

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 2018

A Discord to be Listened For in Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf

Sophie Prince

Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, sophie.prince@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Prince, Sophie, "A Discord to be Listened For in Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2018.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/713>

Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

TRINITY COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

/ A DISCORD TO BE LISTENED FOR /
IN GERTRUDE STEIN AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

submitted by

SOPHIE A. PRINCE, CLASS OF 2018

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

2018

Director: David Rosen

Reader: Katherine Bergren

Reader: James Prakash Younger

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Introduction.....	ii
Chapter 1: Narratives of Consciousness.....	1
Modern Theories of Mind	
Percussive Rhythms in “Melanctha”	
Alliterative Melodies in <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	
The Discontents of Narrative	
Chapter 2: Abstracting the Consciousness.....	57
The Consciousness Machine of <i>Tender Buttons</i>	
The Almost Senseless Song of <i>The Waves</i>	
Works Cited.....	107

Acknowledgments

First, to my many support systems. My thesis colloquium, my dear roommates, and, of course, my family. I could not have accomplished this without them.

To the English Department at Trinity College: especially Barbara Benedict, who convinced me to study literature and advised me for my first years here, Katherine Bergren, who has pushed my writing to be better and assigned *Tender Buttons* in a survey class one fateful day, and Sarah Bilston, for fearlessly leading our thesis colloquium.

And finally, to my incredible mentor, David Rosen. In my moments of doubt, his time, dedication, and thoughtful questions kept this project afloat. Every time I leave his office, my take on literature and on the world is slightly altered. He showed me the joys of Modernism, and for that, I will never be able to thank him enough.

INTRODUCTION

Gertrude Stein's 1914 book, *Tender Buttons*, restores aural texture to written language. The purported premise of the book is simple: it offers eccentric descriptions of objects, food, and rooms in dozens of short segments. Yet for most of the book, Stein's language is not denotative or descriptive in any sense. Her text exists in a space between prose and poetry but goes even further than the typical prose poem: it consistently values words more for their sensory materials than for their referential power. Sound seems to drive the segments with little regard for semantic meaning: "It was a cress a crescent a cross and an unequal scream, it was upslanting, it was radiant and reasonable with little ins and red" (53). *Tender Buttons*, by defamiliarizing language to this degree, may seem to resist interpretation—and, indeed, it leaves many readers behind. However, Stein's text actually invites reader engagement in a novel way. The text proposes a radically new aesthetic for prose, but that aesthetic is a playful one, fully invested in the joys of sound. Even though its semantic ambiguity may be frustrating, the language invites the reader into sensorial, sonic experiences.

Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel, *The Waves*, is the English writer's most experimental work and, in its way, is as radical in its treatment of language as is *Tender Buttons*; yet Woolf's experimental undertaking is far less apparent than Stein's. At first glance, the two texts seem to have very little in common—and, as a result, they rarely, if ever, appear together in scholarship on Stein or Woolf. However, this critical gap fails to recognize several fundamental connections between the two authors' exploratory modifications to the aesthetics of prose. *The Waves* interweaves a series of nine prose poems with nine sections of spoken soliloquies, purportedly delivered directly by the six characters whose lives form the narrative of the novel. These

soliloquies exhibit a tendency, similar (in general terms) to the tendency of Stein's segments in *Tender Buttons*, to privilege the sensory sounds of language over semantic clarity. When Rhoda, one of the six voices of the text, plays with flower petals floating in a basin of water during her early childhood, she evokes an image that is, at once, visually stunning and overwhelmingly sonorous: "That is my ship. It sails into icy caverns where the sea-bear barks and stalactites swing green chains. The waves rise; their crests curl; look at the lights on the mastheads" (11). Although she does so in the context of a novel, Woolf, like Stein, makes language something unfamiliar for her reader. The poetic sound of *The Waves* feels out of place and distractingly loud—an effect that has sometimes been used to fault the book, but which is self-evidently intentional on Woolf's part. The sensory experience that the reader has with this sound actually overrides the narrative at times, but, as I intend to suggest, does so to productive ends.

This thesis is an investigation into what the perplexing, non-semantic sounds of language communicate in *Tender Buttons* and in *The Waves*. We have a disconcertingly thin vocabulary for discussing the role of sound in long prose fiction; that sort of discourse is typically reserved for poetry.¹ However, Stein and Woolf both privilege sound to such a degree that the failure to *listen* could well cause a reader to miss the most important aspects of their texts. To approach this subject, I will look back to the presence of sound in Stein's and Woolf's earlier, less experimental works. Despite their vast differences in style and form, Stein and Woolf have a compelling connection in that they both engage in the psychological project of the early 20th century; both innovate a new kind of literature that attempts to explore human experience as it is,

¹ Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin's *The Poetry of Sound/The Sound of Poetry* (2009) is a collection of essays that "addresses the large-scale indifference to sound structure in the current discourse on poetry" (2). Even in poetry, the conversation typically concerns meaning, or what a poem "says," and rarely concerns sonic texture. In prose writing, this troublesome tendency to ignore sound is exponentially more prevalent.

and not as it has traditionally been depicted. Stein, as a student of the preeminent turn-of-the-century experimental psychologist, William James, and Woolf, as a writer who believed that the interest of art lay “in the dark places of psychology,” were both pioneers of the stream of consciousness mode (*The Common Reader* 152).² Before *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves*, each author attempted a stream of consciousness narrative that used indirect interior monologue to explore characters’ subjectivities: Stein’s *Three Lives* (1909) and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). This endeavor to write conscious experience—that ‘thing’ which frames all reality, yet often escapes realization and defies description—is inevitably difficult. The inchoate, imperceptible, and continuous must be translated into a form that is limited to the tools of language and finite by nature. This task demands some serious formal innovation—and, as I will argue in this thesis, Stein and Woolf both innovate using the sounds of language, albeit in meaningfully different ways.

The sonic experimentation of *Tender Buttons* and of *The Waves*, while different in obvious ways, is the outcome of journeys that begin with the question: how does one represent the consciousness in literature? Stein’s first published collection, her 1909 *Three Lives*, is an integral stream of consciousness text. “Melanctha,” the middle story of three fictional biographies, has been widely celebrated for its palpable characters (yet criticized for its tiresome prose). The novella’s omniscient narrator explores the tumultuous internal landscape of the eponymous character as she struggles through life as a working-class black woman in a fictionalized Baltimore. For Stein at this point, the workings of consciousness are best indicated

² Suspiciously, the critical conversation sometimes presents Stein and Woolf as secondary to authors like James Joyce and William Faulkner, despite their influence on the stream of consciousness mode. Dorothy Richardson, one of the earliest novelists to use the mode, receives the same treatment.

by excessive repetitions, hammering rhythms, and the suspension of narrative time. Woolf, who has a more prominent place in the stream of consciousness canon, offers an integral example of indirect interior monologue in *Mrs. Dalloway*. By tapping into present perceptions and memories of the past, the novel explores the thoughts of (primarily) three characters as they go about a single day in London. The complicated trajectories that Stein and Woolf take in their respective pursuits begin with the sounds of the stream of consciousness mode but end somewhere else entirely—in the abstract, sonic textures of *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves*.

