately insufficient to understand Septimus’s motive. The huge cognitive gap thus created makes her realize the tremendous muted content brimming with meaning in his suicidal act: “Death is defiance...Death was an attempt to communicate.” To make better sense of Septimus’s death, she recalls her own intuitive distrust of the doctor (“obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women”), and the gravity of the tragic incident changes her unspecified dislike of Dr. Bradshaw into positive abhorrence and downright denunciation (“they made life intolerable”). This coercive evil figure of Sir William has been likened to “one of the last and scariest exemplars of the lineage of vampire-like soul-destroyers” in literary history (Herbert 111). With the imminent prospect of being feasted upon, through both physical coercion and spiritual domination, by this vampiric Dr. Bradshaw, Septimus’s choice of suicidal death seems indeed a rational one. As one critic observes, “[r]ather than saving him from death, then, rationality makes his death righteous, in the tragic sense” (White 122).

So far, it still seems possible that Septimus's tragedy is caused by coercive and domineering professional doctors, which are partly drawn from Woolf's personal experience. Another possibility has also been proposed, that of Septimus's homosexuality. Psychoanalytical approaches have read Septimus's sense of guilt as a result of his unconscious gladness at Evans's death that ends his sexual attraction to Evans (Bazin 110), or simply as his frustrated homosexual desire for Evans (Henke 15). While the homosocial bond between Septimus and Evans is certainly obvious, the cause of his neurosis clearly lies more deeply, on the socio-political level.

The key phrase that evidences Clarissa's intuitive knowledge of the socio-political dimension of Septimus's defiant message and connects his tragedy to the theme of Proportion and Conversion is her realization that Dr. Bradshaw commits the sin of "forcing your soul." This is no mere physical confinement imposed by imperious medical authority, for she senses that the liberty thus endangered is not in the usual sense of the term, understood as personal freedom of movement or self-determination, which, of course, can be jeopardized and limited by forceful confinement, involuntary treatment, and the stigmatizing labelling of "mentally unfit", or the old scandalizing association with "Old Bedlam." But the freedom is more about expression than movement. It is something that Septimus "had preserved" through his death, something that she and her friends have "let drop" over the years and "wreathed about" with "corruption, lies and chatter," and above all, it is something "that mattered." This "something," which Clarissa vaguely intuits but fails to formulate in words, I take to be the freedom and integrity of emotional expression, as opposed to the "soul-forcing" of the creed of Proportion and Conversion.

The content of Septimus's message, therefore, coheres with its form, which is the critical need of, as well as a desperate claim to the right of, free expression of feelings and emotions. The suppression of this freedom defines the British society before and after the war. Alex Zwerdling insightfully observes that Septimus's emotional plight "is a compensation for his society's

repression and can only be understood and judged in relation to it” (“Mrs. Dalloway” 76). After the war the government was carefully controlling the possible traumatic emotional aftermath of the victory. The encouraged normative feeling was one of stoical pride. Lady Bexborough in the novel is a good example, who has lost a son, yet showed no signs of unbridled mourning and emotional breakdown. Instead, she continues the noble and heroic exertions of holding a bazaar for war-orphaned children “with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed” (5). Here is a living example to chide Septimus Smith for his morbid, continued wallowing in “disproportionate” bouts of emotional and imaginative excesses. As Zwerdling puts it, the conspiratorial ideal of the society is “stoicism, even if the price they pay is petrification,” and Septimus poses a threat not only “because he insists on remembering the War when everyone else is trying to forget it, but because his feverish intensity of feeling is an implicit criticism of the ideal of stoic impassivity (“Mrs. Dalloway” 71, 75). Moreover, by dying for his right of free expression of his feelings, he also calls into question the moral basis that justified the war efforts and the imperialist enterprise, for which so much was sacrificed, at such tremendous human costs, with emotional wreckage and ideological bankruptcy.

Clarissa’s visionary communion with Septimus makes it clear that his mental disorder is not *pathological*, but *sociohistorical*, and the cause of his death, contrary to the claim that it was a “sudden impulse” and “no one was in the least to blame” (146), is the dominant ethos of the imperialist British society, that of moral intimidation and coercion as well as reductive emotional self-abnegation. As one critic states, “it is caused by society’s refusal to let him give meaning to that pain” (DeMeester 653). Significantly, faced with potentially subversive cases such as Septimus, the governing power’s strategy is exactly to reduce the individual victim of social-political forces to a pathological “case”— “They were talking about this Bill. Some case Sir William was mentioning” (179). Zwerdling comment is again incisive— “The ability to translate

individual human beings into manageable social categories is one of the marks of the governing-class mentality Woolf examines in the novel” (“Mrs. Dalloway” 74).

To truly reach an authentic understanding of Septimus’s desperate attempt at communication and the tragic cause of his death requires a radical stride, cognitive and affective leap over the narrow confines of conservative bourgeoisie that Clarissa Dalloway moves around. And in her visionary moment, with her gifted empathetic powers, Clarissa achieves a temporary self-overcoming. She rightly senses that the young man kills himself for the freedom of self-indulgence in emotions and feelings that may run counter to a patriotic or rationalist rhetoric. This is what her visionary moment is essentially about, though couched in her rather tentative, vague and personal way of progression to arrive at it. And it is also pivotal that we as reader understand the underlying content and emotional logic behind it, for our understanding of both characters and the moral cornerstone of the novel depends on it.

Clarissa’s visionary initiation eventually ends in self-understating. Septimus’s taking his own life drives to heart in Clarissa an almost Kierkegaardian fear of freedom and the inbuilt existential urge towards self-destruction. Her peace of mind is threatened by the fragility of life and arbitrary assault of dark moods. The sense of insecurity makes her realize how much debt she owes to Richard, her husband, for being the harbor that provides stability for her self-gathering and recuperation when the perils and difficulties of living, the precariousness of one’s existence, the very danger of surviving the tumultuous activities day to day, threaten to derail her sense of an oriented self. Therefore, her newly-reached mental state is one of increased appreciation and gratitude, as a result of an awakened sense to the sharpening of its meaning that death may confer upon life. In short, trying to understand Septimus’s death makes her realize the relativity of the self, the fact that we and others share the same set of premises and intuitions about life; it is only through the individuated variations of others’ responses to life’s occurrences that one recognizes

realities and possibilities within oneself. In this light, others' actions, decisions, thoughts, feelings inevitably affect us. If the episode with the old woman is about the tantalizing impenetrability or inassimilability of the other, the visionary rapport with Septimus Smith speaks to the essential relational nature of being and the profound impact others have upon us.

To sum up, in these four important visionary moments of the novel, Woolf presents Clarissa Dalloway as attaining a kindred spirit with her surroundings, acquiring expanded emotional experiences through momentary sexual fluidity, intuiting and respecting the otherness of people around her, and undergoing changes within herself as a result of her intense empathy with another being. The charge that the visionary moment leads to an enclosed, isolated, sealed self can thus be refuted.

3. The Visionary Mode vs. The "Vision"

While Woolf employs the visionary mode as a positive means to put the self in vital exchange with various forms of otherness, she is careful to distinguish it from instances of "visions," which are portrayed in the novel as cautionary tales. Woolf's critical engagement with the "vision" suggests a self-conscious attempt to underscore the contrast between the ingrained undecidability and open-endedness of visionary experiences and the definite and fixed meaning of the "vision." In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf casts the "vision" in its familiar religious form of the church or the idea of God, as the man in the street and Ms. Kilman encounter respectively (28, 130), but most notably the "vision" assumes the shape of a mystical seductive Siren-like figure that lures Peter into quietist self-dissolution (55-7).

The "vision" of a "goddess" figure appears to Peter Walsh during his nap on a bench in Regent's Park, inspired probably by the nurse who is knitting at the other side of the bench. In his dream, Peter becomes "the solitary traveler" who comes across a "spectral presence," a "giant figure" in his adventure. The narrative reveals that it is his innate "desire for solace, for relief, for

something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women” that has conjured up this womanly, maternal figure, which fulfills his wishes by dispensing “charity, comprehension, absolution.” As if the deceptive nature of the scene were not made clear enough, the authorial voice now weighs in and declares:

Such are the visions which proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary traveller, or murmur in his ear like sirens lolloping away on the green sea waves, or are dashed in his face like bunches of roses, or rise to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through floods to embrace.

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and giving him for substitute a general peace, as if...all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing...(56)

In the first paragraph a series of classical references and well-established figures or images that signify deceptive “visions” are invoked—mirages seen in moments of illusion by thirsty travelers in the desert, the seductive Sirens that lure seafaring sailors into treacherous deeps of the sea by their singing in Homeric epics, mermaids “like pale faces,” the fabled creatures that often form dangerous romantic relationships with men, and the obvious allusion to the Grimm story of the fisherman and the flounder, which is about false projections of human desire that quickly evaporate.

The second paragraph exposes even more thoroughly the pernicious effects of such “visions.” They threaten to replace “the actual thing,” that is, the real world, reality; and draw away the traveler from the earth by softening his will with “a general peace,” a life of “simplicity,” with variety amalgamated into oneness. Such visions call for resignation, passivity, non-resistance, and neutrality, the relinquishing of conscious and volitional striving, and a hypnotized lapsing into or merging with a cosmic oblivion. The promised other-world, with differences effaced or homogenized and individualities converted into a common identity, provides a pacifying anodyne for the weary traveler of the modern world. And as DiBattista warns that Woolf has a gift for

exposing “any fantasy, that promises us untroubled happiness, unfailing wit, and fathomless profundity” (*Imagining Woolf* 55), this treacherous “vision” turns out to be a goddess of annihilation which inspires in Peter an impulse toward self-obliteration—“let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest” (56).

This “vision,” unlike Clarissa’s visionary experiences that retain the individual differences of things and accentuate their unique identities in order to challenge the self to an ethical interaction with them, is a simplifying, confounding, difference-cancelling force. There is a night-and-day difference between recognizing and renegotiating the boundaries between self and other, which is encouraged in the visionary mode, and the fading away into a common unconsciousness that the “vision” induces. Woolf makes it clear that “such are the visions” Peter is encountering in his dream that there have apparently been casualties, men enticed away by this Sirenic temptress—Peter saw “an elderly woman who seems... to seek... a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed” (57).

As a result, some essential differences can be drawn between the visionary mode and the “vision.” First of all, the visionary mode is fundamentally characterized by an immersion in, an engagement with the world and the people in it, while the “vision” is distinguished by a tendency to withdraw from it into an established spiritual order, such as Christianity, or a mystical Elysium of blissful rest. And while the former manifests a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of human relations in this world, the latter offers an easy solution by eliminating conflicts and sufferings through miraculous or supernatural intervention.

Another way to put it might be that the former induces awareness of relativity, an interrelated sense of life, when the latter is defined by its “absoluteness”—first, an absolute transcendent realm beyond time and change, and then the absoluteness allows it the power of “absolution,” a

pardoning of ills and sins of the world. This “absolute” promise of peace and oblivion, redemption and forgiveness in fact makes light, or trivializes both sufferings and endeavors in lived experience.

Also tellingly, the “vision” is always posited, projected as an established mystical *image* or *figure*, religious *symbol* or *icon*, therefore, *visual* with definite, fixed meaning—religious absolution or mystical transcendence, for example; on the other hand, the visionary moment is not primarily visual, but *synesthetic*, involving multiple sensory reactions as well as emotional responses. A “vision” can be blindingly bright and annihilating, while the visionary, by relegating the “visual” back among other senses, can actually make us “see” and feel more clearly and penetratingly.

Given their essential differences, the “vision” and the visionary mode in *Mrs. Dalloway* result in two antithetical ways of impacting the self—the former reduces the singularities of the individual self to uniformity and homogeneity and sublates the individual consciousness into a divine, or esoteric wholeness; on the other hand, the visionary mode retains the distinct differences and boundaries between the self and its surrounding world but sets it on a path of endless self-revision and self-overcoming in a fruitfully tensile relation with otherness.

CHAPTER 3 The Politics of the Present: The Visionary Mode in *The Years*

While the visionary mode in *Mrs. Dalloway* helps reveal dynamic interactions and exchanges between the self and various forms of its other, in *The Years*, I attempt to show in this chapter, the visionary mode allows Woolf to explore a kind of collectively oriented energy for change that can be preserved as transformative potentials in the immediate present, thus suggesting a way to counteract the political impasse on a macro-level. Woolf's changed conception of the novel from the more overtly feminist early project of an essay-novel to its final novel form of *The Years*, therefore, reflects not an obfuscated, sanitized or toned down representation of the political dimension, but a more sophisticated and thoughtful understanding of it, with the early exclusively feminist focus transformed into a more realistic acknowledgement of life's embeddedness and the communal nature of change-making.

I argue that the novel conveys this broadened political sense by enacting two temporalities, one diachronic, and the other synchronic. The diachronic temporality both provides structural understanding for, and is manifested by, the chronologically narrated sections from the first till the penultimate one. The succession of the titles for each section, in the form of a series of simple Arabic numbers (1880, 1891, 1907, 1908, 1910, 1914, etc.) with unmistakable historical references and associations, generates an inexorable forward-moving momentum. And it is through this temporality of longer durations that the life-long ups and downs of members of the Pargiter family are chronicled, and their vicissitudes and tribulations recorded to bear out the feminist theme, which is the exposure and critique of the persistent effects of the patriarchal social system.

However, in its disproportionately long finale (accounting for about one third of the whole novel), the last section entitled "Present Day," the narrative drastically slows down and almost comes to a standstill by switching to a "synchronic" temporality. It is almost as if with a conjured

illusion of cessation or suspension of historical time, the present day is somehow liberated, exempted from the diachronic timeline, and set aside for reflection, consolidation, reckoning and pathfinding. And in the immediate present unfolded in this radically shortened and condensed temporal frame, paused and poised between a fraught past and a menacing future, several major characters undergo intensified states of consciousness, prompted by their acute need for conative energy and a sense of direction in face of the ominous development of unprecedented historical crises.

Their political energy in the synchronic temporality is achieved through visionary moments, which both generate emotional momentum for change-making and firmly establish its communal nature. As a result, in spite of the overwhelming adversity and paralyzing setbacks on the contemporaneous international scene, those characters through their visionary moments are able to reconcile, for a moment, the two temporalities, and channel the sedimented feelings and memories in their diachronic past into illuminating and igniting the synchronic present. In this way, the last section “Present Day” can be seen as Woolf’s attempt to renegotiate the perimeters of the political and to reimagine collective possibilities within it through the visionary mode.

1. The Debate on the Political Nature of *The Years*

While today’s readers, with our culturally attuned mental readiness for signs and clues of gender inequality and oppressive social orders, may find *The Years* lends itself readily to political readings, early reception of the novel largely missed its deeply feminist underpinning, and took it as a specimen of the novel genre “family saga” in vogue at the time, a misreading which probably contributed to its commercial success and made it one of Woolf’s most profitable works (Bradshaw and Blyth xxii). To bring to light again its radical feminist polemics, scholars since 1970s have undertaken elaborate efforts in uncovering the novel’s convoluted textual history (important studies of the manuscripts including those of Charles G. Hoffmann, Mitchell Leaska, and Grace Radin).

The Years has not only been read side by side with its earlier version, the essay-novel, *The Pargiters*, but also more and more through the lens of *Three Guineas*, the later published feminist essay that grew out of the excised argumentative and expository materials of Woolf's original project.

While its original feminist intent has been proved beyond doubt, the political edge of *The Years* is often found lacking or toned down compared with the explicit feminist polemics in *The Pargiters* and *Three Guineas*. Woolf's editorial decisions and the heavily redacted compositional process that ensued are seen as lamentably compromised self-censoring. In an early study, Charles G. Hoffman observes that "too much of the external is left out" (89); Grace Radin, through her genetic study of the novel's evolution, complains that many of its original politically explicit scenes have been "deleted, obscured, or attenuated" (148); Hermione Lee also remarks that the political and social commentaries in the novel's final form have been made muted and evasive ("Introduction" xxiii); Karen Levenback sees Woolf's scanty references to the Great War in the last section of the novel as symptomatic of larger repression of war memories in British culture (152). All these judgements seem in a way to point to a reticence and reservation on Virginia Woolf's part and recall Leonard Woolf's famous, though now largely disproved view that his wife is "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (27).

I'd like to point out that the idea of the "political" used in this debate can be seen as mainly situated in a "diachronic" temporality. This temporality is perceived as a linear, one-directional continuum of time that moves through successive historical periods and manifests itself in the accumulated effect of changes and differences over time. It is the temporality frequently employed by realistic novels that aim to document the dynamics of historical progression. To conduct a political critique in this temporality requires an analytic and historicist understanding that draws on historical facts and social records, reflects upon current customs and assumptions, and projects

changes and courses of actions for the future.

Woolf herself indicated in her diary that her original planning of the feminist theme in the novel operates on this diachronic historical sense. The immense amount of journalistic reportage and news coverage that she amassed chronicles the injustice as well as changed fortunes for women over the decades and is said to have “enough powder to blow up St Paul’s” (*Diary IV* 77).

Furthermore, this material-gathering “releases such a torrent of fact as I did not know I had in me. I must have been observing & collecting these 20 years” (*Diary IV* 133). The conception of the novel based on an extended historical outlook is corroborated by one of her letters regarding the novel, where she states that her intention is to:

Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts: envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere;... and show the old fabric insensibly changing without death or violence into the future—suggesting that there is no break, but a continuous development... (*Letters VI* 116).

Though this “insensibly changing” “continuous” historical development contradicts the claims of recent critics that the novel presents a “discontinuous” or “recursive” understanding of history (Snaith, “Introduction” xlii; Davis 18), such historical views can all be seen as based on a diachronic temporality.

The systematic and programmatic changes proposed in *Three Guineas* illustrate a political awareness that is situated within and interactive with this diachronic temporality, which provides a backdrop for feminist critiques of past gender practices, as well as for projections of progressivist courses that may lead to improved praxis in the future. It is also in this temporality that the political thrust in the early sections of *The Years* functions, albeit less explicitly—sibling rivalry for marital prospect, suppressed notions of sexuality, unequal financial investment in education for male and female members of the family. The quiet resentment, the wrongs and injustice, all bear marks of specific times, assume different symptomatic forms, and continue well into the present, with traumatic aftermaths. Woolf’s journalistic source-gathering, her ability to accurately reproduce

concrete incidents that are typical of female experiences and reflect norms and ethos of particular eras, and her patient tracing and recording of their subsequent repercussions and evolving throes over time, all contribute to driving home the political theme. Therefore, criticism of the political efficaciousness of *The Years* compared with its earlier forms also falls on the diachronic axis, which essentially complains that the novel does not make overt or explicit enough the accumulated effects of the patriarchal order over the decades, through longer historical periods.

Meanwhile, there are also critics who defend Woolf's editorial choices and compositional process by highlighting the political implications of the novel's aesthetic form. Formal features of the final version of *The Years*, they argue, actually make it equally, if not more, politically potent or efficacious than its original design, in that it represents both Woolf's refusal to be didactic and propagandist and her abandonment of a unified vocal point that would have bestowed definitive meanings on the events and characters in the narrative. In other words, critics see the novel's decentered form and minimum authorial intrusion as implicitly refuting a totalitarian or fascist outlook. Margaret Comstock characterizes the novel as having "no center or central figure around which subordinate elements can be arranged" (254); Susan Squier emphasizes the political nature of Woolf's anti-propagandist aesthetic by observing that the novel "practices the politics it refuses to preach" (168); similarly, Elizabeth Evans argues that Woolf in *The Years* "rejects a totalizing vision" by "enacting the content of its political message within its narrative form" (75); also, in the natural descriptions heading each chapter's opening, Tonya Krouse detects "anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial interests" (14). Such defenses of the novel's politics through its formal features are echoed in critical readings of Woolf's late work in general. For example, Christine Froula, writing about the open ending of Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts*, sees it as working "against the enforced univocality of totalitarianism" (314). These readings of the political valences of the novel's form are illuminating. However, by referring the political back to the formal, they seem to contradict the

generally accepted fact that in her late career Woolf turned from her early interest in formalism to a more politicized practice of her art.