Given Stein's and Woolf's interests in perceptual experience and the structures of the consciousness, it follows naturally that I approach my investigation from the perspective of phenomenological theory. Phenomenology—as a philosophy, as a psychology, as a critical theory, and as an artistic interest—is the nexus where all the disparate strands of my project meet. Stream of consciousness fiction could not exist without the frenzy of intellectual activity that sought to explore the human experience at the turn of the century—the moment when German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, formally established the school of phenomenology. The most direct influences on Stein and Woolf are William James and Henri Bergson; I will explore them in depth in my first chapter. Methodologically, I am leaning on Wolfgang Iser's "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1974), which has as its foundational principle the idea that "The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence" (50). Unlike his contemporaries, Hans Robert Jauss (who explores historical reception) and Roman Ingarden (who believes in classical aesthetic value), Iser presents a phenomenological approach that is fit to tackle the modern text: he understands interpretation as a series of "interruptions" in which "the familiar [is set] against the unfamiliar" (63). Stein and Woolf, as prominent avant-gardists, engage in this sort of defamiliarizing literature. *Tender*

Buttons and *The Waves*, especially, subvert expectations about language and demand that the reader actively participate in the creation of new systems of meaning.

Unfortunately, Iser's phenomenological approach only accounts for narratological devices and generic expectations. This gap demands that I do some experimenting of my own and extend his vocabulary into the realm of the sonic characteristics of prose. However, I would argue that Iser's "The Reading Process" presents the very tools needed to make this extension profitable. Iser discusses the process by which a reader becomes "entangled" or "open to the immediate experience of the text" (64). In literature, the sonorous, perceptual materials of language are the most immediate experiences a reader can have. By combining Iserian phenomenology with a strict attention to the prosody of Stein's and Woolf's work, I aim to demonstrate that both authors exploit the sounds of their prose to induce intentional responses in their readers—and, ultimately, to convey something of the consciousness in experiential terms.

Despite the relationship between "method and concern," a surprisingly small body of criticism applies phenomenological theory to either Stein or Woolf (Mildenberg 261).³ However, Ellen E. Berry's *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (1992) relates Berry's personal response to "Melanctha," if only for a moment. In doing so, Berry teases the possible rewards of voicing an individual encounter with literature, without the guise of analytical discourse. In terms of the stream of consciousness mode, two rather outdated, comprehensive studies appear at various junctures of this project: Melvin Friedman's *Stream of Consciousness: a Study in Literary Method* (1955) and Robert Humphrey's *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1954). While these works are old

³ Ariane Mildenberg's 2008 article, "Seeing Fine Substances Strangely" (which I will explore further in my chapter two discussion of *Tender Buttons*) is one of the few pieces of criticism that approaches Stein phenomenologically.

(and sometimes sexist), Friedman and Humphrey provide definitions for important terms like “indirect interior monologue” and analyses of broad topics like time and music—all of which are still salient today.

The major tendency in the criticism specific to Stein and Woolf is to pair them together only for their intrigues as queer women writers. While that vein of criticism is exhaustive, the two authors have not had adequate treatment for their experimentation with the aesthetics of prose. There are several disparities that may scare away this treatment: Stein is an American writer, working in many forms, and an active participant in the Parisian avant-garde, while Woolf is a British lyrical novelist and a core member of London’s Bloomsbury Group. Yet they both make a compelling turn to sound to communicate conscious experience where referential language fails.

With Woolf, critics who discuss the presence of rhythm or musicality in her novels usually fall short of articulating the formal innovations that create those effects. Angela Frattarola’s “Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel” (2009) discusses how sound exists in the “auditory imagination” for readers of *Mrs. Dalloway*; however, she only refers to diegetic sounds and not the effects of the prose itself. Maureen Chun’s “Between Sensation and Sign” (2012) directly addresses the “perceptual aura” of language in *The Waves* but does not factor the reader into her analysis. Stein’s treatment is yet more perplexing. The scholarship on “Melanctha” went from being subtly racist in the first few decades (like Hoffman who blames the story’s repetitive prose on Melanctha’s “primitive consciousness”) to being focused only on psychoanalysis in recent decades (most notably Lisa Ruddick’s 1990 book, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*) (Hoffman 84). The scholarship on *Tender Buttons* is as confusing as the text itself. Consequently, it will require a substantial amount of time to unpack in my second

chapter. Critics discuss a variety of perceptual avenues for exploring the text, with particular emphasis on visual (read: Cubist) perception, but ultimately, the search for an “infallible passkey” (i.e. a way to reduce Stein’s hermetic passages to coherent meaning) hinders those discussions (Bridgman).

My thesis will explore two authors, Stein and Woolf, who both have a dissatisfaction with referential language, an interest in portraying the conscious experience, and a keen attention to the sounds of language. The existing critical conversation circles around these points of interest, but never attacks them directly or at once. Because of the “large-scale indifference to sound-structure” in criticism and the neglect of sound in our reading methods, readers have long overlooked the similar trajectories of two authors who both overstate the sound of the signifier when the very act of signifying becomes unsatisfying (Perloff 2).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will explore the role of sound in “Melanctha” and in *Mrs. Dalloway*. For Stein and Woolf, these works represent the early years of engagement with the stream of consciousness mode. While both texts are committed to narrative, they do rely on sound to help influence the readerly perception of those narratives. This chapter will establish a baseline for the relationship between sound and reader as it unravels in stream of consciousness narrative. “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway* are both widely recognized examples of the mode, but they both fail to satisfy their authors’ pursuits—for reasons that I will elucidate at the chapter’s end. My second chapter places *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* in conversation with the texts of chapter one. Both of these books explore the possibilities of abstraction on the level of sound, challenge their readers, and create distinct reading experiences that are unparalleled by other works of literature. In this chapter, I will argue that Stein and Woolf create techniques for of enacting—in the mind of the reader—the processes that define conscious experience

(according to their own definitions), without the need for mediating that experience through the inevitably limiting perspective of a character. *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* abstract some essential thing of the consciousness—a “something” that referential language inherently cannot say, but that resounds through the text anyway.

CHAPTER 1
Narratives of Consciousness:

Unraveling “the invincible thread of sound” in “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway*

To imagine the consciousness as a stream is to profess that thought has a natural, temporal movement. The metaphor implies that the mind moves constantly and continuously, as does the flow of water. Therefore, writers who wish to produce stream of consciousness fiction must inevitably grapple with the issue of time—something which seems to frustrate all literature. J. Hillis Miller’s 2003 article, “Time in Literature,” recalls Heidegger’s recognition of the reality that, in Western languages, nearly all phrases and figures for time are spatial: “Time thereby escapes direct representation” (87). Even though Miller recognizes this linguistic shortcoming, his analysis only aims to expose the issue, and consequently, reproduces it. Narrative, in Miller’s understanding, is “a spatially arrayed allegory of temporality”—essentially, he claims that the sequencing of words on a page allegorizes time as space (91). However, the process of reading is more complex than this spatial model lets on.

Both Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf understand time—by which I mean the lived human experience of time, not the abstract concept of it—as innately linked to sound. They attempt to represent time in their literature through musical forms. Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), which depicts the collective consciousness of post-War English society, rings with the sound of bell tolls to signify the time sequence throughout the narrative’s 18 or so hours. Woolf’s sonic signifiers of the hour are unlike the example that Miller uses to establish the

spatialization of time in literature: the movement of a clock.⁴ Gertrude Stein's collection of fictional biographies on working-class women, *Three Lives* (1909), also rejects the spatialization of time in exchange for a better-suited, sonic metaphor. In the narratives of *Three Lives*, Stein suspends time, groping for what she calls a "continuous present," by creating temporal loops through repetitive phrasing and consistent rhythms ("Composition as Explanation," 4). Miller aptly calls stream of consciousness narrative an "atemporal database," which relays the same general idea of Stein's continuous present or Bergson's *durée réel* (93). Yet when it comes to the phenomenological experience of reading, his spatial understanding of time cannot account for the ways that Stein and Woolf demand a more direct figuration of reading. To approach their unique modes, the critic must turn toward a new language of analysis.