Here I offer a perspective on the novel's unique political understanding derived not from its formal features, but from its dramatically narrated fictional events. There is a political sense that is situated outside the diachronic temporality, the experience of time through long intervals, extending over long durations, in an essentially linear, progressive manner. There is another temporality in the novel by which Woolf complicates and furthers her reflection upon and representation of the political—a synchronic temporality, the immediate present. And in the last chapter of *The Years* the novel turns to contend with the more compact and intense synchronic temporality, the elusive, ephemeral, instantaneous temporality of the immediate present, which is in constant danger of being engulfed by the past or eclipsed by the future. A unique political sense in the synchronic temporality, I argue, withstands the felt powerlessness pervading political reflections along the diachronic axis.

The contrast between the diachronic and the synchronic temporality reminds one of the distinction critics make between narrative time and lyric time. According to Susan Stanford Friedman, the former represents “a sequence of events that move dynamically in time and space,” undergoing change in a progressive manner, while the latter assumes the form of “a simultaneity,” a paused stasis (164); or as Monique Morgan writes, “lyric creates a timeless present, an indefinitely suspended moment, which contrasts with narrative's past progression of events” (301). Woolf herself at one time considered the possibility of a lyrical ending for the last section: “I want a Chorus. a general statement. a song for 4 voices... And how to make the transition from the colloquial to the lyrical, from the particular to the general?” (*Diary IV* 236). Alternatively, Teresa Prudente conceives the two distinct temporalities as “linear” and “a-linear,” which result in “two different processes of knowledge,” one “progressive” and the other “intuitive and instantaneous”

(5).

Though both ways of theorizing the sense of time in Woolf are illuminating, their emphases differ from mine. Lyrical time really foregrounds the richness and variety of the individual consciousness in this “timeless” suspended moment, while Prudente’s “a-linear” time also gives prominence to personal experience and access to knowledge. Instead, while I agree that the prolonged sense of presentness leads to enlivened self-awareness, my focus on the synchronic temporality intends to demonstrate how Woolf uses the visionary mode in the last section “Present Day” to enact what can be called an existential attitude of “becoming with,” a collectively oriented energy for change-making. Visionary moments in the last section, I argue, convey a political sense not in the form of clearly delineated political goals or concrete futurity, but in the form of energized motivation, illuminated mental states, and affective collectivity that initiate difference-making and gesture towards alterity. The political vigor generated within the limited space of the visionary moment can be transient, ambivalent, even confusing, but it affirms a lived sense of purposive, agential, and personal involvement that underpins all programmatic, polemicist, and rationalist political endeavors.

2. Synchronic Temporality and the Visionary Mode

A highly noteworthy development in the last section, “Present Day,” is that the characters whose story arcs have previously been constructed primarily around the feminist theme are now curiously sidelined. It almost seems as though the novel is implying that their lives have become too rigid, too formed for change and new possibilities. The three most important feminist narrative lines in early parts of the novel are Rose’s suffrage passion, Delia’s Irish cause, and Kitty’s imaginative longing for a rustic life. Despite the ostensible differences in their chosen courses of actions, the three characters are uniformly victimized by the same social and familial structures and values.

None of the three characters receive extensive treatment in “Present Day.” As a matter of fact, in

the last section the reader is seldom allowed direct access to their consciousnesses, their mental processes or affective states, in sharp contrast to how their thoughts and feelings are vividly chronicled through an interiorized approach in early chapters (e.g., Delia's train of thoughts at her mother's funeral; Rose's imaginary adventure to the gift store, Mrs. Lamley's; Kitty's reverie on the train ride to her country house). At the party, Rose appears a somehow mellow and feeble old dame, with little traces of her former fierce and impulsive temperament, and Delia is now the perfect hostess, fulfilling her duties with meticulousness and ease. Both are reduced to types, rather than the distinct individualized characters that we come to know from the earlier sections. Similarly, Kitty, now Lady Lasswade, shows few traces of her youthful longings and assumes a natural and dignified posture at the party.

Therefore, it can be argued that the previous chapters have brought their narrative arcs to a finish, in the diachronic temporality. And it should come as no surprise that during the party scene in the "Present Day" section their final condemnation of the shackling social institutions that have caused such suffocation and derailment in their life, when it does come, appears not so much as weighty judgments or eruptions of lifelong suppressed emotions, but as mimicry, stereotypical gestures, worn-out echoing, emptied of substance, indistinguishable from a typical grumbling retrospective posture of old people referring back to their early days. Kitty's remark is representative—a mere exclamatory "how I hated it!" (295). The poignant specificity of a life of possibilities blighted by gender inequality is lost, muddled, and made fuzzy, amidst the sentimental setting and ambience conjured up by the party. And the three characters whose early life experiences are rich in feminist resonances and implications become quaint caricatures of the struggling and smoldering figures of their former selves. Mentally molded and intellectually bounded, they are too rigidified to undergo growth. Other characters take a backstage too. Sara, for example, whom one critic calls "the novel's most charming and enigmatic character" (Linett 342),

appears at the party merely as a comic figure.

It stands to reason, therefore, that the very act of conferring upon or withholding from the characters moments of heightened awareness on the part of Woolf is significant. She skips those characters whose life follows a clearly traceable agenda, a dominant political motif, i.e., the accomplished task of a feminist exposé of suffocating patriarchy, and bestows the center of consciousness, illuminated mental space, upon those characters whose life is less defined and constrained by a single idea, or a single emotion, whether it is antagonism, resentment, or wishful longing, but is marked instead by expansiveness, copiousness, receptivity, and flexibility. And these more spiritually resilient, more imaginatively capable characters are better equipped to find their bearings in the synchronic temporality and take stock of the enriched instantaneity and immediacy through their visionary experiences. They are entrusted with the continued search for change-making paths and actions.

As a result, the visionary experience, signaling a privileged state of awareness, occurs to only three characters in the last section—the oldest daughter of the second-generation Pargiters, the unmarried Eleanor, now in her late seventies, and the two third-generation Pargiters, the brother and sister North and Peggy, children of Eleanor's brother Morris. Eleanor is the most naturally optimistic and energetic member of the family. She undertakes the duty of living with and caring for the old Colonel Pargiter with almost stoic self-abnegation. Always ready to seek and embrace new experiences, she is envied by both old and young of the family for her energy and youthful mental attitude. Peggy is a member of the new generation of female professionals. Being a doctor, she is now living in the realized suffragist dream of woman's enfranchisement. Yet she is somehow troubled by feelings of insecurity and out-of-placeness. North joins the army during the Great War, with youthful and naive notions of patriotism and heroism, much to the dismay and indignation of the family. After the war he withdraws to a farm in Africa and leads an isolated and solitary life.

By the time of the present he has just come back to London ten days ago.

Upon first glance, what stands out in common among the three characters is the contrast between the evident political nature of their preoccupations *before* their visionary moments and their surprising oblivion of or digression from those concerns *during* those moments. The visionary experiences of all three characters seem to be removed from *overtly* political gestures such as condemning the wrong doings of the past, diagnosing the ills of the present, envisioning better courses of actions, or projecting alternative or utopian pictures of social arrangements. However, there can nonetheless be detected a form of the political, manifested not in actualized or proposed actions, but in tendencies, energies, elevated and intensified impulses, sharpened focus, and contagious conviviality, in other words, a distinct form of the political that inhabits the synchronic temporality and subsists upon the immediate moment. I'll present and contextualize the three visionary moments first and then elaborate upon the political of the present implied therein in the next section.

Before the dawning of her visionary moment at the party Peggy's mood swings throughout the day between symptomatic nostalgia and forward-looking anxiety. Past memories as distant and settled as those from her aunt Eleanor's youth, unplagued by complicated and menacing historical conditions, promise a sense of escapist security. That is why during their afternoon chat she repeatedly asks Eleanor to tell her about the early years. But the underlying psychological cause of her nostalgia is in fact an intense anxiety about the future. Later, she feels herself distanced from and distracted by the jovial triviality of the party, for she can't help thinking about the distressing external reality and possible imminent disasters:

“But how can one be “happy”? she asked herself, in a world bursting with misery. On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilisation; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed” (273).

The intense anxiety about the imminent threat Peggy feels in the passage is more bluntly reflected in Woolf's own diary as she was finishing the novel: "Hitler has his army on the Rhine. . . it's odd, how near the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite distinctly see them & hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling at my daily page" (*Diary V* 17). Paul Saint-Amour memorably characterizes this ominous presentiment as "proleptic mass-traumatization, a pre-traumatic stress syndrome whose symptoms arose in response to an anticipated rather than an already realized catastrophe" (131). By the time Woolf finished the novel, fascism was already a reality in both Italy and Germany, and the Spanish Civil War provided the western intellectuals with an ominous preview of the ideological conflict that broke into World War II only three years later. British appeasement under Chamberlain frustrated and enraged the progressive left, but a general sense of political powerlessness prevailed. These imminent threats from external historical circumstances keep Peggy disconcertedly preoccupied and seem to have impoverished the significance of her enfranchised present.

While she already benefits from changed political fortunes of women, belonging to the new liberated generation and being a female professional, she is totally disillusioned with any patriotic rhetoric, and adopts an unfeigned skepticism, if not downright cynicism. This is evidenced by her reaction to the statue of Edith Cavell that she and Eleanor drive past. Edith Cavell (1865-1915) was a British nurse who offered help to soldiers on both sides during WWI. She was arrested by the Germans for assisting escaped allied soldiers and executed in 1915. Her statue in Trafalgar Square clearly indicates that she has been turned into an icon of patriotism and self-sacrifice, which provokes the irreverent mockery from Peggy that the statue "[a]lways reminds me of an advertisement of sanitary towels" (236). Woolf may have written this with her close friend Roger Fry's aesthetic evaluation of the statue in mind— "the Edith Cavell sculpture is not at all the same kind of thing as the Medici tombs" (7), but more importantly, the statue suggests, as Ruth

Hoberman sharply points out, that “women’s hope for social change have been co-opted by jingoism and capitalism” (94).

Peggy’s political imagination for hopes and actions in the diachronic temporality, therefore, is paralyzed by an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and rudderlessness. Yet for all her loss of faith in the current political situation and the future, her visionary moment comes not as one of political dystopian, or cataclysmic collective destruction, but one of hope for change on the more modest personal, communal level, even though the visionary moment is only waveringly experienced, and proves devilishly elusive to be imparted in words.

The moment comes during the party scene, which is the centerpiece of the “Present Day” section and the whole novel, as it is in *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is interesting how the glitz and showiness of a party might lead one to associate it with “kitsch,” which, as Calinescu argues, reflects a “reaction against the ‘tenor’ of change and the meaninglessness of chronological time flowing from an unreal past into an equally unreal future” (248). Woolf’s party in *The Years*, however, though in similarly fraught relations with the past and the future, inscribes possibility *for* change instead of resisting it.

The party doesn’t begin with great promise for Peggy. In fact, her initial experience turns out to be not elevated and rarefied at all, but ludicrous and bathetic, with her deaf uncle Patrick, Delia’s Irish husband, mistaking her inquiry after the gardener who cut himself with a *hatchet* for her asking about the Hackets. Her disappointment is understandable— “A grown woman, she thought, crosses London to talk to a deaf old man about the Hackets, whom she’s never heard of” (247). Yet gradually the gathering eases Peggy’s discomfiture and kindles some deep emotions in her. Peggy’s visionary experience occurs as her attempt to connect with the flow of feeling in the room, and it takes the form of her very struggle to articulate her inner insight and share it with people around her:

...She felt, or rather she saw, not a place, but a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole, and free. But how could she say it?

“Look here...” she began. She wanted to express something that she felt to be very important; about a world in which people were whole, in which people were free . . . But they were laughing; she was serious. “Look here . . .” she began again. . .

“Here,” she began again, “here you all are—talking about North—” He looked up at her in surprise. It was not what she had meant to say, but she must go on now that she had begun. Their faces gaped at her like birds with their mouths open. “. . . How he’s to live, where he’s to live,” she went on. “. . . But what’s the use, what’s the point of saying that?” . . .

“What’s the use?” she said, facing him. “You’ll marry. You’ll have children. What’ll you do then? Make money. Write little books to make money...”

She had got it wrong. She had meant to say something impersonal, but she was being personal. It was done now however; she must flounder on now.

“You’ll write one little book, and then another little book,” she said viciously, “instead of living . . . living differently, differently.”

She stopped. There was the *vision* still, but she had not grasped it. She had broken off only a little fragment of what she meant to say, and she had made her brother angry. Yet there it hung before her, the thing she had seen, the thing she had not said. But as she fell back with a jerk against the wall, she felt relieved of some oppression; her heart thumped; the veins on her forehead stood out. She had not said it, but she had tried to say it. (274-275; my italic)

The last sentence is an important indication of the distinct experiential mode of the visionary—it does not primarily assume or easily translate into verbal form. And this should not be regarded as a failure, for it gives precedence to affective, gestural expressions, instead of verbal articulation. Putting a name on it is not as significant as having an immersive feeling of it; the “trying” outweighs the “saying.” Somehow, her verbal efforts are all wrong, the very opposite of her felt authenticity, but the “trying” does her good, and she “felt relieved of some oppression.”

Though her vision of a “state of being” that is “happy,” “whole,” and “free” is compromised in its original clarity by her struggle to verbalize it, she is nonetheless temporarily freed from her enchainment within the political frustration in the diachronic temporality that has beset her throughout the day. Her envisioning of an alternative future puts forward no definite political agenda and evokes no miraculous change of human nature. It merely consists in her appeal to others in the room for a collective embrace of creative imaginations of what a whole and free life might look like.

Peggy's brother North is similarly besieged by a sense of political futility along the diachronic axis, and it takes a more passionate form— his total disillusionment with the ideology of patriotism. With youthful enthusiasm for national pride and personal duty, he volunteers to join the army during the Great War. Afterwards, he undergoes a serious, prolonged period of soul searching on an African ranch, with all that prompted him to war in the first place called into question. His changed attitude toward the war can be inferred from one term: “poppycock.” This is the word that his aunt Sara uses to describe disparagingly his swagger as a soldier when he volunteered— “Coward; hypocrite, with your switch in your hand; and your cap on your head”, all of which, are “poppycock” (226), that is, pure nonsense, utterly devoid of meaning and emptied of human values. In the present time he totally identifies with the values implied in the word “poppycock,” which he now uses to describe the nationalist and conformist war sentiment as well as the ritualized propaganda aimed at instigating it (“Not halls and reverberating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies, caparisoned...that's all poppycock.” 288). While this has finally freed him from an aggressive patriarchal ideology of imperial expansion, it also deflects him from seriously considering and assessing the upcoming threat of fascism and what it might take to combat it. In other words, for the moment he cannot entertain positive political possibilities on the diachronic level.

As a result, his visionary experience at the party, like that of Peggy, signals his move away from repudiatory inactivity on a macro-historical scale and his reorientation in the temporality of the synchronic present, and it revives in him a more intimate but also collectively oriented political energy. The moment is triggered off by his watching the bubbles rise in his glass of champagne:

He watched the bubbles rising in the yellow liquid. For them it's all right, he thought; they've had their day: but not for him, not for his generation. For him a life modelled on the jet (he was watching the bubbles rise), on the spring, of the hard leaping fountain; another life; a different life. Not halls and reverberating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies, caparisoned. No; to begin inwardly, and let the devil take the outer

form, he thought, looking up at a young man with a fine forehead and a weak chin. Not black shirts, green shirts, red shirts—always posing in the public eye; that’s all poppycock. Why not down barriers and simplify? But a world, he thought, that was all one jelly, one mass, would be a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world. To keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter—the man Maggie laughs at; the Frenchman holding his hat; but at the same time spread out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble—myself and the world together—he raised his glass. Anonymously, he said, looking at the clear yellow liquid. But what do I mean, he wondered—I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion’s dead; who don’t fit, as the man said, don’t fit in anywhere? He paused. There was the glass in his hand; in his mind a sentence. And he wanted to make other sentences. But how can I, he thought—he looked at Eleanor, who sat with a silk handkerchief in her hands—unless I know what’s solid, what’s true; in my life, in other people’s lives? (288)

North’s endeavor to “make a new ripple in human consciousness” starts with a dismissive depiction of commonly conceived political activities. What he intends to do instead is “to begin inwardly, and let the devil take the outer form.” The energy carried by the bubble-inspired image of “the jet...the spring...the hard leaping fountain” breaks the spell of inactivity for North on the diachronic axis. The initial individualist tendency (“to keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter” as against “one jelly, one mass...a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world”) is immediately followed by a dialectical return to affirm the collective, symbolized by the pairing of the images “the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble—myself and the world together.”

Eleanor’s visionary moment towards the end of the novel again highlights a change of temporal axis. Before the moment comes, her mental journey to this point follows a similar trajectory to those of Peggy and North, which is characterized by concerns with imminent danger and an inability to fathom rational political actions available. At the time, even the optimistic nature of Eleanor is severely tested by the international state of affairs. The hopeful future that she imagines in an air raid during the Great War is seriously overshadowed by the increasing menace of a totalitarian upsurge in Europe, about which her generation feels enraged but powerless (e.g., her indignant reaction “Damned bully!” to the Mussolini figure in the paper, 232). Meanwhile, another war, potentially more destructive, is almost visible on the horizon.

Her visionary moment shifts her attention from the near future to the immediate present, the here and now that envelops and rejuvenates her at the party:

There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there. She hollowed her hands in her lap, just as Rose had hollowed hers round her ears. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding. (300)

First of all, John Whittier-Ferguson's comment that "Scarcely a sentence from *The Years* or *Between the Acts*, even if pulled out of context, could be mistaken for something Woolf would have written in the 1920s" (232-233), by which I take him to mean that Woolf's early luminous interiority completely disappears in her later focus upon externality, is clearly an overstatement, for the last few sentences of Eleanor's visionary moment bear remarkable resemblance to those describing the thoughts and feelings of Clarissa Dalloway.

The "another life" Eleanor envisions resides right in the "here and now," both "in this room" and "with living people." Compared with the brevity, fragmentariness, and ignorance afflicting this life, the "another life" can potentially permeate the here and now with continuity, wholeness, and knowledge about ourselves "[w]e're only just beginning...to understand." Access to this synchronic dimension of the present is not presupposed, but it demands conscious efforts and attentive exertions, to "enclose" it and "make it stay." It is also a meeting ground, the synthesizing modality for both the past and the future, where the condensed meaning of temporality is revealed. At the climactic visionary moment of Eleanor's long life represented in the novel, instead of politically explicit messages relating to patriarchy or fascism, we witness her expectant buoyancy, infinite curiosity, and ability of self-renewal.

3. The Politics of the Here and Now

As we've seen from the visionary moments of the three characters, they first and foremost signal a fundamental shift from the political in the diachronic temporality as paralyzed and deadlocked by a stultified futurity to a reactivated and reimagined potentiality in the synchronic temporality, the immediate present. Woolf's title for the expansive coda, the disproportionate "Present Day" section, is naturally taken to refer to her contemporary historical period, especially seen as the last stage in the sequence of the chronologically arranged chapters preceding it. Yet it can also refer to one single day, the present day detailed in the chapter. And if we take one step further, to focus on exactly the present *per se*, not the present time or the present era, we might get closer to the underlying message of the chapter. For quite some time during her composition Woolf was using "Here and Now" as the novel's working title (*Diary IV* 176, 246), and the phrase features prominently during Eleanor's visionary moment.

Both philosophical understandings (e.g., phenomenological, or Bergsonian) and religious teachings (e.g., Buddhist, or Daoist) have suggested that the most difficult moment to live, the most evasive one to pin down, is the present. And our daily experiences may attest to this. On the one hand, we can't help looking back to the past, dwelling upon bygones, reliving both painful and pleasurable memories. The habit of backward looking makes it unexpectedly difficult to focus on the present moment. On the other hand, we can also be agitated by what might come in the future. Preoccupations with impending threats or exciting prospects can also monopolize our attention and weaken our will to concentrate on the present moment. The present, therefore, is the real challenge. If we could somehow manage to live fully in a single moment despite past pains and sufferings and free of anxiety and worries about future happenings, this thinking goes, we might be able to transform our whole sense of ourselves in relation to time.