While the written form of literature can be a tantalizing trap, leading some to regard the art form as spatial, music has no such issue(for the audience, at least).⁵ Indeed, we readily accept that the medium for music is based in time. Perhaps, with modernists like Stein and Woolf, who exhibit a deep respect for the music of literature, it is more productive to understand reading as an experience that activates the sounds of language in a reader's auditory imagination. With this understanding, I aim to avoid the shortcomings of the spatial allegory for time and instead approach the sort of direct temporal experience that Stein and Woolf develop with the music of their stream of consciousness texts. One of the few comprehensive works of scholarship on this

⁴ Miller cites Quentin Compson ripping the hands off his watch in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* as an example of time, represented by the spatial movements of a clock (87).

⁵ In "The Relations between Music and Literature as a Field of Study" (1970), Calvin S. Brown discusses the critical resistance to musico-literary studies in the field of Comparative Literature. While music and literature were born "as a single activity," scholars now hold them as separate, wishing to talk about the influence of one on the other, instead of recognizing their essential unities (97-101).

mode, Friedman's *Stream of Consciousness: a Study in Literary Method*, demonstrates that "the dependence on music is an essential aspect of the modern novel" (138). Friedman refers back to the French symbolist, Edouard Dujardin, to explain how this dependence relates to the mind. In 1931, Dujardin proposed that "the movement of consciousness is expressed by the incessant thrust of musical motifs, which attempt to approximate, one after the other, indefinitely and successively, the 'states' of thought, feeling, or sensation" (Friedman 124).⁶ Essentially, stream of consciousness fiction needs the temporality of music more than any other mode. In order to understand the complicated amalgam of time, sound, thought, and reader engagement that makes up stream of consciousness fiction, I will explore the processes by which sound bridges the disparate temporalities of character and reader to communicate a consciousness in "Melanctha" from *Three Lives* and in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

This analysis first demands that I explore the influence of the late 19th and early 20th century psychologists, William James and Henri Bergson, on Stein and Woolf. Their contemporaneous theories about perception, time, and cognition surely guide both Stein's and Woolf's early attempts at stream of consciousness fiction. In fact, the authors' respective psychological and philosophical interests directly relate to the auditory innovations that govern their texts. Stein's interest in the patterns of thought and attention correlates to her unique rhythmic play; Woolf's interest in listening and other cognitive processing correlates to her phonetic melodies. For both authors, the sound of their prose creates for the reader a direct, temporal experience that allows a fictional consciousness to emerge as an entity that is palpable, personal, real. While both Stein and Woolf use rhythmic repetitions, melodic alliterations, and

⁶ In 1888, Dujardin's *Les lauriers sont coupés* pioneered the stream of consciousness mode, later linking his monologue intérieur to music.

subtle internal rhymes to make music out of prose, their readers experience these auditory devices in vastly different ways.

In “Melanctha,” a novella that details the difficult life of a working-class woman and her failed relationship with a doctor, Stein’s grammatical structures create a percussive musicality that is insistently rhythmic and relentlessly repetitive. This style creates a temporal frustration for the reader; one must choose to endure through a tense and prolonged narrative.⁷ However, to submit to the sonic hammerings of this text is to receive the contents of Melanctha’s consciousness. Stein uses her command of sound to activate in her reader sensations that loosely correlate to the difficulties that Melanctha experiences when attempting to communicate with her lover, Jefferson Campbell. On levels as small as that of the phoneme, Stein creates systems of emotional meanings for sounds where there were none before. “Melanctha” mobilizes its engaging yet often irritating music to deal with the trouble of time and to offer the reader an experience that correlates in tone to the characters’ emotional experiences.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel that dips into the minds of countless characters on a single day in post-War London, Woolf similarly relies on the melodies of her prose to activate emotional responses in her reader. Woolf’s auditory aesthetics—deemed “moving” by many reviewers—have enormous phenomenological power.⁸ While Woolf (like Stein) makes use of music’s ability to produce readerly emotions, she also innovates a unique, sonic method for communicating the consciousnesses of the novel. Woolf’s style of stream of consciousness writing entails detailing

⁷ I would like to say a few words about my usage of “endure” in this chapter. While I wish to imply the common denotation of “endure” as to suffer patiently or to persist through something, I also recognize that this word has a very specific philosophical provenance. “Endure” also evokes a Bergsonian understanding in which enduring simply means existing in time. His definition will be further explored in the following section.

⁸ Numerous blurbs on the 1981 Harcourt edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which I am using for this project, use the word “moving” to describe the novel.

of the sensory perceptions of her characters. The sound of her prose then imitates the diegetic stimuli perceived in the minds of her protagonists. In this manner, Woolf creates an analogy between the characters' experiences with the sounds of the world and the reader's experience with the music of the prose.

In both of these influential works of stream of consciousness fiction, sound—as produced by Woolf's ability to find melody in any sentence or Stein's tendency to turn words into rhythms—can command a reader's experience of a text. Both authors understand the connections between music and the consciousness. Woolf's Peter Walsh “[speaks] to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour” (48). Stein's characters have the same propensity for close audition; Melantha is commended numerous times for her “way of listening with intelligence and sympathetic interest” (64). When readers are equally willing to open their ears to the music of the world, of language, and of literature, the process of reading these texts becomes much richer. In the virtual dimension (a metaphorical, phenomenological space in which reader and text meet), stream of consciousness fiction transcends the confines of its nominal, spatial metaphor and embodies the unhindered complexities of real, lived experience.

MODERN THEORIES OF MIND (HENRI BERGSON AND WILLIAM JAMES)

In William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), James unintentionally foreshadows the artistic legacy of his chapter, “The Stream of Thought,” by likening his text to “a painter's first charcoal sketch upon his canvas” (225). While James is only speaking to the roughness of his ideas, there is some fun to be had in pushing this metaphor a bit farther: by the turn of the 20th century, his “charcoal sketch” had become the canvas on which artists generated

a new mode of literature. In 1890, fiction had already been moving toward regeneration;⁹ however, James's theories on the nature of consciousness would provide necessary direction for modern writers such as James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and James's own student at Harvard, Gertrude Stein.

James begins "The Stream of Thought" with the declaration that "No one ever had a simple sensation by itself. Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations" (224). Through this definition, James argues against an understanding of sensations as simple and singular and instead proposes that consciousness is an individualized, continuous, and ever-changing process. Later in the chapter, he outlines the nominal metaphor for stream of consciousness literature: "Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits... It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life*" [emphasis in the original] (239).

Only a few years after the publication of *Principles*, Gertrude Stein began working as an undergraduate in James's laboratory at Harvard. Her academic relationship with him would mark both her literary career and her life, as Stein explains in a section about her Harvard career in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). Several literary critics have carefully documented this relationship and its influences on Stein's work, most notably Michael Hoffman, Donald

⁹ Friedman, in his chapter "Historical Background," recognizes *Tristram Shandy*, *The Egoist*, and *The Golden Bowl* as novels that anticipated several of the formal innovations that would be fully realized by the advent of the stream of consciousness mode.