Interestingly, Virginia Woolf has been called "a master of the dramatic Now" (Bowen 135), and her idea of "moment of being" has been compared to the Bergsonian concept of "duration" (la

durée), in which “time is qualitative, nonspatial, real, vertical, and always present” (Richter 39). In fact, her own conception of the “Present Day” section evinces a desire to settle on the present:

The last chapters must be so rich, so resuming, so weaving together that I can only go on by letting my mind brood every morning on the whole book. *There’s no longer any need to forge ahead, as the narrative part is over.* What I want is to *enrich & stabilize.* (*Diary IV* 221; my italics).

The visionary mode is the means through which Woolf’s characters seize upon the “now.” Though traditionally characterized as a projection of futurity or the utopian, the visionary mode is in fact equally effective at revealing the immediate present. This visionary stare upon the instantaneous “here and now” requires the resiliency and strength of combined emotional and intellectual energy to activate and sustain, for our focus upon this narrow, infinitesimal interval is constantly threatened by both the engulfing past, and the protean stream of indeterminacy of the future. The visionary grasp of the present moment is a constant battle against these two forces, forever in danger of being assimilated into either one.

Again, Woolf herself was quite aware of how easily eclipsed the present moment can be. In her 1929 essay, “The Moment: Summer’s Night,” she poses the question: “Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it” (*The Moment* 9). This synchronic present can also be easily passed over by Woolf critics. For example, Suzana Zink in her fine study of Woolf characterizes the tone of “Present Day” as “ambivalent, oscillating between disillusionment, nostalgia for the past and a belief in the future’s potential” (173), tellingly overlooking the present. Likewise, Angeliki Spiropoulou, in an intellectual move typical of other critics, briefly touches upon the visionary potential for commonality in the “Present Day” section before immediately switching to *Three Guineas* for its political explicitness:

Peggy's inability to fully get across the vision ... suggests the necessity of more collective forms of intervention and historical awareness. Woolf's subsequent publication in 1938 of *Three Guineas*, the polemical pamphlet which is companion to *The Years*, attests to this necessity. There, she pinpoints the revolutionary potential of the present and makes the vision of unity all too explicit. (137)

Angeliki's interest in "the vision," "collectivity," and "revolutionary potential of the present" almost exactly match mine. Yet she favors the essayistic, "polemical" politics of *Three Guineas* over the novelistic "experiential" politics of *The Years*, the difference being that the political sense of *Three Guineas*, as I alluded to before, operates in the diachronic temporality. In the following paragraphs I attempt to map out an *experiential* presentness with political resonances.

Even before their visionary moments, the characters experience intensified awareness of the present. While in the taxi driving to the party Peggy is contemplating "what is the moment? And what are we?" (235) And when nudged to tell about her youth, Eleanor decides "I do not want to go back into my past. I want the present" (236). North is even more wholeheartedly immersed in the present, partly because he is just days back to London after years in Africa. The very experience of driving on the street can be mesmerizing for him. These intermittent absorptions in the present momentariness amidst their prevailing preoccupations with the diachronic political heralds their visionary moments at the party scene, in which the present is fully seized upon and revealed, and the axis of temporality is momentarily switched.

The essential political nature of their visionary experience in the synchronic temporality can be summarized as an existential attitude of "becoming with." "Becoming" denotes the desire to live differently and the ability to imagine alterity, for the political sense of the synchronic temporality doesn't lie in stasis or stuckness in the here and now, but an urge to change. The "with" indicates the quintessential collective nature of this change-making attitude. It is not an individual repudiation of their surroundings and relations, but an urge communally inspired, contextually inflected, and collaboratively actualized and advanced.

The felt impetus towards becoming, change-making in visionary experience defines the synchronic political not as a programmatic, planned courses of actions, but as a subjective, affective energy that works within its contextual constraints, with spontaneous, not sequential, momentum. Peggy's vision of a "whole, free, and happy" "state of being" denotes an alterity marked not so much by its radical and idealistic nature, as by its exact correspondence to her frequently frustrated political desires on the diachronic level during the day ("whole, free, happy," as responding specifically to "fall," "tyranny," and "misery" written on her imagined placards). The visionary experience provides emotional and expressive release enacted on the synchronic level. Though far short of coming up with real-world solutions, this exercise of her faculty of alternative imagining does make her feel "relieved of some oppression." North's envisioned becoming takes the form of his pursuit of "another life; a different life," that is "modelled on the jet..., on the spring, of the hard leaping fountain," symbols of the dynamic flow of his enlivened imagination. Likewise, in her visionary moment Eleanor also aspires toward "another life," not in futurity, but in the "here and now," in order to make up for "this" life which is "too short, too broken." And in the immediate present, we can initiate change by substantiating what "[w]e're only just beginning...to understand."

In her reading of Woolf, Youngjoo Son discerns a kind of political potentiality in the form of a "utopia" of the present, here and now (10). Though I wouldn't phrase the political vision in "Present Day" in such an optimistic light, I do share her positive interpretation against more negative views of the novel—such as how the "non-communication, the removal of possibility of understanding" indicates a form of "pessimism"(Plain 101), or that "the novel's mode of characterization manifest a skepticism towards agency and individual progress" (Davis 12).

The impetus toward change, to "become," the visionary aspiration for alterity and difference-

making, is also collective in nature, since it invariably takes the form of “becoming with.”¹ The visionary is often faulted for elevating the individual at the cost of the collective. Yet here the visionary denies an individualist stance by being always embedded in an intimate commonality. The political energy that arises within the individual consciousness is not in isolation, but as a result of its implication within a network of interconnections. Melba Cuddy-Keane argues that in Woolf’s communal vision, “the definition of politics as the exercising of power” is substituted by “a model of community as the dynamic inhabiting of mutual space” (284). Perhaps nothing exhibits or embodies this “dynamic inhabiting of mutual space” better than a party attended by family members and close friends, where both shared experiences and temperamental differences can form a generative ground. And just as its origin is collective, the call for action inspired by the visionary moments is also directed at concerted efforts. At its best, synchronic temporality welds individual agency with the larger web of communality, turning the synchronic into the *synergic*, a collectively oriented energy for change. The visionary experiences of all three characters involve a strong sense of solidarity with their present company.

Peggy’s exhortation for a life of wholeness and happiness is clearly directed at all who are present, though her expression unfortunately takes a personal form addressing her brother. Nonetheless, her vision aims at being “impersonal,” that is, not about particular persons or herself, but communal and collective, for it revolves “about a world in which people were whole, in which people were free.” North envisions a dialectical relation between the personal and the collective, symbolized by the bubble and the stream. And his desire to “make a ripple in human consciousness” underlines the fundamental interpersonal nature of his vision. Eleanor’s visionary moment is marked at the very beginning by its self-conscious collaborative spirit: “Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people.” In a word, the visionary mode in the novel

¹ My use of phrase is obviously in a very different sense from that of Donna Haraway (16).

emphatically rejects solipsistic self-absorption commonly associated with visionary experiences and highlights deeply felt bonds in the form of collective imagining, and concerted, communally based actions.

We can only appreciate the significance of this sense of collectivity if we remember how, throughout the novel, even those who have every reason to connect with each other have failed to do so. Efforts toward sharing, common ground building, outreaching, connection-making are frequently frustrated. Mitchell Leaska's comment that "In one sense the novel eloquently communicates the failure of communication" (xviii) is certainly to the point. Real communications between the sexes are near impossible. Colonel Abel wants to talk about his private affairs and his kept mistress Mira to his sister-in-law Eugene, but is prohibited by a resignation to private suffering: "After all, he thought as he went downstairs, slowly, heavily, it was his own affair; it didn't matter to anybody else. One must burn one's own smoke" (90). Colonel Abel's failed attempt is mirrored in the next generation by Martin's difficulties to disclose his love life to his cousin Maggie, Eugene's daughter. Men find it difficult to confide to their female relatives because the patriarchal code of honor stipulates men to be rational, strong-willed, self-controlled, and undemonstrative, and forecloses the possibility to broach such topics as extramarital affairs, unorthodox relationships, etc., that might indicate moral failures and personal weaknesses.

Yet even among fellow sufferers, social factors that set individuals apart inevitably impede the articulation of common feelings, or even reminiscing on a shared past, as Rose finds out during her visit to the Digby Pargiters, Maggie and Sara, whose fall of fortune takes the form of dwindling means as a result of their modest inheritance. Social status also comes in the way of a closer relationship between Eleanor and Kitty, who are temperamentally akin, but socially apart. Kitty more than once attempts to forge a closer relationship with Eleanor, while Eleanor keeps evading her attempts, for they both know that "They had gone such different ways, they had lived such

different lives, since Oxford” (127). After all, by marrying an earl, Kitty is now Lady Lasswade, while Eleanor is the old spinster of the family.

The visionary moment, by generating emotional readiness and alacrity to reach out to members of a shared community thus seems of vital importance. These imaginative and affective outreaches lay groundwork for commonality. And Woolf is known for such collective thinking and gesturing. One often-quoted example is her note on the proposed theme of *Between the Acts* (1941): “‘I’ rejected: ‘We’ substituted” (*Diary V* 135). Another equally well-known expression is from her memoir “A Sketch of the Past”: “But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself” (*Moments of Being* 85). Woolf’s acute awareness and memorable reiteration of this agential collectivity, encapsulated by the “we,” is certainly one of her most important artistic, ethical and political visions. As Gillian Beer perceptively points out, the “we” is not without risks, in that with its elasticity it can both “colonize” and “exclude,” potentially becoming “coercive and treacherous” (87). However, the “we” in “Present Day” does not signify an all-encompassing anonymous catch-all that threatens to dominate and subjugate. It is safeguarded against generalizing and assimilating tendencies by its specific reference to the people around, consisting of relatives, friends and acquaintances and joined together by intimacy, knowledge, and mutual ties. The “we” exists not as an anonymous mass, but as a community of diversity.

Another key feature of the immediate present revealed in the visionary moments is the difficulty both in its envisioning and articulation. The bafflement and self-doubt that often accompany these moments characterize the visionary experience as a bordering consciousness, between knowing and uncertainty, seeing something vaguely on the horizon and losing sight of it, being overwhelmed, enveloped by a feeling and being left in suspense or frustration. This feeling attests to the difficulty of maintaining extended awareness of the immediate present.

Peggy's difficulty to share her vision with others, her hapless efforts in articulating it, which ends in saying the opposite of what she has intended, embodies this ambivalent nature of the visionary present. Her visionary moment ends with a litany of expressions of failure: "flounder," "not grasped," "a little fragment of what she meant to say," "the thing she had not said." Similarly, North's visionary moment concludes with his self-doubt— "But what do I mean,...— I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion's dead; who don't fit, as the man said, don't fit in anywhere?"—and his enfeebled grasp upon reality: "But how can I...unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives?" The prospect of his resolved self-reinvention is thus cast into doubt. And finally, there is Eleanor's attempt during her visionary moment to "grasp something that just evaded her." Her gestures to "enclose the present moment" are her "hollowed" hands—the word "hollowed" is repeated three times in the paragraph, which makes it difficult not to associate the word with its connotations of "holed," "emptied," "cut out," that speak to the futility of her endeavor. The visionary gleam of the immediate present is evasive and fleeting as much as it is powerful and revealing.

The novel closes, fittingly, with Eleanor at the end of the party: "Then she turned round into the room. 'And now?' she said, looking at Morris, who was drinking the last drops of a glass of wine. 'And now?' she asked, holding out her hands to him" (305). The ending recapitulates the essential characteristics of the synchronic present. Eleanor's poised, expectant questionings "And now? ...And now?" signal a heartened readiness for change-making, while her acts of "turning round into the room" and "holding out her hands" indicate with their inviting gestures that she envisions the nature of such an undertaking to be unmistakably collective. The suspense of the last moment, charged with anticipation, mixed with indeterminacy, presents a memorable ending to the temporary suspension of the diachronic, historical dimension, as well as a prolonged glimpse at the possibilities and potentiality inhabiting the immediate present.

In sum, the visionary moments of all three characters epitomize a tendency to imagine alterity and pursue different possibilities for life on a collective basis. They produce a kind of political energy which is to be understood in the broader sense of mental readiness for effecting changes. The positive significance of this energy lies in the fact that it can keep alive possibilities for actions as well as provide affective outlet in face of built-up tension or imminent dangers that thwart conceivable courses of actions in the macro-political context on a larger historical scale.

This aesthetics of political resistance inhering in the present shares similarities with what Jeanette McVicker terms Woolf's practice of "positive nihilism," by which she means an "ability to persevere under the most oppressive of conditions even as one acknowledges the seeming futility of imagining change" (Dubino 14). This courage echoes what Charles Altieri writes about the arts in general, whose aim is "not to offer theoretical solutions but to envision imaginative stances for living within and finessing and even *building upon what we cannot resolve*" (15; my italics). The political essence of the visionary moments in "Present Day" is simply this: if it is currently impossible to effect a *reality* of change, we can at least cultivate collectively a *mentality* for change.

CHAPTER 4 *The Rainbow*: The Visionary Refutation of Ideological Absolutes

So far I have shown why what I am calling the visionary mode is a crucial aspect of Woolf's novels, and especially, that it substantiates a distinctly modern understanding of the relations between the self and other, and engenders a particular kind of political potentiality. In what follows, I turn to examine the mixed legacy of Lawrence's use of the visionary mode in his novels. In the current chapter, I focus on visionary moments in *The Rainbow* to illustrate that when he adheres to a situated and embodied use of the visionary mode Lawrence is able to utilize its subversive, stasis-breaking potential to relativize and historicize exclusivist and ahistorical ideological systems, thus effectively rejecting the totalizing effects that such absolutist systems entail. The following chapter will explore how in his so-called leadership novels (I use *Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo* as examples), Lawrence's obsession with the idea of "power" leads him to overlook the anti-authoritarian implications of key visionary moments. As a result, he very often abandons his previous sophisticated use of the visionary mode and, by means of a thinly veiled character of his alter-ego, preaches his philosophy of power through a quasi-visionary voice. Lawrence's forfeiture of the artistic and critical benefits of true visionary mode in these novels, i.e., experiential immediacy and affective efficaciousness that contradict authoritarian values, I will argue, costs him the opportunity to put his ideas about power to the rigorous test of critical self-reflection.

Lawrence and his works have long been described as "visionary," though the usage of the term varies from one critical context to another. In *The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence*, Eugene Goodheart uses the term to refer explicitly to the future-oriented, prophetic aspects of Lawrence's work that explore radically new forms of life. He concludes that there is a fundamental tension in Lawrence between "the visionary and the ethically prescriptive" and that Lawrence's "vision of life

finally should not be taken as a guide to conduct” (168-9). Robert E. Montgomery uses the term “visionary” to highlight Lawrence’s unique philosophical outlook that situates Lawrence firmly within the Romantic tradition. In *The Visionary D. H. Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art*, he argues that it is the “idea of polarity that is ‘the dynamic idea or metaphysic’ [quoting from Lawrence’s *Fantasia and The Unconscious*] at the heart of Lawrence’s vision” (15). On the other hand, in *The Vital Art of D.H. Lawrence: Vision and Expression*, Jack Stewart uses the term “vision” to refer “both to the faculty of visual perception and to ontological vision activated in the process of writing or painting” (1). On the whole, his study focuses on the “painterly” vision in Lawrence’s novels.

In contrast to the broad perspective such studies evoke with the term “vision,” my approach, as has been made clear in the “Introduction” as well as in previous chapters on Woolf, operates more on the individual, experiential, and micro level. Instead of “grand visions,” specific visionary moments on the textual level are my focus. Compared with more general approaches to the “visions” of Lawrence, attention to the embodied and situated visionary mode can bring to light the temporality and specificity of the dramatized experience itself, and better examine particular ideological implications it evokes.

Not surprisingly, Lawrence’s novel *The Rainbow* also has the reputation of being a “visionary” novel. Mark Kinkead-Weekes reads the novel in terms of a tension between its “social vision” and the Lawrentian individualistic vision of infinite possibilities as symbolized by the rainbow (7). John Worthen praises the “visionary experience” created in the earlier parts of the novel through “lives led and feelings lived” while casting doubt upon the nature of the “propagandist” visions towards the end (72). Moreover, Michael Bell pushes the connotations of the term into paradoxical territories by calling the church tower at the beginning of the novel “an almost subliminal presence” with “a visionary significance” (82). If the visionary can be subliminal, i.e., occurring in

an individual's subconsciousness without their perceiving of it, then clearly the use of the term is on a much more general level, detached from the experiential dimension embodied in characters and narratives, as I tend to understand it in this study. In a word, such uses of the visionary, illuminating and useful as they may be in their respective contexts, tend to overlook the specific unsettling or transformative effects that those visionary moments have at particular textual locations or between narrative sequences.

This critical (and also readerly) tendency to attach one or another sort of "visionary" quality to the novel may be explained as a result of Lawrence's radically innovative attempt at representing a hitherto untouched substratum of consciousness. In *The Rainbow*, he parts ways with traditional means of representing personality, the "diamond" aspect of selfhood, and attempts to portray the individual in its "coal" state—"diamond" and "coal" both being isomorphic forms of the element carbon, which is used by Lawrence to symbolize the self (*Letter II* 182-4). To those accustomed to the Victorian tradition of characterization and emplotment, the novel's unorthodox centering of subconscious impulses and elemental desires is revolutionary. The descriptor "visionary" thus comes in handy to convey a sense of revelatory defamiliarization.

However, this effect of disorientation, created by the general texture of the prose and Lawrence's thematic preoccupations, in my view does not automatically qualify the novel or certain passages of it as "visionary," for the very reason that though those general descriptions of psychological undercurrents may seem defamiliarizing as innovative means of character representation, the characters themselves do *not* typically experience them as *radically unsettling or intensified* revelations or insights. In fact, it is Lawrence's very point that the characters should experience them as constant daily struggles, an inherent part of psychic life, in a natural, unconscious, unquestioning manner. A good example may be the extended description of Anna and Will's marital struggle. By normal standards, the profound emotional conflict is certainly unusual,

but Lawrence's generalized description of it turns it into a largely prototypical experience instead of one with dramatic and temporal specificity. According to Lawrence's conception, this is just how our psychic structure and emotional matrix routinely work. Julian Moynahan's observation that in *The Rainbow* "the ratio of descriptive passages to dramatic scenes" are "staggeringly disproportionate" (52), a point echoed by Allan Ingram (42), is certainly apt here.

Therefore, only sudden, *dramatically* represented moments of illumination that descend on the characters are my focus of the discussion on the visionary mode here. The key qualification is the experiential authenticity and the existential weight and intensity accompanying them that set them apart from the normal pace and usual texture of the narrative. Consequently, a palpable change occurs in the character's state of mind. The moment may usher in a new perspective, or a different worldview, but in similar ways with previous examples of the visionary mode in this study, the meaning of such moments is not absolutely settled, but allows indeterminacy. I will discuss three such moments of visionary intervention—Will and Anna in the Lincoln Cathedral, Ursula's microscopic revelation, and finally the rainbow scene at the end.

1. The Lincoln Cathedral: A Destructively Constructive Visionary Moment

As I've shown in my introductory chapter, in contemporary critical discourse, visionary experiences are regarded as promoting an individualist stance that is conducive to absolutist habits of mind. The thinking goes that its claim to a higher realm of truth, solely subjectively guaranteed, defying rational objective thinking, is compounded by its affirmation of self-selected status, with the individual mind chosen as the privileged recipient of special intimations. This tends to result in a repudiation of the immediate reality, circumstances at hand, for the external world is now believed to be illusionary, deceptive, and inauthentic, of a lower order of truth, something to be seen through and transcended. The luminosity of the vision overturns commonsensical habits of the mind and approximates towards the absolutist status of religious fervor or mystical initiation.

However, I intend to show in this section that the modernist visionary mode functions in the opposite direction, i.e., that it contradicts and complicates, thus turning the absolute nature of the revelation against itself, ushering in a more relational, less hortatory, coercive outlook, underpinned by a more historical sensibility. I'll examine how the Lincoln Cathedral episode in *The Rainbow* depicts a visionary experience that is the very opposite of a religious conversion.