Sutherland, and Lisa Ruddick.¹⁰ In this section, I will synthesize their research as it pertains to my project. While Stein ultimately dropped out of medical school at John Hopkins, many elements of her work as a psychology student still resonate in both the content and style of her early literary texts.

First, the subjects of Stein's research experiments provide some revelatory information about her literary interests. At the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard, Stein worked on projects like "The Place of Repetition in Memory," "Fluctuations of the Attention," and "The Saturation of Colors," and went on to co-publish an article in the 1896 *Psychological Review* called "Normal Motor Automation." While these projects sought to discover "the limits of conscious attention," Stein was primarily interested in how the experiments revealed categorical personality types—or, sets of traits she understood as the "bottom nature" of character—in each participant (Hoffman 199, Binnin 132). In writing *Q.E.D.* (1903), and then drastically adapting it to form *Three Lives*, Stein morphed her quasi-scientific discoveries about personality types into a method of constructing her fictional characters. Most critics, including Hoffman and Sutherland, agree that *Three Lives* is a manifestation of Stein's belief in personality types. However, Lisa Ruddick, in *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*, argues that the psychology of "Melanctha" is instead a product of Stein's "imaginative self-splitting" of herself into the two main characters, Jeff and Melanctha. In the following section on "Melanctha," I will provide a counter reading to these claims. Rather than attempt to psychoanalyze Stein's authorship, I propose to read "Melanctha" as a product of Bergsonian and Jamesian thought, influenced but not wholly

¹⁰ In Michael Hoffman's *The Development of Abstraction in the Works of Gertrude Stein* (1965), the appendixes on Stein's lab work and her connection to James synthesize the material pertinent to her literary work. Lisa Ruddick's *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (1990) offers a more recent perspective on Stein's engagement with psychology, but often psychoanalyzes Stein herself to answer for complexities of her texts.

determined by Stein's work as a psychologist. While the science of psychology clearly infiltrates Stein's work, there is a point at which her understanding and manipulation of these concepts becomes uniquely literary.

Unlike Stein, Woolf was not trained in modern psychology, but she was involved in the academic community.¹¹ For this reason, perhaps, Woolf's engagement with modern theories of mind is often less empirical and guided by Woolf's humanist sympathies. The best resource for Woolf's psychological engagement is her 1921 essay, "Modern Fiction," in which she critiques the late realism of Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells for its failure to capture "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing" (*The Common Reader* 149). In this essay, Woolf invokes a modern understanding of the consciousness in order to explain the main pursuit of fiction ("the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology") (152). Unsurprisingly, her description of the mind echoes James's understanding of consciousness as "a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations" (*Principles* 224). Leaning on her poeticisms, she writes; "The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" (150). To Woolf, this understanding of the mind should directly influence modern modes of writing. She believes the job of the author is to record these atoms, or to "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" (150). Even though several critics have attempted to discount some of Woolf's achievement in the stream of consciousness mode, Woolf's integral beliefs about the pursuits of

¹¹ Woolf published the first edition of Freud in English at Harcourt Press and was close friends with the translators, James and Alix Strachey.

fiction align perfectly with a Jamesian understanding of the stream of thought.¹²

After the 1890s, literary attention to psychological theory turned its focus from James to one of his contemporaries and colleagues—the French philosopher Henri Bergson. Influenced by James’s early articles on the consciousness, Bergson published an article on the flow of thought a year before James’s *Principles*: his 1889, *Données immédiates de la conscience* (Friedman 75). Bergson’s work on the consciousness concerns time and repetition, making his writing particularly applicable for literature. For one, his concept of *durée réel*, or “real duration,” resulted in a changed understanding of time, influencing the structure of stream of consciousness writing. His *durée réel* refers to the subjective, lived experience of time and criticizes the way that mechanical, spatial measurements (like hours and days) distort that experience. Dorothy Richardson, one of the architects of the new mode, recognized the resulting paradigm shift, writing that “Bergson influenced many minds, if only by putting into words something then dawning within the human consciousness: an increased sense of the inadequacy of the clock as a time-measurer” (Kumar vii). In his 1955 study on stream of consciousness fiction, Friedman further describes this shift, claiming that Bergson’s understanding of time entailed “succession instead of simultaneity, intensity instead of magnitude, moments melting into one another rather than being placed side by side” (84-5). The fluidity of time in the modern novel—Woolf’s drawn out 18 hours in *Mrs. Dalloway* or Stein’s never-ending evenings in “Melanctha”—demonstrate those “moments melting.”

Reading Bergson as a literary influence is particularly interesting because, unlike James,

¹² Woolf’s reliance on a third-person narrator sometimes troubles her position as a pioneer in stream of consciousness fiction. For example, James Hafley claims in *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as a Novelist* (1954) that “she never did use it [the stream of consciousness mode]—here [in *Mrs. Dalloway*] or elsewhere” because she does not uphold “the illusion of receiving everything” (73).

Bergson had a unique interest in art forms. In his 1907 book, *Creative Evolution*, artistry becomes a metaphor for the subjective experience of time (his *durée réel*) and a vehicle to discuss orthogenesis (the highly eccentric notion that biological evolution is caused by an internal driving force). Nearly always staying in a metaphorical register, Bergson proposes a multitude of inventive ways to think about the subjectivity of memory. He describes the human mind “continually swelling” across time as the memory “[rolls] upon itself, as a snowball in the snow;” this metaphor implies that consciousness builds cumulatively upon the past and changes constantly (171). The concept of a constant swelling of the past is then complicated by Bergson’s awareness of the non-repeatability of experience, or, the fact that “consciousness cannot go through the same state twice” (173). In other words, a second, seemingly repeated moment always includes the first moment, and thus, does not constitute a repetition. With this understanding, Bergson accounts for the influence of the past on an individual’s subjective experience of the present, without falling into the cynicism of Freudian repetition compulsion. Taking this section of *Creative Evolution* (1907) into account can be revelatory when reading Stein in particular. While many critics turn to James’s work on personality types to describe the *Three Lives* portraits as “static,” there is a richer possibility for analysis (which I will explore in the following section) in understanding Stein’s repetitions as representations of constant change and the non-repeatability of experience.¹³

Although Bergson examines the arts, he also categorizes them in a hierarchy that places music at the top and literature at the bottom. He criticizes the written word quite harshly in

¹³ The “static portrait” readings of “Melanctha” are demonstrated in Hoffman’s *The Development of Abstraction* (207). These readings are in many ways influenced by racist understandings of the text, which saturated Stein criticism in the 1960s. Due to the belief that Stein was trying to depict Melanctha and Jeff as simple-minded barbarians, critics tended to ignore the complexities in the trajectory of their relationship.

Données immédiates, claiming that “Literature is the least adequate in conveying the ‘aesthetic emotion.’ It is expressed by words, which tend to wander around the object rather than give it an exact meaning” (Friedman 86). He feels that hearing is fundamentally more intuitive than seeing and thus more complex. As a literature student, I cannot help but instinctively to want to defend reading against Bergson’s critique; however, as someone studying the auditory imagination, I also realize the productive possibility of Bergson’s valorization of hearing. He offers the literary critic an exciting framework to rethink the act of reading—if she is willing to incorporate a multitude of senses into her understanding of the written word. That process entails questioning Miller’s vision of literature—the “spatially arrayed allegory of temporality”—and understanding that the time of reading moves according to the *durée réel*, not according to the clock or any other spatial system (93).