The scene in Lincoln Cathedral is a key moment in the marital life of the second generation of Brangwens, Anna and Will. During their courtship and early marriage, Will's religious intensity, described memorably in his self-absorbed chorus-singing and in the miraculous transformative effects on him of the illustrated book on the Bamberg Church, both fascinates Anna and somehow puts her off. Their visit to the Lincoln Cathedral, at Will's insistence, brings the tension to a crisis, and leads to a resolution of Will's transcendence obsession and a newly conceived relationship between them. The scene starts, expectedly, with Will's enrapturement by the profound grandeur of the interior of the church:

Then he pushed open the door, and the great, pillared gloom was before him, in which his soul *shuddered* and rose from her nest...His body stood *still*, absorbed by the height. His soul leapt up into the gloom, into *possession*, it *reeled*, it *swooned* with a great *escape*, it quivered in the womb, in the hush and the gloom of fecundity, like seed of procreation in *ecstasy*. (186; italics mine)

In the first place, it should be clarified that the church's mesmerizing effect on Will here emphatically does not represent the Brangwens' aspiration towards the expansion of consciousness through culture, which, as portrayed at the beginning of the novel, is symbolized by their fascination with the powers of the church. His desire here is directed inward, not outward, aimed at simplification, not expansion. Despite Lawrence's high-flown, lofty description of Will's transfixed state, the passage is carefully worded with unmistakable suggestions of the self-abandoning nature of his religious wish-fulfillment. Ravishing as the language of the paragraph is, in Lawrentian philosophy, words such as "possession," "reel," "swoon," "escape," and "ecstasy"

carry strongly negative implications (chapter XV of the novel is actually entitled “The Bitterness of Ecstasy”). They are telling signs of the author’s disapproval. In other words, Will’s yearning is portrayed as an escapist anachronism, a desire for resigned passivity and strifeless ecstasy.

Then comes one of the most memorable descriptions of the novel, where Lawrence is writing in a language that is sublimely incantatory:

Away from time, always outside of time! Between east and west, between dawn and sunset, the church lay like a seed in silence, dark before germination, silenced after death. Containing birth and death, potential with all the noise and transition of life, the cathedral remained hushed, a great, involved seed, whereof the flower would be radiant life inconceivable, but whose beginning and whose end were the circle of silence. (187)

The passage may initially sound like third-person narrative, until we realize it should be more appropriately read as free indirect discourse, for from what follows it is clear that this elevated imaginary flight is simply Will’s long craved desire to be at one with the religious absolute writ large. Therefore, what we are witnessing here is situated beyond doubt within Will’s consciousness:

Here in the church, “before” and “after” were folded together, all was contained in oneness. Brangwen came to his consummation. Out of the doors of the womb he had come, putting aside the wings of the womb, and proceeding into the light...and the beginning and the end were one. (187)

These extraordinary passages carry a profound ambiguity. On the surface, they sing the praise of the church for its be-all and end-all, life-generating, and meaning-bestowing power. Yet underneath, there is also an overwhelming sense of exhaustiveness, a life summed up, finished, concluded by fast backward and then forward. In a way, to give oneself up, to succumb one’s life to such a destiny is a kind of cheating, avoiding the pains of actually living through life’s tribulations and vicissitudes. By associating self-sufficiency, end of struggle, elimination of ambiguity and uncertainty with the church Will is effectively using it as illusion, distraction, and escape.

In an essay entitled “Life,” written a few years after the publication of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence reiterates the idea that two kinds of unknowability, a “before” and an “after,” define the limits of human existence (in this essay he uses the words “beginning” and “end”): “We are balanced like a flame between the two darknesses, the darkness of the beginning and the darkness of the end. We derive from the unknown, and we result into the unknown” (*RDP* 16). However, Lawrence also makes it clear that our goal should never be to join, to merge with or lose ourselves in the unknown— “This is the law. We shall never know what is the beginning,” because the unknown retains its life-endowing power only when it remains mysteriously “unknown.” Once we attempt to make it “known,” whether by regressing to the origin, the “womb,” the “before,” or by merging oneself into the “end,” the “after,” as Will is doing here, the great “unknown” becomes the explicit “known,” and the fructifying tension between it and our worldly experience collapses. Easy visibility and conceivability diminish its power. Therefore, the way is to remain open, receptive, and ready for sporadic visitations—“The unknown has ingress into me because, whilst I live, I am never sealed and set apart; I am but a flame conducting unknown to unknown, through the bright transition of creation” (*RDP* 17).

To seek absolute certainty and absolution, promised deliverance from vicissitudes of fighting through life, and suspension of temporal unfolding, therefore, is life-denying and thus deeply immoral. Within such an all-encompassing scheme of absolution, there is nothing the individual needs to do, except to surrender themselves with piety into the great arms of the church or some other ready-made systems of beliefs, and relinquish one’s will to struggle in this world.¹ Will’s “consummation,” if completed, therefore, endangers his worldly aspirations, his sense of unique individuality, and the very purpose and meaning of his earthly being.

Fortunately for him, despite the apparent linguistic grandeur and sublimity, one senses strongly

¹ For a recent critical engagement with this religious worldview, see Martin Hägglund’s *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019).

that Lawrence is in full control here, that it is only Will who is being carried away. As H. M. Daleski warns, “[t]his passage presents Will’s experience so sympathetically that only a close scrutiny reveals that Lawrence is not identifying himself with it” (53). After all, the splendidly described consummation of Will’s religious craving for transcendence is nothing new or revelatory, either to Will himself, or to the reader, but has been prefigured several times. The religious experience, profound as it is, merely presents an acting out of Will’s deep-seated longings and desires. Lawrence is setting up the stage for the real visionary moment that ensues as a correction of Will’s spellbound devotional extravagance. In fact, the Cathedral scene may be seen as Lawrence’s conscious dramatization of the religious “Vision” vs. the modernist visionary mode, the latter as an experiential and affective undoing of the former.

The truly transformative, revelatory part of the narrative, its quintessential “visionariness” therefore, does not consist in the ecstatic and solipsistic religious self-abandonment of Will, but in Anna and Will’s collective experience of forcing Will out of the influence of the religious absolute. Therefore, Will’s momentary absorption in the religious primordial fecundity is not the visionary moment *per se*, but merely its target of assault. Lawrence builds it up in order to deflate it immediately after. The true realization comes when the inflated and high-flown imagination of both of Will and Anna is brought back down to earth. And it is Anna’s worldly, commonsensical, rational temperament that leads the way.

Anna initially shares Will’s enchantment: “She too was overcome with wonder and awe. She followed him in his progress” (188), but she soon starts to contend with the seductive influence of the church and realizes the outdatedness of the Christian ideal: “The altar was barren, its lights gone out. God burned no more in that bush. It was dead matter lying there. She claimed the right to freedom above her, higher than the roof” (189). Eventually she overcomes the cathedral’s hypnotizing effect by diverting her attention to the small things on the church wall— “she caught

sight of the wicked, odd little faces carved in stone” (189).² By contemplating human actuality instead of religious abstractness, she remembers that “the cathedral was not absolute” and that there is illimitable sky and freedom outside:

These sly little faces peeped out of the grand tide of the cathedral like something that knew better. They knew quite well, these little imps that retorted on man’s own illusion, that the cathedral was *not absolute*. They winked and leered, giving suggestion of the many things that had been left out of the great concept of the church. “However much there is inside here, there’s a good deal they haven’t got in,” the little faces mocked. (189; my italics)

Mark Spilka has pointed out that the little figures Anna sees could be the same that Ruskin describes in *The Stones of Venice*, which represent “the dignity and wholeness of each workman” (104). The individuality of the small faces gives lie to the all-encompassing influence of the Christian church. However consummate the religious experience is, it can never replace the unique path each person goes through, failures and losses one has to live with. To fall into the temptation of the promised worry-free ecstasy is to forfeit the possibilities of the unique process of individuation, to turn one’s back upon life itself. With this realization Anna breaks the spell cast by the church and gets free, her visionary moment taking full effect.

Her reoriented sanity causes a profound transformation in Will’s state of mind as well. What for Anna is simply a regained soundness of mind serves for Will as a forever-transformed psychological and spiritual landscape. His old world is gone:

She had got free from the cathedral, she had even destroyed the passion he had. She was glad. He was bitterly angry. Strive as he would, he could not keep the cathedral wonderful to him. He was disillusioned. That which had been his *absolute*, containing all heaven and earth, was become to him as to her, a shapely heap of dead matter—but dead, dead.

Yet somewhere in him he responded more deeply to the sly little face that knew better, than he had done before to the perfect surge of his cathedral.

They went home again, both of them altered. She had some new reverence for that which he wanted, he felt that his cathedrals would never again be to him as they had been. Before, he had thought them *absolute*. But now he saw them crouching under the sky, with still the dark,

² Significantly, these “little imps” also make their appearance in the contemporaneous prose work *Study of Thomas Hardy*: “There was, however, in the Cathedrals, already the denial of the Monism which the Whole uttered. All the little figures, the gargoyles, the imps, the human faces, whilst subordinated within the Great Conclusion of the Whole, still, from their obscurity, jeered their mockery of the Absolute, and declared for multiplicity, polygeny” (66).

mysterious world of reality inside, but as a world within a world, a sort of side show, whereas before they had been as a world to him within a chaos: a reality, an order, an *absolute*, within a meaningless confusion.

...
But now, somehow, sadly and disillusioned, he realized that the doorway was no doorway. It was too narrow, it was false. Outside the cathedral were many flying spirits that could never be sifted through the jewelled gloom. He had lost his *absolute*. (190-1; my italics)

Will's faith in the cathedral as embodying absolute beauty and ensuring ultimate meaning is shattered by the individuality and particularly of the small faces, and he is left ever since with a sense of relativity that is characteristic of modernity. Their experience in the cathedral perfectly illustrates Lawrence's playful warning: "Be aware of absolutes. There are many gods" (*SCAL* 28). Besides, the imagery of the cathedral has not fared particularly well in Lawrence. In *Kangaroo*, there is a scene where a "beautiful" cathedral lies side by side with some "scrappy" bungalows, yet the protagonist Somers prefers the scrappy bungalows (346).

The visionary experience exemplified in the Lincoln Cathedral episode is destructively constructive in that it instills, though with agonizing pain, a historical and relative sense in Will, which gradually drives him to seek a more publicly active, communally purposive way of life. He has come to terms with the fact that life's meaning is not foreordained or predetermined but is to be sought and created in one's fluctuating relations with the manifolds of worldly existence. The religious absolute, originally conceived and experienced as an unchallengeable order, is now forced into a dialectical relation with the individualistic, personalized, fleshed-out secularity (symbolized here by the all too human expressions and gestures of the figurines) that defies being subsumed into any absolute, all-encompassing scheme, to be either sublimated or sacrificed.

Will Brangwen now has to deal with his daily life and its meaning. His community, his fellowmen, the materiality of their common life, the palpability of their presence, the authenticity of their tastes and desires, are no longer to be ignored. It is a state of relativity, with less stability and certitude compared with the absoluteness of his former worldview. Yet it is more resilient and

receptive, including openness to new forms of historical experience. It is debatable to what extent Will succeeds in adapting to this new outlook, arguably because Lawrence's structural design—to use Will's partially reformed way to set the stage for further development expected in the third generation, Ursula, shifts the focus of the narrative elsewhere.

One might argue, however, that even in a time when the religious absoluteness of Christianity is no longer sustainable as the center of a systematic religion on a large social scale, it can still hold true and effective as an individual seat of faith, source of comfort, as long as the person can really believe in it, as Will seems able to do at first here. In other words, there can still be little isolated pockets in the forms of devout individuals in which the old faith is still preserved intact and in a living way. This may be true, but it wouldn't do for Lawrence's purpose here, which is to emphasize a shared worldview as prerequisite for true relationships to develop in a secular world. Daleski, against John Middleton Murry, remarks that what is destroyed in the cathedral is not spirituality *per se*, but Will's tendency to see it as an "overwhelming oneness" which forecloses the formation of any intimate relationships (55). Therefore, Will's strong tendency toward religious transcendence, while it may have the benefits of yielding him occasional solipsistic ecstasies, is impossible to be solely contained within himself as a purely individual and private affair. For Lawrence a sacrosanct, inviolable personal space in intimate relationships should not be a *precondition*, as popular conceptions of "respect for privacy" tend to have it. It can only occur *after* some vital connections are achieved through intense sensuality and contentious spiritual exchange.

Seen in this way, Will's continued self-absorption in the exclusivist religious absolute would have presented a serious obstacle in his relationship with Anna, since it would have kept them each persisting in fundamentally different modes of being, sensibilities and outlooks. They have to resolve their conflict at some point, because one side has to win over the other before their relationship can further develop. Their visionary experience in the cathedral achieves exactly this

purpose. With the secular spirit of the modern age on her side, Anna eventually prevails, and as a result, their relationship settles into a more mutually fulfilling phase. Will's newly gained awareness of existential relativity impels him to transpose his religious sense of wondrousness in more worldly forms, for example, onto the sensuality of Anna.

2. The Visionary Mode against Philosophical Mechanism

If Will and Anna's visionary experience in the Lincoln Cathedral shows how it can effectively call into question absolute notions of religious transcendence, the visionary revelation Ursula Brangwen experiences by looking at a unicellular organism through a microscope challenges another form of ideological tyranny—philosophical mechanism.³ Mechanism, the philosophical outlook that relies exclusively on physical and chemical laws as its explanatory model, first justified itself as systematic knowledge and methodology to deal with the inanimate material world. Yet once it established domination over the material, it posed itself as a totalizing philosophy that attempted to colonize the human world as well. By the early 20th century, mechanistic thinking threatened to become the dominant ideology, the only rational discourse for conceiving reality. For Lawrence, it was the source of all modern ills, from dehumanization of daily life, deprivation of creative imagination, to the overall catastrophe of unprecedented warmongering, all a result of blind, frenzied mechanistic drive towards conquering nature and procuring ever increasing profits.

Mechanistic ideology, by touting itself as scientific knowledge that will dispel past superstitions and cognitive errors and by promising total transparency and simplicity in its understanding of the world, in effect obliterates the sense of historical relativity and possibility. In fact, mechanistic philosophy can be seen as radically contracting historicity to a timeless present—not in the sense of

³ Recent readings have attempted to explore Lawrence's more positive views of natural sciences, one of the most extended effort being Jeff Wallace's *D.H. Lawrence, science and the posthuman* (2006). Drawing on Lawrence's use of biological and evolutionary theories, Wallace sees "modern science as a source of Lawrentian reverence and wonder for 'life' rather than as an obstacle to it" (102).

a temporary pause as in *The Years*, but a permanent be-all and end-all explanatory scheme—things have always been so; we have only come to realize their true nature. As Robert J. Richards explains, “the clockwork mechanism that an intelligent Creator would produce was stable, coherent, and as perfect from the beginning as it would be at the end” (11). In this scheme engendered by the seemingly unlikely marriage of deism and mechanism, time and history has relevance only as the lamentable records of past human errors and misconceptions before the dawning of our perfect knowledge of the rules and principles on which the universe eternally and immutably operates.

In other words, philosophical mechanism attempts to endow human knowledge with *absolute* certainty by seeing every phenomenon as explicable in determinate *relations* with external factors. I emphasize the ideas of “absolute” and “relation” here because the visionary moment of Ursula resists the totalizing “absoluteness” of the mechanistic philosophy by activating a different understanding of “absolute,” one inhering within the individual self. Ursula is the third generation, who carries on the Brangwens’ hope for sensual and spiritual fulfillment. The crucial visionary moment happens during her college years, when, looking through a microscope at a living unicellular organism, she recalls a mechanistic theory of life expressed earlier by her professor of physics. It is a moment of intense questioning that merits quoting at length:

She had on her slide some special stuff come up from London that day, and the professor was fussy and excited about it. At the same time, as she focused the light on her field, and saw the plant-animal lying shadowy in a boundless light, she was fretting over a conversation she had had a few days ago with Dr. Frankstone...

“No, really,” Dr. Frankstone had said, “I don’t see why we should attribute some special mystery to life—do you? We don’t understand it as we understand electricity, even, but that doesn’t warrant our saying it is something special, something different in kind and distinct from everything else in the universe...May it not be that life consists in a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science? I don’t see, really, why we should imagine there is a special order of life, and life alone——”

...[W]hat was the purpose? Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces, like one of these? She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw

it move—she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?

...

It intended to be itself. But what self? Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity. (408-9)

This is a brilliant example of how the visionary moment is intensely experiential, with heightened affective state. The “sudden knowledge” that dawns on Ursula comes from her acute observation of the cellular structure and her persistent questioning of the motive behind its movement; the “intensely-gleaming light” is both visual and spiritual, with resultant euphoric feelings of “consummation” and “triumph.” And in a typical way, the significance of the visionary experience is not spelt out, but remains ambiguous, and open to interpretation and reactivation—“She could not understand what it all was.”

Dr. Frankstone, clearly a reference to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, articulates the central tenet of the mechanistic view of life—there is nothing mysterious or special about the phenomenon of life; like electricity, it can be perfectly explained as “a complexity of physical and chemical activities.” The comparison of life to mechanism can be found in the father of rationalism, Descartes, who writes “I suppose that the body is nothing but a statue, or a machine,” while the 18th century natural philosopher Robert Boyle extrapolated mechanistic principles to the entirety of existence as he confidently claimed that “the phenomena of the world are physically produced by the mechanical properties of the parts of matter [which] operate upon one another according to mechanical laws” (*qtd*, Guerlac 18). This radically new, and sweepingly comprehensive explanatory framework sets as its goal to drain the metaphysical swamp, to get rid of fantasies, illusions, and spirituality, with a healthy overdose of hard science and positivism. Dr.

Frankstone's world is ruthlessly ordered, marvelously transparent, and frighteningly uniform.

Reducing the individual life to nothing more than an effect of biochemical laws is an extreme form of absolute thinking. The individual organism is understood and studied in terms of its "relation" to external stimuli, but this "relation" shares none of the connotations of "relative" or "relational"—changeable, contextual, situation-specific, fluid or permutational. Instead, the individual's relations to external forces are determinate, measurable and quantifiable according to immutable mechanical or biochemical principles. In other words, the individual is "absolutely" fixed in its relations with external factors. In the mechanistic worldview the relative and the absolute are effectively reduced to the same thing, in the form of determinate "absolute relations."

The mechanistic picture of deadly fixed relations emanating absolute certainty is what is rejected during Ursula's visionary gleam of the nucleus of life. Significantly, her sense of "supreme infinity" that concludes the visionary moment is comparable to the two concepts "absolute" and "relative"—"supreme" indicates an absolute valuing and affirming of the self, while "infinity" can best be understood as the infinite possibilities the self can theoretically actualize through a fructifying relationality (as opposed to the "nominal" relationality in the mechanistic worldview) in interaction with its environment.⁴ For sure, the wording here is unfortunate—"a oneness with the infinite" might be mistaken for a transcendent longing, but I think Lawrence's meaning is clear within the context. "Oneness" signifies embodiment rather than self-abandonment.

Here I'll bring in another expression by Lawrence of the ideas "absolute" and "relative" to better clarify his unique understanding of them and to bear upon Ursula's vision. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, prompted by the popularity of Einstein's theory of relativity, Lawrence reflects upon the idea of relativity in general and puts forward his personal take:

⁴ Another possibility is that the "infinity" is the individual's inherent possibility, its birthright or innate potentiality, i.e., the individual self contains the infinite within itself. However, given Lawrence's pervasive thinking of the self as in vital interaction with others, I tend to think the "infinity" lies external to the self, in that the individual enjoys infinite possibilities only in its tension-filled exchange with others.

I feel inclined to Relativity myself. I think there is no one absolute principle in the universe. I think everything is relative. But I also feel, most strongly, that in itself each individual living creature is absolute: in its own being. And that all things in the universe are just relative to the individual living creature. And that individual living creatures are relative to each other. (*FU* 191)

Lawrence's reflection begins with a declaration that "everything is relative," which was a quite popular intellectual position at the time. Katherine Hayles draws parallels between this relative thinking of Lawrence and the contemporary "New Physics" ushered in by quantum theories:

[M]ost physicists would agree (though for very different reasons) with many of Lawrence's deepest beliefs: that reality is a dynamic, ever-changing flux rather than the manifestation of rigid laws; that the observer, rather than being isolated in Cartesian objectivity, participates in that flux; and that certain aspects of reality elude deterministic analysis. In the absence of much factual knowledge about the new science, Lawrence nevertheless anticipated the spirit of many of its principal results. (107)

While I agree with Hayles's observation that Lawrence used such "relative" thinking to counteract "the positivist belief that scientific logic was capable of completely comprehending and predicting physical reality" (106), I believe his "relative" thinking has more affinities with a philosophy of life than with quantum physics. This is evidenced in the quoted passage from *Fantasia of the Unconscious* by what promptly follows the declaration of relativity— his surprising reaffirming, "most strongly," of an "absolute" sense of the individual being. This "absolute" sense is immediately qualified by the phrase "in its own being." The following statement of the relational nature between the individual and other things carefully avoids implications of imperiousness or dominance by calling the interrelation "relative" instead of "absolute," though admittedly the individual creature is regarded here as the point of reference.

This stated "absolute" sense in this paragraph, paradoxically precluded by a principle of universal relativity, then self-contradictorily qualified by its self-limited status, leads one to think that the "absolute" here is not "absolute" at all in the sense of being "ultimate," "exclusive," "primary," "center of the world," "of the highest order," or "measure of all things." Instead, I argue that this

“absolute” sense placed on the individual life signifies a “will,” “faith,” or “existential imperative,” absolute in terms of its will to life, its unconditional orientation toward life.

And at the end of the paragraph any lingering suspicion of an “absolute” individualism is dispelled by Lawrence’s proclamation that all individual lives are relative to each other. This realization implicitly acknowledges again that the so-called “absolute” individual self consists not in its superiority, priority, or supremacy, for as soon as it comes in contact with other selves, it realizes its own relative status, that others by nature are born with the same “absolute” will to life as oneself. This presents an ethical and social understanding, not a radically individualist one. Therefore, the “absolute” can only refer to a conative, volitional, aspirational imperative. Understood in this way, the absolute is not opposed to or in contradiction with the “relative” or “relational.” Instead, both are fundamental conditions of *being*—being as defined by a will to life, as well as by an awareness of relationality. To put it simply, Lawrence is saying that each individual being should “absolutely” affirm life, while accepting and embracing true relationality. Michael Bell’s contention that “Lawrence’s absolutes are always relative, and his relatives are never simply relative” proves to be particularly illuminating (149).

With this updated understanding of Lawrence’s unique sense of “absolute,” it is clear that Ursula’s passional affirmation of the infinite contained in a cellular organism exemplifies exactly such an *absolute* will to life. In Ursula’s vision she chooses to see the individual being as something other than an object of empirical knowledge, to be pinned down with absolute certainty according to laws that exhaustively dictate its actions and reactions. The “supreme infinity” of life, figured by the gleaming nucleus Ursula sees through the microscope, as the “absolute” individual living creature from the prose excerpt, is also an existential imperative, meaning that the will to life—the process of painful self-creation and self-overcoming, must be unconditionally, “absolutely,” “supremely” affirmed. Ursula’s vision presents ultimately a different individual

subject from that of mechanistic philosophy: not a subject of consciousness or knowledge, but a subject of action.⁵

To sum up, the mechanistic worldview presents a totalizing and tyrannical “absolute” that promises total transparency, certainty, and predictability. By contrast, Ursula’s visionary moment that pictures a “supreme infinity” in the individual being affirms an “absolute” will to life, with the “absolute” here denoting conative, purposive, aspirational self-creation instead of claim to objective knowledge or universalizing representation.

Admittedly, even with such an affirmed attitude toward life, the “infinity” envisioned by Ursula feels more rhetorical than literal. After all, in terms of biological compositions and chemical reactions, the unicellular organism is pretty much fixed. There is nothing infinite about it. Similarly, the potentially endless ways that individual receptivity can reflect and react to external reality are also only a theoretical construct. The dramatic contrast between the oneness of the cell structure and the infinity of life’s possible manifestations proves difficult to reconcile. It is therefore telling that Ursula’s conclusion forms itself mainly in negative expressions— “could not...only, not limited...nor mere.” The “absolute” imperative to affirm life may turn out to be a private article of faith or a personal mantra.

Indeed, this is more of an impassioned wager than a scientific refutation of the mechanistic denial of life’s possibilities and potentiality. To vindicate her will to life, Ursula has to set up the bet with personal stakes. The only way she can pull this off is by her own example, by proving with her living experiences that such reductive mechanistic understanding of life is false. Her visionary moment, in other words, yields no objective knowledge, but affective energy and emotive resolve. It is an act of expressivity that possibly leads to acts of performativity. And Ursula shows her readiness for action by looking forward expectantly to the immediate future, as her subsequent

⁵ I owe the verbal formulation of this distinction to Suzanne Guerlac (4), who uses the conceptions to distinguish Henri Bergson from post-structuralist theorists.

thoughts indicate: “Ursula sat abstracted over her microscope, in suspense. Her soul was busy, infinitely busy, in the new world. In the new world, Skrebensky was waiting for her—he would be waiting for her” (409). The revealed purposiveness in striving to embrace infinity in a life of finitude urges her to actively and creatively seek her own fulfillment in a new world.

3. The Rainbow

Another pivotal visionary moment in the novel is the regenerating symbol of the rainbow witnessed by Ursula at the end. As the novel unfolds, the anti-mechanistic vision she has glimpsed in the microscope episode is put to practice. Yet what she strives to achieve throughout the rest of the novel with her fated lover Anton Skrebensky does not come to fruition. Their relationship ends disastrously precisely because Anton is innately deficient for purposive endeavors toward a life of creative and imaginative possibilities. During her temporary defeat and uncertainty, she undergoes a period of tumultuous mental struggles, at the end of which the rainbow appears as a symbol of her inalienable potential for self-renewal.

In an essay entitled “Whistling of Birds,” written in the years immediately following *The Rainbow*, Lawrence describes the power of self-renewal intrinsic to life: “Even whilst we stare, at the ragged horror of birds scattered, broadcast, part-eaten, the soft, uneven cooing of the pigeon ripples from the outhouses...[w]e cannot hold back the spring...[f]or it is in us, as well as without us” (*RD* 22). Similarly, Ursula gradually finds this unstoppable stream of life reviving in her at the end of the novel:

As she grew better, she sat to watch a new creation. As she sat at her window, she saw the people go by in the street below, colliers, women, children, walking each in the husk of an old fruition, but visible through the husk, the swelling and the heaving contour of the new germination...

In everything she saw she grasped and groped to find the creation of the living God, instead of the old, hard barren form of bygone living. Sometimes great terror possessed her. Sometimes she lost touch, she lost her feeling, she could only know the old horror of the husk which bound in her and all mankind. They were all in prison, they were all going mad.

She saw the stiffened bodies of the colliers, which seemed already enclosed in a coffin, she

saw...corruption so pure that it is hard and brittle... And then, in the blowing clouds, she saw a band of faint iridescence colouring in faint colours a portion of the hill. And forgetting, startled, she looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself... The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. (458)

The rainbow, as George H. Ford has pointed out, appears at significant moments in all three generations of the Brangwens (75). However, for the first two generations, the rainbow is introduced by the omniscient narrator to symbolize the achieved equilibrium in their marital relations. The characters themselves are not aware of it. It is only with the third generation, with Ursula, that the rainbow is actually seen and intensely experienced in the individual consciousness of the character, thus qualifying it as a visionary moment.

The visionary glimpse of the rainbow, the leap of faith and sudden flash of hope is often regarded as unfounded, unconvincing, and individualistic. F. R. Leavis questions the optimistic ending by observing that there is little to nothing in the novel to justify Ursula's faith in the rainbow (42-3); Julian Moynahan also thinks it is Lawrence not the neurotic Ursula who sees the rainbow (55); David J. Gordon interprets the ending as proof of Lawrence's "willed optimism" against "felt pessimism." Gordon sees Lawrence as "unwilling or unable to discover objective correlatives" and pronounces Ursula's vision of "the new creation" as "arbitrary and abrupt" (88). Such questionings of Ursula's visionary experience are in keeping with Paul Maltby's verdict on the visionary moment in general that it "lacks significant propositional content" and "is a source of precious feeling rather than articulable knowledge" (19).

In a sense, if Ursula's first visionary moment of "supreme infinity" is largely a passional

assertion of the individual's absolute will to life in the face of cold-spirited scientific materialism, her vision of the rainbow at the end yields hardly better solutions, for the rainbow after all, is a recycled symbol from Christianity. Yet it would be a mistake to see Ursula's myth-making as a mere anachronistic recourse to the old biblical source. Though the drawn inspiration is from an established religious story, Ursula's visionary power, infused with her imaginative flair and fueled by her urgent psychological need, gives the story a far less particularized religious context, and a more general field of application. It is a transformative story without being a conversion narrative. The crucial force, a divine agency, is missing; it is more a testament to her innate, native ability of self-renewal, than an appeal to, or evocation of a power from above. The rainbow is the accompanying occasion, or epiphenomenon, rather than the cause of her transformed state of mind.

On the whole, though Ursula in her two visionary moments falls short of clearly pointing the way to a viable future, the visionary experiences usher in for her a new course of *affective* imagination. I would argue that in both visionary moments, it is the secondary affective effects, instead of any real solutions or alternatives, that save Ursula's spirit from being besieged and entrapped by a mechanistic worldview. In a word, hers are self-assertive acts of expressivity bolstered by local affective energy, like the purely expressivist redness of the poppies that Lawrence uses to symbolize the power and purpose of life in *Study of Thomas Hardy*.

This seems a rather gloomy situation—the options are painfully limited; one is reduced to the last resort, which is essentially an act of passivity, doing mostly self-repair and reorienting. Active seeking is temporarily out of the question, for the world is filled with false “objects”—mass-produced by mechanistic power, and treacherous “relations” —with people whose emotional intelligence and spiritual vitality has been emptied out. What is available now is just clearing the ground for more creative and collective engagement later rather than positive action itself, a moment of introspection rather than exertion.

However, we should not underestimate the impact brought about by the visionary mode. This seemingly modest visionary capacity of invoking an alternative imaginative mode and the affective self-fortification it brings is what distinguishes Ursula from a series of victimized male characters in Lawrence's novels, whose minds are seized by and locked into the dominant ideology of automatism and mechanism.

Mechanistic thinking, despite being a product of historical specificity, attempts to eliminate its own historical status and inaugurates itself as an absolute teleological orthodoxy. It seeks to end history and establish itself as a totalized outlook that rules out alternative imaginaries. In Lawrence's novels, characters exhibit different symptoms for this modern malaise, including a pathological adherence to a mechanistic will, complete surrender to oblivion and unconsciousness, obsession with the mechanization of nature and human beings, and also a strange prowess in managing matter and machines. The victims seem to be trapped in a timeless, ghoulish world by the logic of their reductive imagination, in which their affective and intellectual faculties are paralyzed.

There are four major examples in Lawrence's novels of this psychological disorder caused by socio-historical conditions, typically men, presumably because for Lawrence men are more naturally drawn to mechanistic ways of thinking. First, there is Tom Brangwen Junior, Ursula's charismatic uncle, who, after losing interest in all worldly pursuits, resigns himself to purely mechanistic management of the coal mine; then Anton Skrebensky, the very epitome of mechanistic self-oblivion and self-effacement, whose enervated nature proves to be too deficient in creative energy and emotional stamina to escape the deadly fate of giving in to thoughtless darkness and self-nullification inspired by the African continent; the third one is Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*, whose entire mode of being is plagued by self-abandonment to unconscious darkness and forfeiture of volition, tellingly compensated by an uncanny ability to manipulate

matter that results in his great success in managing the coal mine; and finally, there is Clifford Chatterley, who, after his traumatic experiences during the war, not only becomes physically disabled, but also prostitutes himself wholeheartedly to the mechanistic rhythms in his social and emotional life. A comment upon Gerald Crich would suffice to sum up all four: “as if he were limited to one form of existence, one knowledge, one activity, a sort of fatal halfness, which to himself seemed wholeness” (*WL* 207).

These characters not only identify with values embodied in machines, but act like machines themselves. Once the simple and definitive mechanistic explanation of life is put forth as the solely valid worldview, the only logical way for humans to construct meaning and pursue a purposive life is to go after the goddess of efficiency, to chase ever increasing prowess with diminishing return, to perfect efficaciousness of manipulating the material world, and to worship numbers. The emotional reductionism this doctrine entails is evident in how the four male characters struggle to feel anything at all, to endow human spiritual and intellectual life with any kind of inherent, autotelic significance, because to do so is irreconcilable with the materialistic law of efficient productivity, precise controllability, and perfect manipulability. Therefore, what ensues is an overpowering sense of doomedness, entrapment, and stuckness. To use one of Lawrence’s poignant expressions, they are imprisoned in an emotional state of “anarchy of fixed law, which is mechanism” (*RDP* 29).

The visionary mode serves to break the enclosure, the static self-entrapment by reinstating a sense of historical relativity that exposes the false claim to absolute status of totalizing ideologies. Ursula’s visionary moments are instantiations of her imaginative and affective powers for alternative envisioning. Her acts of rebellion are more than symbolic or gestural—they are in a way self-evidence of the unique human ability embodied in the visionary power. Ursula is the chosen protagonist not because her visionary moment points to a definite path or solution, but simply

because she is still *able* to feel, to see, to imagine differently. Her visionary moment saves her not with its content, but with the ontological demand to *be* that lifts her out of the monotonous rhythm of mechanism. Hence, she is the rightful heroine of the novel, hailed by one critic as the “first ‘free soul’ in the English novel” (Sagar 57).

This ability of self-renewal may seem like a privilege granted to Ursula by the author. Yet in a sense, it is not. The conclusion shouldn't be that a chosen few are born with special abilities to receive such moments of revelation and regeneration, and some people are just deader than others so we need to resign to our fate. Lawrence is implying that one needs to choose life first (in the form of an “absolute” affirmation, or orientation), instead of death and darkness, before one can be baptized with fresh eyes and renewed sensibility to receive intensified moments of significance, before the real offshoots and branching can start to come out again. This “desire” for life comes not from a privileged special realm but resides locally in each individual. Lawrence makes a crucial distinction between human beings and the machine: “The machine has no windows. But even the most mechanized human being has only got his windows nailed up, or bricked in” (*Phoenix* 31). Those characters whose end appear to be foreshadowed from the beginning and who do not exhibit much struggle are not *doomed*, but have *failed* to choose life over death. They barely put up a fight.

Not surprisingly, all four men eventually head irretrievably in their tailspin towards the dark fate of completely relinquishing their active and creative consciousness. Their doom in a sense comes as a result of their failure to see the historically specific and relative nature of their mechanistic nemesis. They don't make conscious efforts to conjure, however briefly, some alternative imaginative mode that would put their emotional turmoil and intellectual sterility into perspective. Consequently, compared with Ursula's characteristic impulsive, sporadic upsurges of heightened consciousness to rebel against the dominant mode of sensibility, the four male characters' arc of mental progression is one of steady decline into self-annihilation and spiritual automatism—

ungraced by any visitations from a realm of imagined alterity.

CHAPTER 5 *Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo*: The Visionary Mode as Missed Opportunity

The previous chapter on *The Rainbow* illustrates how the visionary moments in the novel counteract two forms of ideological absolute, transcendent religiosity and philosophical mechanism. In this chapter, I examine the visionary mode in relation to one ideological bias of Lawrence's own, namely his notorious idea of power, which is essentially an advocacy of a form of authoritarianism for both social organization and personal relations. I intend to show that the visionary moments in Lawrence's "power" novels, namely *Aaron's Rod* (1922) and *Kangaroo* (1923), act as a countervailing force against his overt obsession with and espousal of power.

Three key components of Lawrence's idea of power can be identified—a human figure as the authoritarian leader, a substitution of voluntary obedience to the leader for individual initiative and potentiality, and a hierarchical structure that inaugurates a relation of inequality. In contrast, I present three visionary moments that take place independent of a power relation and implicitly call into question its authoritarian nature—Aaron's visionary moment of a "maskless and invisible" self, Aaron's transportive flute-playing with the Marchesa, both in *Aaron's Rod*, and Somers's "non-human" encounter with the full moon by seaside in *Kangaroo*. The first example demonstrates the transformative potential within the individual self, by its open-textured receptivity and heightened awareness, without the intervention of a "power" figure; the second presents a mutually liberating experience between two individuals that is not structured by power, but arises from a relation of participatory equality; the third shows the communion between a single self and non-human elements in a natural scene, which creates a profound affective experience that puts in the shade the influence by a power-wielding *human* figure.

The idea of power, together with its personalized form, the leader, assumes a prominent place in Lawrence's writings in the first half of the 1920s. Though variations exist, power, in the

Lawrentian context, generally means the exercise of authority, or assumption of control, over one individual or social group by another. With the idea of power Lawrence intends to imagine a social order that subjugates the majority of citizens to one leader figure, or as Lilly puts it in *Aaron's Rod*, “a real committal of the life-issue of inferior beings to the responsibility of a superior being” (281). Despite Lawrence's frequent qualification that power is distinguished from brute force by a voluntary instead of compelled submission of the follower to the leader, it would not be inappropriate to characterize his power as authoritarian, since, as broadly defined and generally understood, authoritarianism refers to a philosophy of government that demands strict obedience to authority and restrictions of individual freedom.

Power is projected by Lawrence as both an explanation of, and a solution to, the political crises in Western democracies after the Great War. Democratic order is in danger of falling into a bullying mob state, as Lawrence contends that England did during the war, because the liberal conception of the individual as an independent, autonomous, and rational being, while may contain some truth concerning the individual's private self, simply doesn't work on a communal, national level. This is because people also have a *collective* self that has different psychological makeups and emotional needs: “The mass does not act by reason...The more intense or extended the *collective* consciousness, the more does the truly reasonable, individual consciousness sink into abeyance” (*Kangaroo* 298; original italics).

Lawrence proposes that the principles, or “great life-urges” (*Aaron's Rod* 297), to meet those needs and give people a sense of security and purpose are love and power, i.e., general good-will toward each other, and an authority that inspires proper fear. If either one dominates, the masses degenerate into a mob— “Break the balance of the two great controlling influences, and you get, not a simple preponderance of the one influence, but a third State, the mob-state” (*Kangaroo* 300). Since at the particular historical moment the dominant institutional forces, Christianity and

democracy, both overemphasized the love principle, Lawrence called for a reassertion of power to redress the imbalance. The conception of the collective nature of the individual in effect prompted Lawrence to posit power as a socio-political necessity based on a negative understanding of humanity, i.e., its propensity toward unruly, violent, purposeless, centrifugal mob state. Power was justified on the ground of its normative, preventive, stabilizing force, imposed as an authoritarian order to hold in check the mob's destructive instincts.

Critics have been vocal in denouncing Lawrence's lapse of political judgment. Bertrand Russell is most condemnatory by declaring that Lawrence's thinking "led straight to Auschwitz" (115). Others, while less extreme, are equally unsparing. Julian Moynahan believes that the political novels reflect "a temporary breakdown in Lawrence's morale" and demonstrate confused and perverted "political insight" (113); Scott Sanders, insisting that literary and artistic creations "do take political forms" (170), condemns Lawrence for advancing in his novels a "totalitarian social order" (167); Kate Millett, though emphasizing Lawrence's sexual politics, does not hesitate to categorize his mid-career as "excursions into conventional political fascism" (245), which are not only politically reactionary, but also sexually repressive. Compared with such scathing judgments, qualified opinions such as voiced by G. M. Hyde's statement that "nowhere does Lawrence support the Fascists; but some of his views...could be assimilated to Fascist ideology" (96) sound almost mild and exonerating.