Stein and Woolf seem to agree with Bergson’s deep distrust of language—or, at least, they agree that words, as units of semantic meaning, are not adequate. In fact, a similar concern for the problem of inexpressibility in language arises in the works of Stein and Woolf. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf reveals her distrust as the narrator relates that “the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows, after all of communicating feelings...was not for them” (178). In “Melanctha,” both Melanctha and Jeff obsess about communication by endlessly repeating lines like “I certainly do wonder, if we know at all really what each other means by what we are always saying” (78). By turning to audition and the sonic elements of language, perhaps Stein and Woolf are both escaping some of the inexpressibility of language and turning toward a more intuitive, Bergsonian music.

PERCUSSIVE RHYTHMS IN “MELANCTHA”

Gertrude Stein’s first published book—her 1909 collection of fictional biographies

entitled *Three Lives*—is an intensely technical piece of writing. In three independent stories, consecutively “The Good Anna,” “Melanctha,” and “The Gentle Lena,” Stein presents the lives of working-class black women, all living in the Eastern seaport of Bridgepoint (a fictionalized Baltimore). Of these stories, “Melanctha” has inspired the most critical attention, largely due to its experimental approach to constructing a portrait of the eponymous protagonist. Scholars of “Melanctha” celebrate the work for achieving a “systematic device for rendering consciousness” and “for liberating the [English] language from literary convention” (Friedman 54, Sutherland 276). Other modern writers also understood “Melanctha” as the development of a new kind of realism. William Carlos Williams, for example, said of the story: “‘Melanctha’ is a thrilling clinical record of the life of a colored woman in the present day United States, told with directness and truth. It is without question one of the best bits of characterization produced in America” (Stein and DeKoven 257). Through my analysis of “Melanctha,” I aim to establish that sound is Stein’s essential tool for rendering the mind; this claim will later serve as a baseline for my analysis of *Tender Buttons* in chapter two.

The content of “Melanctha” stems from one of Stein’s earliest pieces of writing, her 1903 *Q.E.D.*, which was not published until 1950 as the posthumous novel *Things as They Are*.¹⁴ The process of adaptation entailed a significant change in character identities. *Q.E.D.* tells the autobiographical story of Stein’s first lesbian relationship; “Melanctha” then transposes this story onto a heterosexual relationship between two black, working- and middle-class characters: Melanctha Herbert and Jefferson Campbell. The novella traces Melanctha’s pursuits and

¹⁴ *Q.E.D.*, (short for *quod erat demonstrandum*, a Latin expression used to conclude arguments with “thus it has been demonstrated”) is recognized as one of the earliest coming out stories. In Norton’s 2006 edition, *Three Lives; and, Q.E.D.: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, editor, Marianne DeKoven, explores Stein’s adaptation of this novel in detail.

struggles in a circular and somewhat disjointed fashion, yet still arrives at a complete picture of her character. The narrative moves from her unpleasant childhood with an uninterested mother and an abusive father to her instructive and dependent friendship with the socially experienced yet alcoholic Jane Harden. “Melanctha” then settles upon the principal matter of its plot: the tale of Melanctha’s first serious relationship with her mother’s doctor, the educated and rational Jeff Campbell.

While the narrative content of the novella is not inherently experimental, the way in which Stein composes this content truly commences her radical literary career. As evidenced by contemporaneous reviews of *Three Lives*, Stein’s experimental aesthetics can aggravate certain readers. Early critics of the collection typically understood her style as something that the common reader would have to overcome in order to enjoy the text. In a 1910 issue of *The Nation*, for example, one reviewer stated that “These stories lack construction and focus but give that sense of urgent life” (Stein and DeKoven 252). The *Chicago Record Herald* describes the same problem in more detail, observing that: “The broken rhythm of the prose, the commonness of the wording will probably be so repellant that the reader will not linger long enough to permit these qualities to produce their rightful effect and swing him into the imaginative understanding of the simple, mystic, humble lives of the women of whom the author writes.” (Stein and DeKoven 253). Interestingly, even this reader, who feels that the prose will come off as “repellant,” understands the offending style as a way of accessing the characters’ subjectivities. This understanding leads to a compelling question: how can Stein’s polarizing use of ordinary, rhythmic language communicate a fictional existence so successfully to her reader?

In order to understand this process, I propose to look at the interaction between reader and sound that takes center stage in “Melanctha.” The style of this novella is insistently

rhythmic, with the unremitting movement of musical measures.¹⁵ Repetitions layer every page of the text, sometimes doubling sentences almost exactly, such as when the narrator relays Jeff's thoughts as he approaches the first of several break-ups with Melanctha:

All he knew was, he was uneasy now always to be with Melanctha. All he knew was, that he was always uneasy when he was with Melanctha, not the way he used to be from just not being very understanding, but now, because he never could be honest with her, because he was now always feeling her strong suffering, in her, because he knew now he was having a straight, good feeling with her, but she went so fast, and he was so slow to her... (100)

Moments like this—the single instances of contemplation that duplicate and run-on for longer than some readers can tolerate—are crucial in the text's attempt to grapple with psychology. However, due to the sheer wealth of these moments, "Melanctha" is particularly resistant to cogent analysis. In this section, I will have to grapple with the fact that I have limited space to discuss a text that only takes shape due to excessive, tiresome reiteration. While an excerpt presents a small fragment of the musical patterns that Stein creates with repetition, no set of excerpts can properly replicate the cumulative power of the whole—the product of Stein's dedication to crafting sonic and syntactic patterns. Still, one must deal with these difficulties in order to understand the fundamental problem that this work presents: namely, approaching a text this repetitive requires a certain degree of endurance on the part of the reader. To read "Melanctha" is to submit to an incessant hammering of rhythms; however, those rhythms serve a

¹⁵ See: Michel Delville's "Gertrude Stein: In Anticipation of the Loop" (2013) for more connections between form in "Melanctha" and musical notation. Delville explores literary repetition for its similarities to the electronic looping pedal. The power of the loop is to "[reactivate] the space where complex or elusive melodicality might have gone unnoticed" (79).

purpose. The sonic patterns efficiently communicate patterns of consciousness, such as the obsessive repetitions of thought or the mental accents that fall on certain memories.

In more recent criticism on the intense musicality of Stein's prose, critics sometimes explore their own experiences of engaging with these patterns. This occasional critical turn toward individual interpretation can be rewarding. In *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (1992), Ellen Berry leans on ideas from Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* to describe her experience with "Melanctha." Her chapter, "On Reading Gertrude Stein," explores the moments in which "Pleasure arises from the multiplicity of languages colliding with one another." Berry then continues: "in Stein's words 'a single image is not splendor.' At these times, the pulse of the text—its rhythm and speed—and my pulse feel in sync (like Jeff and Melanctha in their good moments...)" (20-1). Berry's statement about the syncing of textual and personal "pulses" reveals something of the phenomenology of reading "Melanctha." As a reader, Berry engages with Jeff and Melanctha's consciousnesses in rhythmic terms. Stein's rhythm subsumes both reader and character: it is at once the internal texture of the characters' minds (the actual patterns along which Jeff and Melanctha think) and the external texture of the prose (the sonic materials that the reader encounters).