On the other hand, Graham Hough gives Lawrence the benefit of the doubt, claiming that he "died too early to be put to the only really diagnostic test" and that "[h]is swift intuitive penetration into the real nature of men and women would have saved him from any prolonged complacency towards Fascism in action" (239). This view is echoed by Baruch Hochman, who contends that Lawrence leadership idea is "personal-passional," therefore "so different from the mechanism of fascist self-subordination" (221). Thinking along similar lines, Michael Bells suggests that

Lawrence's deep aversion to bullying serves as both his attraction to power—to curb, check the mob instinct—and “the necessary basis of his ultimate critique of fascism” (152). What is often cited as supportive of this optimistic perspective is Lawrence's own first-hand impression of fascism in Mussolini's Italy in early 1920s—he calls what he witnesses there simply “another kind of bullying” (*Movements* 263). About the delicate balance between a historical, contextual sense on the one hand, and critical, political vigilance on the other in assessing Lawrence's political thinking, Anne Fernihough probably puts it best when she remarks that the fact that the set of imagery and rhetoric used by Lawrence “would be so appropriated [by Nazism] Lawrence could not have foreseen; that it was so appropriated we should not forget” (10).

General political reckonings of Lawrence's authoritarian turn with his idea of power are both politically pertinent and ethically necessary. But critical assessment drawing mostly upon formal political categories and a liberal sensibility has its limitations when it comes to close textual examinations of Lawrence's writings on power. Critics are often puzzled by the fact that Lawrence's authoritarian turn does not present a complete abandonment of, or turn away from, his former valued principle of individuality. In fact, the two seemingly contradictory sets of values very often appear side by side, intertwined in the same work.

Barbara Mensch identifies this paradox in Lawrence's thinking by highlighting his two contrasting views on the individual being: “His view of the mass of men as ‘insects and instruments’ is directly contradictory to his view that ‘every man is a sacred and holy individual, never to be violated,’ which she terms as “the central core of his ambivalence” (167). This ambivalence in Lawrence's thinking is reformulated by Simon Casey as a self-contradiction between authoritarianism and libertarianism, which, Casey observes with professed bafflement, “compete not only from book to book, but sometimes on the same page, even within the same paragraph” (116). More recently, Colin D. Pearce attempts to resolve this contradiction by seeing it

as Lawrence's dramatic way of conducting his famous "thought experiments." Pearce concludes that:

[Lawrence's] point is that it is simply impossible to have both these principles [individual freedom vs. hierarchy, subordination] extended to their fullest amplification in any given socio-political order...

Lawrence's teaching in all this, then, is that we have no choice but to learn to live somewhere on the spectrum between these two deeply desirable poles of egalitarian individual freedom on the one hand and hierarchical community solidarity on the other. (109)

This in my view presents a too convenient way out. It tends to make light of the earnestness and vehemence with which Lawrence expresses both positions. Besides, seeing the opposition solely through abstract political principles threatens to obfuscate textual specificities. And Michael Bentley's observation that Lawrence's "anarchism and dictatorship...both offer ways of theorising which minimize or altogether avoid discussion of how political communities function" (78), though insightful as political commentary, suffers from the same limitation.

The choice seems to be between the position that Lawrence is simply an inconsistent, illogical thinker, or that this contradiction demonstrates a characteristic Lawrentian way of thinking beyond an either-or logic, both of which seem unsatisfactory to me. Here I offer another perspective. It is true that when analyzed through formally defined political categories, the authoritarian tendency of power is doctrinally opposed to the valorization of individuality, but if we examine the two in novelistic contexts, they assume quite different discursive forms.

In the political novels, the power theme is put forth mostly as theoretical postulations, speculative preoccupations, somehow superimposed upon the dramatic actions of the narrative, and extraneous to the novelistic context. It fails to materialize and has few instances of substantiation. On the other hand, affirmation of agential and situated individuality is not primarily cast in the form of polemical doctrines or strident rhetoric, but more convincingly and concretely presented through its enactment in the lived experiences of the characters, notably through visionary

moments. Thus, though the two tendencies are abstractly, doctrinally opposed, one lacks the crucial experiential actualization and concreteness that defines the other. The visionary mode offers a revealing illustration of this difference and highlights the inherent deficiency and falsity of the ideology of power—that the power relation is not conducive to, but prohibitive of, intensified, revelatory experientiality.

1. Aaron's Visionary Experience of a "Maskless and Invisible" Self

Written between 1917-1921, *Aaron's Rod*, which Lawrence called his last "serious England novel—the end of *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* line" (*Letter IV* 92), is also his first novel in which the idea of power is explicitly set forth. The novel charts Aaron's quest for a new life. He leaves behind his marital attachment and familial duties, mingles with a Bohemian circle in London for a while, briefly lives on patronage by English expatriates in Italy, and finally ends up in Florence with Rawdon Lilly, a Lawrentian figure who professes the doctrine of power, and to whom, it is suggested several times across the course of the novel, Aaron is eventually going to become some kind of disciple. Though there are critics like John Worthen who sees the novel's ending as Aaron's "mystical submission" (132) to Lilly, for all intents and purposes, Aaron remains uncommitted at the end.

The theme of Aaron's quest and self-discovery, however, is borne out in other ways, the most important episode of which is arguably the vividly described experience of Aaron's transmuted "maskless and invisible" new being, conveyed in the form of a visionary moment. Graham Hough's assertion that "Lawrence's characters spend too much of their time in unnaturally heightened states of consciousness" (72) certainly doesn't apply to Aaron, for whom moments such as this are rare. The episode happens during Aaron's early sojourn in the northern Italian town, Novara, amidst a scene of domestic respectability and mundaneness. By this time Aaron has turned his back on his family and his country. Also significant is the fact that the experience comes at a

point in the novel where Aaron is at the furthest reach from Lilly's influence—both geographically, for since he parts with Lilly in London, the latter has wandered off to somewhere in Europe; and also narratively, for Aaron won't be reunited with Lilly until toward the end of the novel.

Aaron feels a momentary barrenness in the present setting, and recalls his old memories of domestic life, which sets him on a series of realizations that eventually precipitates a visionary experience. It starts with him realizing the cause of his connubial struggle is that the marital power game of seeking willful domination impinges upon each other's inviolate, individual singular being:

Then suddenly, on this Sunday evening in the strange country, he realised something about himself. He realised that he had never intended to yield himself fully to her or to anything: that he did not intend ever to yield himself up entirely to her or to anything: that his very being pivoted on the fact of his isolate self-responsibility, aloneness. His intrinsic and central aloneness was the very centre of his being... By the innermost isolation and singleness of his own soul he would abide though the skies fell on top of one another, and seven heavens collapsed. (162)

Compared with Clarissa Dalloway's experiences that put the self in connection with various forms of otherness, Aaron's recognition here of "his intrinsic and central aloneness" and "the innermost isolation and singleness of his own soul" seems to come perilously close to solipsism. However, Lawrence repeatedly affirms the importance of relation-building for the individual self. The best-known example may be from *A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover,"* where Lawrence specifies three fundamental relations the individual needs to have: "First, there is the relation to the living universe. Then comes the relation of man to woman. Then comes the relation of man to man" (*A P LCL* 331). An early summation by F. R. Leavis of Lawrence's philosophy of life also comes to mind—for Lawrence, "it is only by way of the most delicate and complex responsive relations with others that individual can achieve fulfillment" (118). Therefore, the emphasis on singleness of being here should be seen as contextual and relative, for it is made to correct Aaron's excessive entanglement in marriage. As Aaron comes to conclude in a following paragraph, one

needs to “give thyself”—just make sure you “give thyself not away” (165).

This belated realization of his fundamental alienation from marriage comes, Lawrence tells us, only “vaguely,” and “half articulated” (162), and continues into deeper states of awareness and revelation. He now comes to feel that he used to live under a disguise, a false persona, in the form of “passport,” as he terms it:

These authentic passports, self-describing: nose short, mouth normal... This ready-made and very banal idea of himself as a really quite nice individual: eyes blue, nose short, mouth normal, chin normal: this he had insisted was really himself. It was his conscious mask.

Now at last, after years of struggle, he seemed suddenly to have dropped his mask on the floor, and broken it. His authentic self-describing passport, his complete and satisfactory idea of himself suddenly became a rag of paper, ridiculous. (163)

The “self-describing passport” as “his mask” here reminds one of what Lawrence calls “personality” elsewhere: “*Persona*, in Latin, is a player’s mask, or a character in a play,” and “personality is that which is transmitted from the person to his audience: the transmissible effect of a man. A good actor can assume a personality” (*RDP* 74,5). Hence the warning: “Never trust for one moment any individual who has unmistakable personality. He is sure to be a life-traitor. His personality is only a sort of actor’s mask” (75). The shattering of Aaron’s mask, the tearing apart of his old passport, is thus an act of getting rid of habitually formed, socially imposed “personalities,” after which Aaron transfigures into an unprecedented version of himself, exhilaratingly strange. It ushers in a full-bloomed visionary moment of Aaron’s new state of invisible being:

His mask, his idea of himself dropped and was broken to bits.

There he sat now maskless and invisible.

...

The old Aaron Sisson was as if painfully transmuted, as the Invisible Man when he underwent his transmutations. Now he was gone, and no longer to be seen. His visibility lost for ever.

And then what? Sitting there as an invisible presence, the preconceived world melted also and was gone. (163-4)

Paradoxically, the true self “unmasked” proves to be unrecognizable to habituated perception, for it doesn’t give Aaron more “visibility” in the eyes of the public, but renders his “visibility lost for

ever.” Another possibility is that there is nothing behind the mask, there is not only no “true self,” but no self at all; the mask is all there is. Interestingly radical as this possibility sounds, it is contradicted by the repeated use of the word “transmutation,” which indicates that Aaron’s self changes from one form to another, as opposed to, say, a “dissolution” or “disintegration” that would confirm a selfless void, blank behind the broken mask. In his new invisible state, the outside world, the “preconceived,” i.e., habitual, conventional world consisting of other formed personalities no longer matters to him. The known social and moral constraints “melt” into thin air.

To convey a lived sense of Aaron’s visionary transformation, Lawrence does not stop at narration, or “telling.” He goes on to “show” it to the reader through a vivid experiential account of Aaron’s felt moment of transmutation, drawing predominantly on sense impressions, albeit delivered in a metaphorical sense:

Having in some curious manner tumbled from the tree of modern knowledge, and cracked and rolled out from the shell of the preconceived idea of himself like some dark, night-lustrous chestnut from the green ostensibility of the burr, he lay as it were exposed but invisible on the floor, knowing, but making no conceptions: knowing, but having no idea. Now that he was finally unmasked and exposed, the accepted idea of himself cracked and rolled aside like a broken chestnut-burr, the mask split and shattered, he was at last quiet and free. (164)

Aaron’s experience is conveyed through analogies to sensory and bodily experiences, like a dark chestnut coming out its burr. In this intimate, instinctual “knowing” he transcends what Lawrence calls “mental knowledge”— “having no conceptions” and “no ideas.” And as a final sum-up of this prolonged intense visionary experience, Lawrence reemphasizes the non-conceptual, even non-verbal, nature of the whole experience—Aaron’s initiation is a “silent, maskless state of wordless comprehension” (165). Thus, the episode presents not Aaron’s reasoning or mental process but an intensifying progression of experiential transfiguration. Leaving behind ethical ratiocination, the novel attempts to justify Aaron’s decision and actions by the authenticity of his feelings and experiences.

This sustained and intensified visionary moment affirms a conception of the individual self that is neither a sealed, isolated, autonomous entity, nor an overdetermined product of external forces. Its open-texturedness and susceptibility puts it in a dynamic exchange with its surroundings, thus inscribing possibilities for change and self-overcoming. The episode exemplifies not a version of philosophical individualism, but more properly a form of existential becoming. As Michael Bell aptly states, Lawrence turns the old integral self into “a dynamic and evolutionary matrix of competing forces rather than an autonomous ethical entity” (5). Fiona Becket also characterizes the Lawrence’s conception of the subject as one that is “constantly (re)created” (*The Thinker* 66).

This transformative, self-overcoming capacity of the individual self is written off by the ideology of power, which demands the relinquishing of individual initiative and prescribes willing, voluntary giving up of one’s will. Lawrence repeatedly expresses his impatience and frustration with the average person’s failure of self-overcoming: “Understanding...doesn’t belong to every man” (*RDP* 34); “most people are half-born slaves,” and “most people never get there” (*FU* 76-7). The ever-present call for novel experience, the God’s urge, as Lawrence calls it, will always elude “the bulk of humanity,” for they “will be helpless to interpret the message” (*Kangaroo* 296). And since the individual is incapable of self-renewal, the leader is needed: “Somebody has to give us a clue” (*RDP* 323). Diminishment of individual agency entails that meaning and direction of life be administered, dealt out by the leader. All that’s left for the follower to do is to submit “one’s will, becoming a spark of this great tendency” (*RDP* 46) and relish this “joy of obedience” (*Kangaroo* 107). Through obedience, they are made “unconsciously happy” instead of “consciously unhappy” (*Kangaroo* 120).

In Aaron’s visionary moment of self-transformation, arguably the most important one in the novel, the leader has no place, for the deeply immediate experiential quality is incongruous with intervention by another human figure. After this deep, richly sensual, radically unassimilable self-

transformative experience, whatever Lilly has to offer as a leader would seem a letdown. In fact, his very claim to leadership has often been questioned. Julian Moynahan comments that “Lawrence never gets around to demonstrate the power of Lilly, his superiority,” while Keith Sagar concurs by remarking that “the novel presents few of his credentials as leader” (112). Leader or not, Lilly surely confers no intense experiences comparable to those of Aaron’s visionary invisible being. Whenever Aaron is called upon to enter a form of apprenticeship, his instinctive rebellious spirit, in the form of disrupting and questioning what Lilly proposes, prevents any fruition of achieved relation between them. Aaron remains his own master till the end of the novel.

2. Aaron’s Flute-playing with the Marchesa

Now, the power principle, when applied to personal relations, implies disparagement of two things: first, individual initiatives and potentiality, and second, positive outcome of the interchange between free, equal individuals. By contrast, the new order that the leader would impose is a hierarchical one of inequality. If Aaron’s solitary moment of self-transformation refutes power’s claim to supremacy over individual potentiality, the episode of Aaron’s flute-playing with the Marchesa depicts the most significant interchange between two equal individuals in the whole novel, which contrasts sharply with the notable absence of such a defining moment of shared insight between Aaron and Lilly, though the power relation Lilly proposes to Aaron is supposed to effect precisely such experiences of enlightened understanding. G. M. Hyde’s claim that “there is no privileged domain of consciousness in *Aaron’s Rod*” (14) is right in the sense that no characters are established as the sole purveyor of truth or superior insight. Yet there are privileged *moments* of consciousness, attained either individually or interpersonally between two free individuals, that culminate in condensed significance.

The Marchesa, an American by birth but married into Italian nobility in Florence, has a short military officer for a husband, and performs her social duties by giving cultural and musical

gatherings. The character is apparently intended in the novel as another embodiment of female temptation for Aaron to overcome on his path of becoming Lilly's disciple. Yet a deep rapport between the two can be detected in spite of such a schematic design.

Her confinement within an oppressive and debilitating social life and her intuitive preference for proud single being is symbolized by her intolerance of chords, and keyboard instruments in general, which, reducing single, individual, distinct notes into a conflation of blended sounds, represent a form of jumbled, aggregated, undifferentiated collective existence (225). This of course is in essence the same cultural and personal preference as Aaron's choice of flute as his instrument. The flute enables Aaron's solitary quest by furnishing him with a living, but it also betokens a desired spiritual singleness by Aaron's typical stand-alone manner of performance. The ethical implication of the single musical note/instrument, as Susan Reid points out, is difference as against conformity (149). This singleness of being, the clarity and singularity of independent existence signals their joint desire for alternative imaginations of life lying outside of the obligatory social norms and customs they both detest.

Because of this temperamental affinity the two characters transcend the overt *femme fatale* design that the novel assigns to them, and during the brief moment shared in that pristine flute music they have a glimpse of something new. Aaron's flute playing draws him to the Marchesa in a way far more compelling than his sexual craving does, for it goes more deeply, in symbolic forms, to express and satisfy a profound cultural and spiritual yearning for the transcendence of bourgeoisie morality. A simple medieval solo passage played on Aaron's flute unites them in a transported state of awareness, a shared visionary experience:

And there, in the darkness of the big room, he put his flute to his lips, and began to play. It was a clear, sharp, lilted run-and-fall of notes, not a tune in any sense of the word, and yet a melody: a bright, quick sound of pure animation: a bright, quick, animate noise, running and pausing. It was like a bird's singing, in that it had no human emotion or passion or intention or meaning—a ripple and poise of animate sound. But it was unlike a bird's singing, in that the

notes followed clear and single one after the other, in their subtle gallop. (227)

The music on the flute is purged of all hackneyed human feelings and hidebound sentiments; it is disorienting and strange, but not purely animalistic and unrecognizable, because it is delivered with a distinct articulacy that attests to the creative spirit enlivening it; its medieval origin presumably prevents it from being contaminated by excessive cultural influence in subsequent ages; vital, quick (a word in Lawrence's dictionary referring not primarily to speed, but to the quality of "quivering with life"), animated and galloping, it epitomizes the life force of the individual being. Its piquant articulacy, its accentuated "aural" quality, its resemblance to and divergence from "bird's singing," converge to liberate the Marchesa from a herd mentality and a herd morality and uplift her towards an understanding of the singularity of being. It works a profound change in her:

She seemed like one who had been kept in a horrible enchanted castle—for years and years. Oh, a horrible enchanted castle, with wet walls of emotions and ponderous chains of feelings and a ghastly atmosphere of must-be. She felt she had seen through the opening door a crack of sunshine, and thin, pure, light outside air, outside, beyond this dank and beastly dungeon of feelings and moral necessity. (227)

The "enchanted castle" is her married life and social life, and all the duties, expectations, conventions, which reduce the sphere of free actions of the individual to a restricted "atmosphere of must-be." This fiercely single and austere flute music revives her sense of her inner independent and unique being and allows her a glimpse of the realm of freedom and alternative possibilities lying beyond the confines of her social circumstances.

The narrative makes it clear that this is a moment of reciprocal expansion, a shared moment of visionary understanding and empathetic rapport between Aaron and the Marchesa— "He knew that they understood one another, he and she. Without any moral necessity or any other necessity. Outside—they had got outside of the castle of so-called human life" (228). Their understanding and a new sense of being precipitates an extension, a liberation of imaginative space— "Outside the

horrible, stinking human castle of life. A bit of true, limpid freedom. Just a glimpse” (228). It thus constitutes a supra-individual state of awareness, for it results not in exclusive interaction between the parties during the initiation process, in notions or emotions directed solely at, or grounded entirely upon, each other, but puts the two individuals in a new relation with the outside world, allowing them access to a broader realm beyond the restraints of the “human castle of life” and “moral necessity.”

This liberating visionary moment brought about through participatory equality poses a challenge to the hierarchical structure of inequality sanctioned by power. Lawrence has always held a strong view of natural differences among people; a well-known statement is given by Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*: “In the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as different in quality and quantity...One man isn’t any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically other.” This could sometimes serve as a wholesome critical spirit against certain naive notions of egalitarianism. With his turn to the idea of power, however, Lawrence is induced to reconceive the innate, incomparable differences among humans as natural “inequality”: “power is given differently, in varying degrees and varying kind to different people. It always was so, it always will be so. There will never be equality in power. There will always be unending inequality” (*RDP* 326). Or more elaborately:

Among men, the difference in *being* is infinite. And it is a difference in degree as well as in kind. One man *is*, in himself, more, more alive, more of a man, than another. One man has greater being than another: a purer manhood, a more vivid livingness. The difference is infinite. (*RDP* 367)

The above line of thinking eventually leads to an unsalutary distinction between the “inferiors” and the “superiors.” The fact that Lawrence is using the dubious idea of masculinity (“manhood”) as the evaluative measure of human worth (even among men) effectively sends him on a path of worshipping power.

As a result, free association among “equal” individuals is unlikely to lead to truly significant, transformative experiences, for two incomplete individuals in themselves can’t achieve any increase of power or amplification of meaning. This belief underlies Lawrence’s objection to the “love” principle, whether in the form of romantic attachment, or comradely brotherhood. In either case, it is nothing but two atomized individuals, acting with their limited power, exposing their own innate shortcomings and deficiencies, and falling short of fulfilling the creative end of bringing into existence something new.