Through the extensive manipulation of these rhythms, and of other sonic effects, Stein generates her integral tool for writing stream of consciousness narrative in "Melanctha." The pursuit of the novella is to communicate the psychological torment that Jeff and Melanctha experience as their vastly different minds clash. Through sound, Stein offers her reader a

correlative to those pains that Melanctha and Jeff are feeling.¹⁶ As the reader endures the novella's percussive musicality, she experiences a correlative that, although different in source and nature, helps to "swing [her] into the imaginative understanding" of Melanctha's pain (Stein and DeKoven 253). Stein's prose can feel extremely frustrating when her monosyllabic repetitions go on for long durations, but the abstract discomfort that we feel brings us closer to Melanctha and Jeff. At the same time, when Jeff and Melanctha are together and happy, those percussive rhythms let up: thus, Stein gives her reader well-timed and much-needed reprieve. Instead of simply narrating her characters' interiorities as they go through heartbreak, doubt, and occasional bursts of happiness, Stein offers her readers a correlative experience with the sensory materials of her prose.

As I carry out my analysis of "Melanctha," I will be following the structure of the plot for durational reasons. The phenomenological experience of reading this text develops chronologically: as tension builds in the narrative, a correlative tension builds in the sound when Stein's repetitive rhythms go on for longer than her reader can enjoy. From the outset of *Three Lives*, Stein announces her technical choices and then practically never allows them to let up. The narrator begins strangely removed from the novella's title character, introducing a friend of Melanctha's from late adulthood: "Rose Johnson made it very hard to bring her baby to its birth" (339). While the sentence is conversational, and thus not particularly jarring, it demonstrates that Stein will bend natural grammatical structures in order to form and emphasize alliteration. The

¹⁶ I see this term as perhaps similar to, but not the same as T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative": "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of [a] particular emotion" ("Hamlet" 48). In "Scratching the Surface" (2017), Chad Bennett compares Stein's technique in *Tender Buttons* to Eliot's objective correlative, but affirms that Stein's technique is more nuanced than Eliot's "neat equivalences of emotion and object" (24).

string of /b/ phonemes in this simple, first sentence exemplifies Stein's commitment to packing phonetic play into language, regardless of "the commonness of the wording" (Stein and DeKoven 253).¹⁷

Stein's connections between sonic effects and narrative content are abundant. This invocation into Melanctha's life prepares the reader for the linguistic experimentation that soon takes over the novella. The narrator introduces Melanctha as if she were a secondary character: "Melanctha Herbert who was Rose Johnson's friend, did everything that any woman could" (339). Stein then manipulates the pacing of the text as the narrator compares Rose and Melanctha. The phrasing moves freely between polysyndeton and asyndeton while listing litanies of adjectives—sometimes with as many as five or six modifiers on a single noun. For example, "she [Melanctha] was patient, submissive, soothing, and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled and fussed and howled and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast" (339). The loud grammatical difference between commas and conjunctions highlights the sort of binary oppositions that will consistently describe Melanctha's life story; the narrator assigns submissive Melanctha the fluidity of asyndeton, but fussy Rose with the interrupting conjunctions. Choices of syntax also operate on the pacing of the narrative, which stays fluid, accelerating or slowing at different moments. For example, the narrator describes Rose and Sam (a rather auxiliary couple to whose child Melanctha tends until his death), but then quickly brushes over a dark event by omitting commas: "anyway the child was dead and Rose and Sam her husband were very sorry but then these things came so often in the negro world in Bridgepoint" (339). The acceleration of pacing almost always indicates the

¹⁷ Following the notation rules of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), I will use paired slashes when referring to single phonemes.

presence of a psychological pressure.

Stein employs similar techniques throughout the novella with impressive consistency and little mercy for her audience. As patterns emerge and repeat, their effects on the reader intensify. Thus, the experience of the first page involves only a fraction of the intensity of the experience of a page halfway through the novella. It is only after numerous iterations of structures (like the sentences that expand with an excess of adjectives) or of sounds (like the alliterated phrases which privilege phonetic play over clarity) that Stein's aesthetics are fully able to induce an emotional response in her reader. To return to Bergson's terms from *Creative Evolution*, a "mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing—rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow" (171). This metaphor fits the trajectory of the sonic effects in "Melanctha." When a reader endures through this repetitive text, the swelling of each pattern upon the last has the power to develop palpable psychological pressures. Like a snowball "rolling upon itself in the snow," the reader's experience swells with intensity as the plot progresses.

The beginning of "Melanctha," then, constitutes the least troubling portion of the story. Before the aesthetics of the prose reach a durational extreme,¹⁸ they simply invite the reader into the story. In the introduction, the content of the narrative is far more troubling than its form. When the narrator details Rose's ambivalence toward the loss of her infant and the physical abuse suffered by Melanctha as a child, the prose takes on a simple, poetic sound. For example, Stein constructs an end rhyme between "so blue" and "to do" as Melanctha considers suicide:

¹⁸ By "durational extreme," I mean that "Melanctha" consistently expands scenes as far as they can go. Ellen Berry calls this process a "pleasurable overload of just-one-more" than most readers can handle (22). Michael Hoffman also approaches a Bergsonian idea of duration when he calls Stein's present tense "an accumulation of the moments that have preceded it" (76).

“Melanctha told Rose one day how a woman who she knew had killed herself because she was so blue. Melanctha said, sometimes, she thought this was the best thing for her herself to do” (340). The melancholic content loses its edge as Stein’s prose offers her reader a mawkish neatness in its construction. Furthermore, the parallel structures and directness of sentences like “Rose was lazy but not dirty and Sam was careful but not fussy” make certain descriptive moments sound like straightforward narration (342). Yet Stein repeatedly juxtaposes this plain literary style with sudden psychological intensities and exaggerated circularities in the narrative, effectively negating the surface simplicity of the language.

In twelve short, consecutive paragraphs, most of which begin with “Melanctha Herbert was always...,” the narrator seemingly forgets Rose Johnson altogether and enters Melanctha’s childhood. At this moment, the narrative suddenly accelerates—not only because of the shortened paragraphs and repetitive structure but also due to an increasing intensity of sound. With the phrase, “All her youth was bitter to remember,” the narrator dips into Melanctha’s memories of her parents to form a portrait of her childhood (343). Melanctha’s father, James Herbert, drank often and had a “hard handed” temperament, making him a source of many of her early traumas (344). In the description of a violent fight between James and a coachman who was too friendly to Melanctha, the prose sonically reflects the violence of the scene: “Suddenly between them there came a moment filled full with strong black curses, and then sharp razors flashed in the black hands, that held them flung backward in the negro fashion, and then for some minutes there was fierce slashing” (346). An excess of fricatives marks the sentence, in both the mild /f/ alliterations and in the repetition of the /ʃ/ (or ‘sh’) digraph (“sharp,” “flashed,” “fashion,” and “slashing”). Next, the narrator details James’s abuse of Melanctha, commenting that “Now when her father began fiercely to assail her, she did not really know what it was that

he was so furious to force from her” (347). As Stein continues alliterating /f/ syllables, the reader notices, consciously or unconsciously, that violence is linked to the harshness of fricative sounds.¹⁹ Where Hoffman claims that Stein “[awards] private meanings to words,” I would argue that she does the same on the level of the phoneme (131). When the reader is forced to enter Melanctha’s childhood memories of physical and emotional suffering, Stein repeats sharp fricative hisses to produce an emotional response in her reader. Of course, the reader’s experience of a grating stylistic effect is nothing like Melanctha’s experience of actual violence. Still, the effect of this correlative is to create a sonic atmosphere in which Melanctha’s subjectivity emerges.

Even though the first section of “Melanctha” deals with Melanctha’s childhood, the novella is not a linear narrative in any traditional sense. Stein manipulates time to an excessive degree, groping for what she calls a “continuous present,” or, her interpretation of Bergson’s *durée réel* (“Composition as Explanation” 4). On multiple occasions, the narrator signals that the story is “really beginning,” as if everything before was a sort of false start. After Melanctha’s childhood memories, the narrative commences for the second time with “Melanctha now really was beginning as a woman” (347). Here, the intense phonetic environment of the prose momentarily lets up as the reader gets some distance from the traumatic memories. A new phonetic sequence crops up as Melanctha begins to explore her sexuality at young adulthood and “wanders” around docks and railroad yards with the working-class men of Bridgepoint. The narrative lingers on this period of her life for multiple paragraphs, re-describing Melanctha’s

¹⁹ Linguistics of the 20th century and onward typically assert that phonemes have no inherent semantic meaning, but experiments that are more recent have argued that “certain strings of English phonemes have a non-arbitrary emotional quality” (See: “Inherent emotional quality of human speech sounds,” 1105). These discoveries far postdate *Three Lives*, but Stein consistently pairs specific emotions with specific sounds to build these connections herself.

behavior again and again with small variations of phrasing: “Melanctha’s wandering after wisdom she always had to do in secret and by snatches,” “she wandered, always seeking but never more than very dimly seeing wisdom,” she “wandered on the edge of wisdom,” and in search of a “world wisdom” (348-9, 351). Again, it is as if Stein has committed a single phoneme to a particular mental state; an excess of /w/ sounds, intermixed with sibilants, indicates Melanctha’s desire for social and sexual experience. Sounds suggest to the reader specific emotional environments through processes that are systematic on Stein’s part but may play out unconsciously in the reader’s imagination.

As Melanctha wanders more and more with the men of Bridgepoint, the prose demonstrates a similar propensity for wandering, complicating the narrator’s attempt to relay Melanctha’s streams of thought.²⁰ When Melanctha visits the railroad yard one day to watch the “wonder world of mystery and movement” (note again the /w/ alliteration), the narrator wanders into an unprecedented universal voice. The digression starts with marked sibilance “Railroad yards are a ceaseless fascination. They satisfy every kind of nature. For the lazy man whose blood flows very slowly, it is a steady soothing world of motion which supplies him with the sense of a strong moving power” (349). This divergent paragraph goes on for much longer than one typically does in the choppy structure of “Melanctha.” The auditory construction sounds quite pleasant, but the reader, who has at this point adjusted to a casual dialect, must confront the fact that those statements cannot possibly be relaying Melanctha’s thoughts. As she wanders, other voices creep into the text, creating new sources of tension.

²⁰ The “wandering” of the prose has been a favorite subject of many critics of *Three Lives*, particularly in psychoanalytic scholarship. Lisa Ruddick, for example, discusses Melanctha’s sexual wandering as an extension of Jamesian “mind-wandering,” but claims that “in spite of its lack of linearity,” the narrative has “a wholeness that transcends the term *mind-wandering*” (41).

In these early sections of “Melanctha,” the reader is trained to be hyper-aware of the auditory effects of the prose, but those effects have not yet reached their full potential. In the terms of Bergson’s metaphor, the rolling snowball has just begun to pick up snow. The power of Stein’s experimentation with sound and grammar grows as the reader works through multiple repetitions of the text. Even though “Melanctha” seems to move linearly (from her childhood, to her adolescent wandering, to her relationship with Jane), that movement is complicated by the text’s many repetitions within each period: the reader is forced to live, relive, and relive again the formative events of Melanctha’s life. The phenomenological experience of the reader, then, evolves throughout the text’s duration, which cannot be defined in the spatial and sequential terms of a timeline.²¹ As “the narrator simultaneously relates and resists relating Melanctha’s life story,” the reader must face the difficulty of imagining and realizing a cohesive whole from disjointed component parts (Berry 39, Iser 50). Interestingly, the narrator seems to attribute certain narrative issues to Melanctha’s personality. It is like a sort of apology for the disjointedness of the narrative when the narrator remarks, “Melanctha never could remember right when it came to what she had done and what had happened” (356). Perhaps the centrality of Melanctha’s consciousness to the novella has ramifications in terms of narrative structure.

“Melanctha” does not fully settle into the stream of consciousness mode until the middle segment of the novella. In this segment, Stein prolongs time itself as the narrator painstakingly relates each word of Jeff and Melanctha’s circular conversations. Stein practically achieves the

²¹ Bergson’s complication of the timeline also relates to Iser’s description of the reading process as an “active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection.” Instead of simply moving through a linear sequence of events, the reader must “[view] the text through a perspective that is continually on the move” (56).

“continuous present” here. After Melanctha’s mother falls ill, Jefferson Campbell arrives on the scene to tend to Mis’ Herbert on her deathbed. At first, Jeff resists getting to know Melanctha, as her reputation for wandering threatens his reserved morals and elevated status as a professional. Eventually, the approach of Mis’ Herbert’s death (which reoccurs three times before she actually passes) pushes them into dialogue. While a good deal of stream of consciousness fiction (Woolf’s work included) highlights the difference between private thought and public speech, “Melanctha” does not. The dialogue of Stein’s work, unlike that of Woolf’s or Joyce’s, is not performative. After a few humorously unproductive exchanges about “good and regular living” versus “seeking out new excitements,” it becomes clear that the dialogue does little more than expose the private concerns of Jeff and Melanctha. The stream of speech is an extension of the stream of thought. Stein writes speech as if it flowed unedited from the mind, with no apparent concern for verisimilitude.²² This choice has direct ramifications on the reader’s phenomenological encounter with these scenes because Stein upends her reader’s expectations about literary dialogue.

Typically, in stream of consciousness narratives, dialogue offers the reader respite from the claustrophobia of being figuratively trapped inside a character’s interiority. In “Melanctha,” however, the dialogue feels so similar to the characters’ internal monologues that the conversations only worsen the reader’s claustrophobia. Stein reverses what her reader might

²² In Hoffman’s words, “Stein is not interested in reproducing dialogue with the exactness of a tape recorder” (84).

expect to be an escape from the private world into the social.²³ In Iser's words, the "defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations as well as his distrust of those expectations" (63). The reader may recognize the dialogue as a possible escape from the circular, repetitive narrative, but that recognition is ultimately false. The dialogue offers no escape and thus tension dominates the textual atmosphere. Melanctha and Jeff are trapped by their inability to effectively communicate; the reader is trapped by the ineffective narrative structure. These tensions have different sources and are only akin in tone, but their correlation helps make the reader somewhat sympathetic to Melanctha and Jeff's situation, which is otherwise aggravating to watch.