Therefore, “not brotherhood, equality, but obedience to authority” (*FU* 191). The unequal relation between the leader and the follower is based on an imbalance of power, and this very inequality makes the relationship effective and beneficial, because the superior leader has power surplus to share with the follower. Significant changes can only happen when real power is transferred in this way, when there is a channeling of energy from the powerful leader to the follower. The follower only needs to have a “passionate yearning of a soul for a stronger, greater individual,” “and obey them to the death” (*FU* 191,2). This is the best scenario, for with the natural inequality in the distribution of power among humans, Lawrence insists that it is “[B]etter to touch it in others than not having it” (*RDP* 327).

Against this view that positive experiences are a limited and scarce resource to be doled out by the leader, the visionary episode of Aaron and the Marchesa demonstrates the generative potentials in human reciprocity, based not on an asymmetrical power structure, but on an equal basis. It depicts the relation between self and the other not as hierarchical, subjugating, oppositional, but relational, complementary, and mutually reinforcing. If their example disproves a potentially bullying relationship of power and endorses petty dominance by neither party, it also does nothing to approximate to self-isolating individualism. It bypasses the false opposition between self-abandonment and self-centeredness by focusing on the recovery of self-possession and

strengthening of individual singularity through reciprocal ways of relating to each other and a collective effort at reaching a higher plane of moral imagination.

With such a deep affinity between them, briefly glimpsed in the flute-playing episode, it is both unfortunate and unconvincing that the relation between Aaron and the Marchesa turns out to be no more than an ordinary affair and the woman proves to be expectedly possessive and passive. The novel is indeed, as one critic describes, “most notably unfair to its women” (Worthen 132), for the episode implies so much potential for a real transformative relation reaching beyond the narrow confines of romantic love or sensual fulfillment. One suspects it is because Lawrence never intends to give them a chance to develop a relationship like that of Birkin and Ursula. To reduce the significance of the episode in the novel to merely Aaron’s adventurous paramour indicates that Lawrence is unconsciously pruning suggestions of the episode to fit it into his overall scheme, which requires Aaron to escape the trap of a femme fatale on his journey toward becoming Lilly’s follower.

3. Somers’s “Non-human” Encounter with the Full Moon

If the two visionary episodes in *Aaron’s Rod* challenge power’s diminishment of the significance of both the agential subject and the interaction between free, equal individuals, the visionary moment in *Kangaroo* calls into question the very figure of the human leader itself that attempts to embody power.

The plot of the novel is centered on a Lawrentian figure, an English writer Lovatt Somers, who travels to Australia and becomes involved in proto-fascist underground organization, the Diggers, whose leader, Kangaroo, a lawyer named Ben Cooley, attempts to recruit Somers to his cause. Somers eventually refuses to pledge himself to Kangaroo, who later gets fatally shot during a fascist-socialist confrontation. The novel ends with Somers leaving Australia for America.

Somers’s falling out with Kangaroo and his departure from Australia lead some critics to see the

novel as Lawrence's rejection of the power/leadership idea as a whole (Casey 13). I think this is mistaken. If the relatively few and restrained self-promotional remarks on power by Lilly in *Aaron's Rod* might give one the impression that Lawrence still has scruples about its strident anti-liberal ideology, the extensive comments on power in *Kangaroo* leave no room for doubt as to Lawrence's seriousness in espousing the idea. In fact, Somers has no objections to Kangaroo's authoritarian rule. He just thinks that Kangaroo still clings to the wrong idea, an obsolete, outmoded principle. "Kangaroo is in a false position," Somers believes, because "he wants to save everything," "save everyone" and "be God Himself," which "can't be done" (303,4). Kangaroo is a deficient leader because he still relies on the old notion of Christian love instead of power. And after all, Somers still wants a leader, but one who is

clean with glory, having majesty in himself, the innate majesty of the purest *being*, not the strongest instrument, like Napoleon. Not the tuppenny trick-majesty of Kaisers. But the true majesty of the single soul which has all its own weaknesses, but its strength in spite of them, its own loveliness, as well as its might and dread. The single soul that stands naked between the dark God and the dark-blooded masses of men. (303)

In a word, a leader with real *power*, of demi-god stature. At one point, Somers tellingly calls Kangaroo's ruling philosophy, based on paternal benevolence, "human, all too human" (206). The implication of the Nietzschean phrase is that the leader should go beyond the merely "human" and aspire to be the "uebermensch," or "overman," a figure who transcends customary societal values and epitomizes the will to power. "Overman," of course, is still a human figure, and this Nietzschean reference turns out to be an affirmation of the human authoritarian leader, not a rejection of it.

Yet there is another alternative to the "all too human," underexplored in the novel—not the "overman," but the "non-human," natural, elemental forces that defy normal human sentiments and reactions. I believe that this "non-human" existential otherness Somers experiences implicitly questions Lawrence's personalized understanding and projection of power. Its lessons and

implications, however, never reach thematic and textual self-awareness. Lawrence fails to recognize that the power he imagines cannot assume human form without eventually entailing force and coercion, and that it functions best as an impersonal, non-human source of inspiration and provocation, as evidenced in Somers's encounter with the forces of elemental nature in Australia.

Somers's encounter with the "non-human" is powerfully described in a visionary moment in the penultimate chapter of the novel, at which point he leaves the Kangaroo on his death bed and his Diggers scheme stillborn. He walks desultorily to the beach on a full-moon evening, where he attains the status of a "non-human human being" through merging with natural elements in the scene:

Richard rocking with the radium-urgent passion of the night: the huge, desirous swing, the call, clamour, the low hiss of retreat. The call, call! And the answerer. Where was his answerer? There was no living answerer. No dark-bodied, warm-bodied answerer. He knew that when he had spoken a word to the night-half-hidden ponies with their fluffy legs. No animate answer this time. The radium-rocking, wave-knocking night his call and his answer both. This God without feet or knees or face. This sluicing, knocking, urging night, heaving like a woman with unspeakable desire, but no woman, no thighs or breast, no body. The moon, the concave mother-of-pearl of night, the great radium-swinging, and his little self. The call and the answer, without intermediary. Non-human Gods, non-human human being (341).

The exposition of "call" and "answerer" occurs earlier in the novel. They represent another way by Lawrence to convey the dynamic and inexorable propelling force that drives relation-building. The call and the answering are said to take place "between the dark God and the incarnate man," "between the dark soul of woman, and the opposite dark soul of man," and "between the souls of man and man" (267), exactly the three relations singled out by Lawrence as fundamental for the individual's well-being, which I mentioned in the discussion of Aaron's "maskless self."

Except that this time there is "no living answerer," that is, Somers is unable to act as the familiar human subject with its habitual ways of responding to nature's calling, presumably because the radically estranging and dehumanizing forces in the scene have rendered irrelevant any customary

human emotions and reactions. While both the God “without face” and the woman with “no body” provide further disorienting momentum to cleanse any residual associations and resemblances to the readily recognizable “human,” the ensuing juxtaposition of the four phrases with the telling “and” effectively transforms Somers’s “little self” into a natural element too, in the same company with the other natural presences in the scene. This typical Lawrentian “naturalization” of the self is summed up by Anthony Burgess’s comment that “Lawrence’s characters sink easily into the world of ‘otherness,’ where human life accepts that it is also natural life, and identity...is quelled” (208).

Significantly, the qualifier “without intermediary,” besides signifying the obvious sense of “immediate,” direct access to the “call” of nature, also specifically rules out any intervention and influences by human factors, that of a leader included. At the end, we find that though the emphasis has been repeatedly placed on the “non-human,” the intent is paradoxically to radically reimagine, rejuvenate, and recreate the human, for the “non-human human being” is after all inevitably, unmistakably Somers himself. In his famous letter to his then editor Edward Garnett, Lawrence explains that his interest in *The Rainbow* is the “non-human, in humanity” (*Letter II* 182). What happens to Somers here may be construed as a more effective way of bringing into direct contact the human and the *external* non-human.

Meanwhile, about the positive effect that a *human* leader can bring, Lawrence has plenty of romanticized conceptions. The leader is the one who has “strong, just power” (*Kangaroo* 111), and doesn’t “want it selfishly,” and has “some natural gift for it, and some reverence for the sacredness of it” (*Kangaroo* 100). Moreover, power is not merely force, or will, but “*pouvoir*: to be able to,” and “the ability to make,” that is, “to bring about that which may be.” Therefore, “the exercise of power is the setting of life in motion” (*RDP* 323,4). The powerful leader is thus not a stern ruler, but a “saviour” that can “put men into a new relation with the universe” (*RDP* 369,70).

However, the reality is that a personalized power-seeker not only looks “human, all too human,”

dwarfed and trivialized by non-human elemental forces, but its influence on others can be pernicious and toxic. Though Kangaroo doesn't conform to Lawrence's idea of a perfect leader based on power, his ideas of an enforced social order do share the same authoritarian tendency with Lawrence's power. And a glimpse of the possible influence of such an authoritarian figure on his followers may give us a hint of its true nature. This can be seen clearly in another character in the novel, Jack Calcott, who is both the Kangaroo's faithful disciple and able lieutenant. His fervent adherence to Kangaroo's cause of effecting a coup d'état, however, only brings out his bullying nature and killing instinct. When he learns that Somers, after being let in the secret of the Diggers' plan, refuses to commit himself, he insults and physically threatens him. And more appallingly, during the confusion in which the Kangaroo-led proto-fascists disrupt a socialist gathering and the two sides get into physical conflict, Jack becomes unhinged, picks up an iron bar, and "settled three of 'em" (319). My point is, if the example of Kangaroo and Jack has any indications as to what a forceful personal relation would culminate in, any expectations of positive influence are seriously misplaced.

On the other hand, after the collapse of Kangaroo's ideal of a benevolent dictatorship, and him as a personified power figure, Somers, through the intense experiential authenticity and jolting power of the visionary moment by the sea, is able to reconnect with a depersonalized source of power, with his bare and naked self in unmediated contact with the refreshing and regenerating non-human.

4. The Fundamental Incongruity between Power and Enriched Experientiality

All three visionary episodes are shot through with an experiential intensity that Lawrence's ideology of power has failed to achieve. Power needs to be justified through lived experience brought about by a leader figure, because for the leadership idea to work, it needs to generate positive experiential gains for the follower to compensate for circumscribed personal freedom, to

make up for the conceded autonomy, and in a word, to demonstrate its superiority to a relationship of equality. Therefore, power cannot be based solely on a negative estimation of humanity, on the necessity to maintain social stability, but has to deliver a positive promise of enriched experiences and individual fulfillment. And above all, power needs to be more than an idea and reach toward substantiation because as Lawrence himself once remarked: “The world doesn’t fear a new idea. It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can’t pigeon-hole a real new experience” (*SCAL* 13).

However, as we’ve seen, examples of a life-affirming, transformative power relation, which is supposed to “put men into a new relationship with the universe,” are starkly absent from the “power” novels. Lawrence never manages to pull off even one convincing novelistic episode where such a fulfilling relationship takes place. And this constitutes the quandary that Lawrence finds himself in throughout his struggle with his idea of a personalized form of power and his proposal of a life-affirming leadership, i.e., the very representational means and narrative medium to substantiate its supposed advantages and personal benefits are also the critical apparatus to expose its inherent impossibility. The absence of any actualized power relation is therefore not accidental, for there seems to be something intrinsic in power itself that forbids an enriching, intensified, truly transformative personal exchange. Such experiences within a relation of power are structurally impossible.

This is because a power relation inevitably imposes a fixed, absolute structure that restricts the free flow of agential energy and experiential intensity. Its emphasis on obedience and necessary subjection to a leader’s will rigidifies the interchange of affective vitality and contracts the realm of interactive possibilities. After all, despite all the qualifications of the leader idea that Lawrence gives about its supposed uncoercive, unforced nature, there is something inevitably, inescapably forceful and dictatorial about it. It essentially puts in place a party of dominance in interpersonal relations, which runs against the contingent, fluid, unpredictable nature of relation-building. A

participatory, provisional mode of engaging with others, establishing common grounds, and reimagining shared experiences is foreclosed by such a fixed structure of power.

By contrast, interchanges between characters during visionary moments in Lawrence's novels are based on mutual independence and individual singularity. The encounter creates in the self a heightened awareness of the distinct being of the other, and consequently an adjusted understanding of the self in a newly conceived and freshly felt relationality, which ushers in new emotional and imaginary possibilities. It is the case with the extended description of the marital struggle between Anna and Will in *The Rainbow*, as well as the famous scene in the "Excuse" chapter of *Women in Love* where Ursula and Birkin attain the state of "star-equilibrium." The ingrained ethical confines and tendencies of the visionary mode place imaginative and transformative powers within the individual, but also direct those powers toward reciprocity, in a dynamic, open-ended interaction with its various others. Uncircumscribed and undiminished receptivity and sensitivity multiply the possibilities of human exchange. This idea of a "porous" self in a dynamic exchange with its circumambience not only contrasts sharply with the subjugated follower in the authoritarian ideology of power, but also diverges from the integral self of liberal individualism and traditional humanism. This version of authentic Lawrentian selfhood, as Roger Ebbatson points out, is not an identity under "a proper name," but a "flux" (91).

Since power is inherently inhibitive of positive experientiality, Lawrence's engagement with it can only stay on the theoretical, speculative level, expository instead of experiential, thought about rather than lived through. This makes his comments on power in the novels sound like mere reiterations of ideas in his contemporaneous prose works. For example, when the quasi-Lawrence figure Lilly proclaims that "All men say, they want a leader" (299), he very much resembles the Lawrence in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* who claims that "Leaders, this is what mankind is craving for" (120); when Somers wonders "if he wants to be a leader of men" (*Kangaroo* 94), it

sounds like a more guarded expression of Lawrence's self-professed desire in his prose work: "the working men, I'd like him to give back his responsibility to me" (*FU* 141).

In fact, the liberty Lawrence takes between his works across the two genres further accentuates power's lack of experiential substantiation and evidences its incompatibility with the novelistic context. Lawrence himself makes a famous distinction between the creative processes of his fiction and essays:

The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are *pure passionate experience*. These "pollyanalytics" are inferences made *afterwards*, from the experience. (*FU* 65; italics mine)

Though I wouldn't go so far as to adopt Kingsley Widmer's stance that "the passionate is the only ethic in Lawrence" (128), I do think Lawrence is most original and convincing and when his prose is most experiential. Lawrence's mistake in his theorizations of power is that instead of drawing "inferences afterwards," he conducts his speculative excursions *before* his literary creations; he allows his "pollyanalytics," i.e., political and philosophical reflections, to precede his artistic rendering of the flow of "pure passionate experience." It is therefore not a coincidence that Lawrence's writing on power is more unchecked and extreme in his prose works than in his fiction, for the latter is more capable of self-correcting due to its formal requirements of experiential concreteness, while the essays are more prone to flights of unhinged fantasizing detached from contextual restraints.

It is only fitting that the last chapter of *Aaron's Rod* is entitled "Words," which indicates that Lilly remains largely a ventriloquist mouthpiece and his commentaries on power stay on the verbal level. One critic calls him "lightly sketched, barely contextualized" (Wallace 219); another comments that he "spouts out over-conscious philosophy" (Becket, *Critical Guide* 67). There is little in the character to encourage the reader to imagine him as capable of fulfilling the exacting

role of a leader. Keith May suggests that Lawrence in the novel is of the view that the two parties in a leader-follower relationship should take turns to be leader, a point I find very poorly supported by the novel itself (134).

To invoke Lawrence himself again, a work of art “must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres” (*STH* 89). Lawrence would have got closer to the profound contradiction within his leadership idea if he had heeded what his work is trying to tell him, i.e., that the visionary moments in the novels reaffirm, through experiential weight and authenticity, the value of individuality and single being, while the leadership idea struggles to bring about any demonstrable experiential gains for both parties in a power relation. However, the lessons of these embedded visionary moments are overshadowed by Lawrence’s strident propagating of power on the discursive and thematic level. He seems heedless of the implications of these visionary moments. Or more likely, he unconsciously refuses to face what on the textual level has already been made clear.

Lawrence’s obsession with power makes him miss the opportunity of self-criticism that the visionary mode provides to expose power’s unviability as a means of experiential enrichment and its intrinsic insufficiency as a human possibility. As a result, the power/leader idea remains skimpy and never ceases to be a polemical and rhetorical soliloquy made of untested and fortunately, untestable, formulations and doctrines. They exist as self-revelatory signs that the idea of power is not only ethically dubious and politically suspicious, but more importantly, experientially impossible.

Against the ideology of power, the visionary mode demonstrates an understanding of the individual self which, by virtue of its open-textured receptivity and heightened awareness, is filled with transformative potential; possibilities of mutually liberating relations between two individuals that is not structured by power, but arises from participatory equality; and finally, an *unmediated*

and *nonhuman* exchange between a single self and its natural surroundings, which creates a profound affective experience that makes a power-wielding *human* figure seem rather trivial and insignificant and look like a charlatan.

CHAPTER 6 The Visionary and the Ordinary: In Permanent Tension

In previous chapters, I have defended the modernist visionary mode against the more general intellectual charges of solipsism, ahistoricism and political disengagement, which contemporary critical judgment tends to invoke against experiential categories that seem to manifest and reinforce individualist or subjectivist stances. Its novelistic exemplification in the works of Woolf and Lawrence shows that the modernist visionary mode more often than not propels the self out of its comfort zone for more interactive relations with others and more intense immersion in its material surroundings; it can by its affective intensity and flights of imagination introduce into the subject a sense of historical contingency and restored temporality; and lastly, the emotional and intellectual energy it generates has the potential to facilitate communal bonding and collaborative initiatives, thus opening up new political possibilities, in the broad and general sense of collective change-making. Furthermore, the modernist visionary mode, when practiced in an embodied, particularistic, fully situated manner, can also avoid the ideological pitfalls that a more problematic form of “Vision” is prone to, such as sweeping statements, overextending sympathy, excessive readiness to overlook particular and local differences and complexities, and untethered flights into universality or transcendence.

In this chapter I will turn to a more specific challenge the modernist visionary mode faces in recent years, the ordinary--conceived as the mundane and the habitual in the realm of the quotidian, as its supposed experiential opposite and ideological other. The purpose of bringing in the ordinary in the critical discussion of the visionary mode is to reinstate the latter in its real everyday praxis and to examine its effectiveness as a change-working, transformative force in daily experience. And if these two can be shown to form a productive symbiosis, it would be a further, and even more convincing refutation of the charges of solipsism, ahistoricism, and political disengagement

previously dealt with concerning the visionary mode. The goal I attempt to accomplish here is certainly not a vindication of the visionary at the expense of the ordinary, but a reconciliation, or more appropriately, a reengagement of the two, by suggesting that they are not opposites in nature, but are joined in complementarity. Such a situated and relational understanding of the modernist visionary will lead to its increased, rather than diminished importance, in our appreciation of, and engagement with everyday life.

The recent rise of critical estimation of the ordinary can be partly explained by the rediscovery of its long-neglected virtues: its stability and comfort, its restorative and tranquility-promoting effects, its particularity and concreteness against various kinds of metaphysical or idealistic abstractness, its capaciousness as a repository of human experience. Furthermore, a gendered perspective also underlies the burgeoning interest in the ordinary. The domestic sphere of the household, the mundane task of housekeeping and daily chores had all been traditionally associated with women. The reappraisal of the ordinary as a possible rallying ground and anchoring site for women allows contemporary feminist theories to infuse the daily life with positive political possibilities.

What is notable, however, is the way studies of the ordinary very often contain an implicit critique of the visionary, the assumption being that the ordinary can prove to be more politically efficacious than the visionary. The emphasis of such studies therefore, falls very often upon an “untransformed” ordinary, as the preferred grounding of daily experience. For example, in her book *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (2007), Bryony Randall argues that attention to daily time can be politically empowering and subversive. Facing the choice between “searching for the exceptional moment to illuminate the everyday” and “imagining the present, life now, ongoing daily time” (7), Randall, drawing on William James and Henri Bergson, opts for the latter as the focus and orientation of her study. In similar ways, Liesl Olson’s *Modernism and the Ordinary*

(2009) argues that the conception that modernism constantly seeks to reach a transcendent realm “fundamentally obscures modernism’s commitment to the ordinary, to experiences that are not heightened” (4). Lorraine Sim also takes issue with recent Marxist and feminist theoretical paradigms in studies of the everyday “which see the everyday to be, in one sense or another, a problem and in need of transformation or transcendence,” and offers instead to “draw attention to the value, import and richness of the quotidian” (3).

On the whole, this valorization of the ordinary can be seen as a tactical move of self-conscious over-correction, aimed at redressing certain perceived long-held prejudices and misconceptions about the ordinary, useful in highlighting the positive potential in the ordinary, such as eluding dominant metanarratives, creating a spatiality within domesticity, or serving as a form of silent political resistance. However, it is important to point out that when this tendency goes too far, and the ordinary is presented and pursued as some kind of “final good” (Olson 4), it verges perilously close to a form of static and dualistic thinking, thus forfeiting the inherent dynamics for change contained within everyday experience. I find this critical tendency to see the ordinary as being an independent existential entity that embodies absolute values (some form of “final good”) instead of strategic usefulness counter-productive, and the suggestion that the ordinary on its own offers practices, customs, spaces that can directly act as, or indirectly translate into political resistance, deeply problematic.

While the recent critical trends in modernist and cultural studies tend to favor the unheightened and untransformed ordinary, the long established studies on the critical concept of the everyday, however, have always insisted on both the transformability of the everyday, and the very necessity and imperative of transforming it. Henri Lefebvre, the arch-theorist of the everyday, believes that though the everyday under capitalist social order has undergone a process of severe fragmentation and degradation, transformative efforts in the form of a “direct critique” can still bring about a

“rehabilitation of everyday life, shedding new light on its positive content” (87). For proponents of the Situationist International (SI), the arrival of late capitalism reduces everyday life to a mere “spectacle,” characterized by alienation and atomization. One prominent figure of the movement, Raoul Vaneigem, once declared that “the space of everyday life is encircled by every form of conditioning” (165). Therefore, there is an urgent necessity for “the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality” (Debord 38). Another important theorist of the everyday, Michel de Certeau, challenges the idea that the everyday is complicit in the late-capitalistic colonization of modern life, and instead emphasizes the maneuvering space within the everyday for more active and rebellious acts of transformation through the exercise of individual agency.

The emphasis on an untransformed ordinary on the one hand, and the insistence of a transformable everyday on the other, therefore, seem at loggerheads with each other at first glance. However, I suggest that we can reconcile the two seemingly contradictory stances by introducing a conceptual framework that enables us to see their fraught relations in a new light and opens up positive implications for everyday praxis. The solution I propose here hinges upon a critical differentiation of the referential confines of the two concepts, the ordinary and the everyday. Instead of using the two terms in a loosely interchangeable manner to refer to essentially the same realm of experience, I conceive them as forming a structural relation, existing in an order of hierarchical subsumption.

I take the everyday to designate the vast, various, rich manifolds of our daily experience. It constitutes the essential medium of our temporal being for experiential actualization, with all its paradoxes, contradictions, internal conflicts. It is the arena where our daily life unfolds. Defined in this way, the realm of the everyday seems very much to be encompassing all the existential aspects of being itself. However, there are two important exclusions. First, the everyday is divested of

those rare miraculous occurrences in a traditional sense. That is to say, it is stamped with a distinct historicity, for the everyday is not a timeless experiential category, unchanged throughout human history. Instead, it refers to the quintessential *modern* existential mode minus the divinely inspired or religious-tinted mysterious experiences. In other words, it is the lived experience of disenchanted modernity. As Rita Felski usefully sums up, the everyday is “[s]ecular because it conveys the sense of a world leached of transcendence; the everyday is everyday because it is no longer connected to the miraculous, the magical, or the sacred” (79). It is, however, important to note that while the everyday is purged of the “the *conventional* idea of miracle,” as Donald Crosby calls it, it can still abound in a kind of *modern extraordinary*, for “the extraordinary, wondrous, and miraculous are made evident in the ordinary, immanent, day-to-day aspects and events of the world” (xv; italics in the original).

The second exclusion from the everyday realm has to do with the connotations of everydayness or dailiness in the concept. Its essentially commonsensical nature and contextual affiliations mean that the everyday by both definition and implication excludes certain more formalized activities occurring in realms such as art, philosophy, and science, the distinctions lying chiefly in rational and affective modality. This is by no means to say that there is no place for artistic, creative, philosophical, or scientific activities in the everyday. Quite the contrary, such activities thrive and proliferate in it. What the everyday really keeps out from its domain is the formalized and institutionalized versions of those activities—art as isolated and self-absorbed, typical of the aesthete, philosophical thinking as rarefied and scholastic, and scientific undertaking as objectivist and instrumental. The everyday engages activities from all these fields, but only and always in an embodied and contextualized manner.

While the everyday defined in this way constitutes the very medium of modern existence, the ordinary, in the definitional scheme I propose here, refers to a particular affective experiential

mode that occurs within the realm of the everyday. For its affective and emotional index, the ordinary can be characterized by habitude, regularity, inattention, functional instrumentality, intellectual inactivity, or mental fatigue, qualities that can be either enhancing or impeding. The modern everyday experience may take the form of the ordinary, but it is only one of the two major modes, the other one being the visionary mode that complements the ordinary. The visionary mode conveys the modern extraordinary that I mentioned above, which is secular, subtle, and modest, different from the more conventional kind of the miraculous which often appears in the form of world-changing “Visions.”

Therefore, the everyday realm of experience seen as a whole is composed of the ordinary and the visionary, interlocked in a dialectical structure of forward movement. Seen in this way, the everyday as our day-to-day experience can be in a state other than ordinary; it can both foment and stage visionary experiences. It is this productive or generative tension between the visionary and the ordinary that moves the everyday struggle toward self-transformation and charges the everyday terrain with potentials of imaging beyond itself. In this way, I propose a reconceptualization of the relations among the three interlinked terms, in the form of referential differentiation, making the everyday effectively subsume both the ordinary and the visionary, in order to better capture the unique, complex, and volatile mode of modern experience. This scheme of making the everyday as the ultimate realm of synthesized experience shares the spirit of Lefebvre’s idea of the everyday as a totality:

Everyday life... must be defined as a totality...Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground...And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and its form. (97)

For me, this new conception presents more possibilities of reconciling the visionary and the ordinary, with its implicit ontological premise that chooses to envision the everyday not as a set of rigidly defined activities, attitudes, or affects, but as an encompassing medium, an embracing locale, where contending motives and pulsations play out and move forth in a perpetual momentum towards struggle and progression. Within such a conceptual framework the visionary and the ordinary are seen to form a dynamic pair, instead of a dueling and dualistic opposition. The axis of the ordinary serves as the orienting frame of reference, the structural underpinning, and in a sense, even the arising occasion for the visionary, which is to be understood and made sense of only in relation to the material concreteness of the ordinary that gives rise to it and which it seeks to transform.

The visionary, meanwhile, does not constitute a pristine, untarnished, absolute starting point for epistemological or ontological pursuit; neither does it seek to establish an ultimate end, purpose, or destiny of utopian culmination, or furnish a panacea for all present problems. Instead, the new conceptual scheme allows us to see the embedded nature of the visionary so that we should acknowledge its very "*in medias res*" status, its mediated and mediating, contingent and transient nature, which is only made manifest if we examine it in relation to experiences of the ordinary.

Compared with the position that forces one to pick a side between an emphasis on the untransformed ordinary and an insistence upon the transformability of the everyday, this model has certain advantages: for those who privilege the untransformed ordinary, a clarification of its essential interconnections with the visionary will realign it with dynamic agents of change, underwrite it with promises of self-overcoming and transformation; for the everyday theorists, the positing of the dual nature of the ordinary and the visionary as the key constituents of the everyday provides a feasible mechanism for explaining and facilitating changes within the everyday realm itself. In a word, this model has the clarifying benefits of restoring the dialectical interchange

between the ordinary and the visionary, thus also rejuvenating the everyday realm with inherent transformative potential.

Theorists of the everyday have always been keen to expose the untenable position of maintaining a clear boundary between the ordinary elements and the potentially transformative elements within the everyday. In fact, not only do they express few scruples in seeing the visionary and the ordinary side by side, in a kind of peaceful coexistence, but they also readily presuppose the essential role the visionary plays in critically and creatively engaging with, and continuously transforming, the ordinary. They attempt to show that if we recognize the inevitable inextricability of the two, the ordinary as lived experience is always already intertwined with the potentiality of the visionary. Dialectical and dynamic conceptions of the relation between the two can be found in numerous writers.

According to Stanley Rosen, “ordinary experience is saturated with the extraordinary. The two are not independent entities; one cannot hold the ordinary against the extraordinary like a ruler to a line or a tailor’s pattern to a bolt of cloth” (10); for Michael Gardiner, “[t]he ordinary can become extraordinary not by eclipsing the everyday, or imagining we can arbitrarily leap beyond it to some ‘higher’ level of cognition or action, but by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within it” (6); Lisi Schoenbach, drawing on John Dewey, insists that “neither habit nor shock on its own is sufficient for meaningful change” and argues therefore for “an ongoing relationship between them” (31); in a recent collection of essays on the ordinary and the extraordinary in early modern England the editors take the aim of the collection as illustrating how the two “each informed the other and thus to demonstrate that any characterisation of the normative, indeed the concept of ‘everyday life’ is itself essentially unstable” and should be “the subject of constant renegotiation” (McShane and Walker 4); and finally the philosopher Stanley Cavell, one of whose major theoretical concerns is to reveal “the extraordinary of the

ordinary” (24; and see his essay on Beckett’s *Endgame*), once described his philosophical task as one of outlining how the human experience is “inherently strange, say unstable, its quotidian as forever fantastic” (154). To sum up then, the very “transformability” of everyday life, whether it presents itself as radically revolutionary, or as a more modest tactic of resistance, is a starting premise, a grounding assumption, for many theorists of the everyday.

If we can recognize the amorphous and permeable boundaries and confines within the everyday, we’ll be able to grasp its “messy,” therefore, complex and generative nature, and to tap into the subversive and transformative energies that certain of its elements possess. Thus, the everyday is not characterized or defined by its routinized “ordinariness,” but already harbors recalcitrant agents that can be turned against itself in a moment of radically fracturing. The everyday is charged with dynamism and momentum, instead of stasis and fixture.

More importantly, such a relational, dialectical, dynamic, and procedural understanding of the relation between the visionary and the ordinary stays true to what the modernist novelists in this study have evidenced in their works. The novels discussed so far all implicitly refuse an antithetical conception, a dramatized opposition between the two realms of experience, but as a rule transition seamlessly and alternate effortlessly from one to the other, with a kind of natural modulation that closely imitates the real-life interpenetration of the two. In their novelistic embodiment, the interaction of the two exemplifies a pattern that emulates authentic lived experience.

The often raised objection against the visionary mode by those who insist upon the superiority or effectiveness of the ordinary is that for those characters who are privileged with special moments, deeply felt insights, the elevated state is likely to desensitize them in their reaction to and interaction with ordinary experience of the everyday, making them less willing or ready to engage with daily transactions, mundane tasks, or undramatic communications with others.

However, based upon my exploration of typical visionary moments in Woolf and Lawrence, I

believe the opposite is true--that those who have experienced the visionary moment usually return to their daily life and ordinary proceedings, challenged, reoriented, changed, equipped with new perspectives, and more ready to engage with others to work together towards meaningful changes. Therefore, a fruitful symbiosis and productive relationship between the visionary and the ordinary can result in a more *sensitized* take on everyday life and a strengthened habit of reflection and introspection.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, despite my previous exclusive focus on her visionary moments, Clarissa Dalloway is equally characterized and defined by her immersion and interest in the ordinary, her implicit trust and supreme confidence in the everyday life. Her faith in the ordinary undergoes a significant change after her climactic revelatory experience triggered by the news of Septimus's death, but in a positive way—it only deepens her understanding of her daily rhythms of peaceful undertaking (“He made her feel the beauty. He made her feel the fun.”182), and her appreciation of imperceptible kindness and support imparted by the daily presence of her husband Richard (“...quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive... she must have perished” 180), without reducing Septimus's tragedy to a mere necessary sacrifice to life or a case of surrogate suicide (as Woolf had originally entertained in her initial design of the novel).

The Years presents a slightly different case. On the textual level, there is a seeming imbalance between the visionary and the ordinary, with the latter in the form of chronicled mundaneness almost ruling supreme. The novel seems to be dominated by the undramatic unfolding of daily transactions, regular undertakings, fortuitous and uninspiring incidents, uneventful passage of time, all laboriously detailed, with only rare occasions of momentary visionary relief. Despite the disproportion between the two kinds of experience in the novel as a whole, in the last section, “Present Day,” where the visionary experiences of three main characters take place, the casual

ambience of an ordinary day and the seemingly desultory activities of various sets of characters set the stage that ushers in those extraordinary flights of imagination occurring later, and also stand at the receiving end for the transformative energies generated through the visionary moments.

The visionary reveries of the three characters happen right in the midst of this ordinary setting—the mood and manner of their association at the evening party is simply a natural continuation of their diurnal interaction. The visionary moments of the three characters, though all directed at and devoted to the tangible possibilities of a realm of the imaginary, take place exactly when they are engaging with their friends and relatives in formulaic greetings and small talks, performing social routines and observing etiquette, carrying themselves in a manner and at a setting that is for them nothing out of the ordinary. And already inscribed within those intervened moments, are motives, intentions, impulses that will gradually slow down to a more moderate tempo and eventually translate into the ordinary pace of life.

In *The Rainbow*, a fruitful engagement between the visionary and the ordinary may be said to be on full display. Will, the protagonist of the Lincoln Cathedral visionary initiation, bears the weight of the spiritual consequences of the event well into his daily life. The sacred art of old church reparation to which he is previously devoted as a sign of his religious enthusiasm, is reemployed in a new context after its crumbling demise in the Lincoln Cathedral episode, transferred into an everyday setting and changed into the forms of carpentry, joinery, and wood-carving. He even goes out to give handicraft classes and workshops at schools. The destructively constructive visionary experience of losing one's belief in a religious absolute forces Will to begin his painful process of reengaging with daily life--the concrete, material, particular present that stubbornly refuses to be used merely as a stepping stone for lofty spiritual ascension, but persistently asks to be taken as what it truly and simply is, in its ordinariness and utility, as a joining together of human labor and pleasure, through the literally hands-on process of imbuing work with meaning.

In Ursula's case, a direct link can be detected between her daily experiences as a school mistress and her subsequent visionary moment in the laboratory episode. In the chapter "The Man's World" Ursula goes to teach at Mr. Harby's school. The pedagogical model of the school is essentially that of the M'Choakumchilds' in Dickens's *Hard Times*, where children are regarded as little more than automatic information storage units, to be fed with factoids—in other words, the standard understanding of human nature in materialist and mechanist philosophy. Ursula's daily grind at the school constantly chafes her lively and sensitive imagination, prompting her to call into question the ethical and existential implications of her teaching practices. This daily immersion in the ordinary plays a significant role in Ursula's revelatory insight and passionate reaction in the laboratory episode, where the doctrines implied in the mechanist philosophy espoused by Dr. Frankstone are essentially the same as those informing the practices at Mr. Harby's school. Ursula's vehement refusal of the mechanistic outlook during the laboratory episode resonates with her earlier revulsion against a passive behavioral conception of human nature at school and is prefigured by her detestation of the pedagogical presumptions in her daily duties as a school-mistress.

The above examples in Woolf and Lawrence's novels demonstrate repeatedly that there is a productive and continuous exchange between the ordinary and the visionary, and for those who have undergone a visionary moment, what ensues the experience is more likely to be a sharpened awareness of, and deepened engagement with daily life, rather than an act of distancing away from it. The impression that visionary elevation of consciousness will desensitize the mind towards the everyday turns out to be wrong because the modernist visionary, unlike its predecessor, the otherworldly-oriented religious and mystical "vision," is firmly and inextricably enmeshed in *this* world, in the daily stream of experiential pulsations. It is during the repeated encounters with the ordinary, and with the ceaseless self-readjustments that such encounters set in motion, that the

modern individual comes across, from time to time, an intensified affective surge that sheds a new light upon the familiar and the habitual. Moreover, the transformed state of the individual will eventually, inevitably subside, and return to the normal ordinary state. As Stanley Rosen puts it, “ordinary experience is ordinal; it regulates the transformative disruptions because it continues to function as their matrix and womb” (295).

In addition to Woolf and Lawrence, another modernist, James Joyce presents an alternative mode in which the visionary and the ordinary form a particular concord of interconnection and coexistence, counterbalancing and reinforcing each other within a rich, coherent, complex experiential stream. What distinguishes Joyce’s model is that within it the ordinary and the visionary are not contained in a single character’s elevated self-awareness of their transformative experience. Instead, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the visionary experience of the protagonist Stephen Dedalus is checked and chastened by the omniscient but only discreet presence of the narrator, who uses deliberately ironic, deflational, anti-climactic interpolated passages to offset and contrast with the preceding self-glorified epiphanic moments of Stephen Dedalus; and in *Ulysses*, though the criterion of the visionary mode I set earlier, i.e. the embodiment of the moment within coherently represented, interiorized individual experiences, still holds true, the visionary and the ordinary are embodied separately, in two distinctly different characters, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom.

In this way, it seems that in both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the author, or the narrative voice is withholding something from the characters endowed with visionary capacities, using them as forming part of a larger signifying pattern with symbolic intentions. And the message thus implied appears to be that the visionary is essentially, or merely one side of the story, and if unchecked and uncomplemented by the quality of ordinary commonsensicalness (which is arguably the more reliable the two), will soon lend itself to ridicule and become a ready target of satire.

Since Joyce dispenses with the one-character embodiment of both the ordinary and the visionary but retains the alternating rhythm between them, the effect is not heightened self-reflexivity within one individual, but a deliberate contrast between two distinct existential modalities, which function as check-and-balance for each other. In a way, Joyce's presentation of the alternating impulses of the visionary and the ordinary can be seen as incarnated within an overarching "textual consciousness," or authorial design that is not identical with, but comparable to, the kind of experiential coherence and immediacy that particular characters exhibit during their visionary moments in Lawrence and Woolf.

A brief recapitulation of my argument in this chapter so far: I set out to examine the theoretical impact of recent "ordinary" studies on my reevaluation of the visionary mode. I do not take issue so much with those critical efforts to emphasize the reassuring, comforting, anchoring (and even boring) affects to be gleaned from the ordinary, as with the often tacit neglect and understatement, or even obfuscation and denigration, of the real dialectical nature of the relation between the ordinary and the visionary. This propensity tends to mislead one into seeing visionary descriptions as merely a symptom, a sign of telling flaw, an erstwhile illusionary habit of mind, or the mere product of a particular kind of verbal, rhetorical effect, residue from an older religious tradition—all usual objections to the visionary mode that exponents of the ordinary regularly raise. Yet, it should be clear by now that any forms of fixation upon the ordinary is in even more grave danger—of reducing it to a stasis, a deceptive realm of experience that, despite its limited value as a temporary tactic, or sheltering retreat, may potentially impede the continuous transformation and evolution of the everyday experience by depriving it of dynamic energies.

Therefore, I propose a dialectical conception of the two experiential categories, with both subsumed within the general realm of the everyday. Conceived in this way, the visionary can actualize its full transformative potentials while firmly grounded in meaningful daily experience,

and the ordinary can recover its inherent possibilities for permutation and evolvment. Fully embedded in everyday experience, the visionary mode can stand as a strategizing option to precipitate ideological demystification, or serve as a springboard to mid-wife intellectual illumination, but above all, it can act as a constant, daily reminder that in the present environment of cluttered intellectual landscape, oversaturated informational bombardment, and fiercely disputed cultural and political discursive space, we are in urgent need of daily critical reflection and deep introspective renewal and readjustment, conducted through the test of lived experience. And seizing upon those sudden, seemingly fortuitous inroads into our awareness, those moments of incongruous, jangling discordance, of jarring, unsettling intimations and feelings, which the visionary mode delivers, can be an effective way of achieving that end.

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