Of course, Stein makes this method of communicating emotional tension to her reader play out on a sonic level. As Jeff and Melanctha struggle with disagreements about the proper way of living and begin to "talk a little harder," the sound of their dialogue becomes more and more insistent thanks to the relentless repetitions (365). Jeff and Melanctha move back and forth between agreement and disagreement as the conflict between Jeff's thinking nature and Melanctha's feeling nature develops. Stein's use of repetitive phrasing forces even moments that approach compromise to be riddled with vagueness, like in Jeff's response to Melanctha's critique that "you are always looking as if you was thinking, and yet you really was never knowing." Jeff temporarily concedes: "'Perhaps you are right Miss Melanctha,' Jefferson answered. 'I don't say never, perhaps you ain't right Miss Melanctha. Perhaps I ought to know more about such ways Miss Melanctha. Perhaps it would help me some, taking care of the

²³ While this process is highly individualized, Stein's dialogue in "Melanctha" would be noticeably different for anyone who has read several other works from the stream of consciousness canon. Iser's phenomenology recognizes that, while each reader has different expectations or preconceptions, the author "exert[s] plenty of influence on the reader's imagination [with] the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal" (57).

colored people, Miss Melanctha'” (370). As words tend to do when repeated excessively, the proper noun, ‘Melanctha,’ begins to lose all signifying power and turns into a rhythmic accent that falls at the end of each utterance. In addition, the overuse of verb forms like “I was just thinking” and “I certainly do think I feel” adds to the outrageous redundancy of the language, making the central motifs of thinking and feeling sound meaningless.²⁴ Even as the reader realizes that certain repeated words (especially the characters’ names) can be visually glossed over, the auditory patterns cannot be ignored—they are so persistent and annoying that they can make a reader almost-physically uncomfortable. This phenomenon provides yet another reason for abandoning Miller’s understanding of literature as an arrangement of words across space. The reader’s responsive discomfort in this situation is clearly more durational than it is spatial; these tendencies can only develop over a significant amount of time.

While the first few pages of dialogue between Jeff and Melanctha are tolerable, the unceasing repetitions of confused prose and circular talk eventually become more and more grating—especially when the narrator offers possible opportunities for reprieve, like revealing “At last he [Jeff] gave up his thinking,” but then quickly returns to the conversation (375). Over time, the recognizable patterns become annoyances, like when the word “certainly” ironically rings throughout their uncertain talk. Pushing this irony further, the idea of meaning becomes thematically central in the very moments when repetitive grammatical structures make language itself feel vacuous and without purpose:

“I certainly do wonder, Miss Melanctha,” at last began Jeff Campbell, “I certainly do

²⁴ Friedman also notes that the dialogue troubles meaning: “Melanctha’s language seems to indicate a groping for the instinctive movements of the mind which underlie the factitious logic of ordinary discourse; it attempts to convey their rhythms through a language divested of its ordinary meaning” (54).

wonder, if we know very right, you and me, what each other is really thinking. I certainly do wonder, Miss Melanctha, if we know at all really what each other means by what we are always saying.” “That certainly do mean, by what you say, that you think I am a bad one, Jeff Campbell,” flashed out Melanctha. (373)

Imagine something like this going on for five pages straight. No single citation can show how intense these rhythms of monosyllabic words and repeated sentence structures become during their over-extended argument; however, the sheer numeric quantity of repetitions can represent the redundancy of the text as a whole. For example, the phrases beginning with “I certainly do wonder,” “You certainly do,” or “I certainly don’t” repeat approximately 75 times in the first few conversations alone—and then upward of 450 times in the story as a whole. At this degree of use, the repetitions of words are not simply morphological; they constitute a percussive rhythm that can be aggravating. When Jeff worries that they do not “know at all really what each other means by what [they] are always saying,” he overtly presents his frustration with communicating (373). Stein then translates that feeling into a linguistic and sonic frustration experienced in the mind of the reader who, if she wants to finish the story, must choose to endure.

While repetitive structures and circular dialogue define the unique style of “Melanctha,” the rare moments of reprieve from these patterns significantly influence the reader’s experience of the text as well. After several false starts of the relationship between Jeff and Melanctha (in which Jeff doubts his decision to associate with her and the same conversations restart all over again), the narrative finally progresses with two short scenes of action. First, Jeff admits his attraction: “and then, very quick and sudden, she [Melanctha] kissed him and then, very quick again, she went away and left him” (377). Next, the pace and tone abruptly change as the

narrator announces in a similar structure, “and then slowly and without much pain she [Mis’ Herbert] died away” (377). It becomes clear at this point that scenes of action sound entirely different from the tedium of thought exposed by the dialogue. The sentences are still neatly structured with parallel forms, but these events require no patterns of repetition—they are succinctly stated once. Thus, even while Stein uses the same stylistic devices, the tension temporarily dissipates and a less conflicted pleasure of the text emerges.

While uncertainty consistently punctuates the joy of Jeff and Melanctha’s relationship, the overall tone of this section differs entirely from the anguish of the earlier two. For the first time in “Melanctha,” the reader finds herself in the relaxed auditory environment of the diegetic world as Jeff and Melanctha explore Bridgepoint together. Sound and silence somehow coexist in this setting, without conflict: “It was summer now, and there was a lovely silence everywhere, and all the noises, too, that they heard around them were lovely ones, and added to the joy” (393). “Melanctha” finally explores the external world—a place which allows the reader an escape from the claustrophobia-inducing space of interiority. The happiness of the good moments of Jeff and Melanctha’s relationship gets transplanted onto the scene: “the summer evenings when they wandered, and the noises in the full streets, and the music of the organs, and the dancing, and the warm smell of the people, and of dogs and of the horses, and all the joy of the strong, sweet pungent, dirty, moist, warm negro southern summer” (394). When the incessant repetitions disappear from the narrative, the same techniques from earlier sections of the story—like rapid shifting between polysyndeton and asyndeton—produce a more pleasant effect on the reader. Without feeling duration-based exhaustion, we can enjoy the way this sentence runs-on to develop a cohesive image. Thankfully, we will not have to read this sentence restated in slight variation ten more times; it does not receive the same obsessive treatment as thoughts or

dialogue. These descriptions resemble the approaches to stream of consciousness narrative that grapple with sensory perceptions. This turn toward the exterior world offers the reader a moment of relief from the tedious monologues of internal consciousness, even while the text never genuinely lets up in its engagement with Jeff's and Melanctha's mental perceptions.

At the end of the novella, suffering returns for all of the characters. Therefore, excessive repetition returns to haunt the reader as well. Jeff and Melanctha's relationship falls apart because "Melanctha was too many for him," but this end has already been foretold by the unproductive dialogues that signaled their fatal incompatibility (410). At their downfall, the emotion of the diegetic auditory environment changes: the "long, tender silence" of the summer joy morphs into a "long, unloving silence" (398, 405). The narrative reaches the beginning again: i.e. it finally gets to the moment in which Melanctha moves in with Rose, the opening scene of the novella. The narrator repeats several sections from the beginning word-for-word, but the experience does not feel the same after reading all the events leading up to it. The reader encounters several instantly recognizable phrases like, "Melanctha did everything that any woman could" and "she was patient, submissive, soothing and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled, and fussed, and howled, and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast" (447). After a narrative that has exposed Melanctha as stubborn, impulsive, and trapped in her ways, the claim that she is "patient, submissive, [and] soothing" now only has an ironic effect. By returning (with very slight variation) to the opening sentence, "Rose had a hard time to bring her baby to its birth," Stein effectively closes the loop of "Melanctha." The return to sounds from the beginning of the novella signals the imminent end (447). The /w/ alliteration associated with Melanctha's wandering youth returns with particular

force, after “Melanctha was lost, and all the world went whirling in a mad weary dance around her” (456). Stein’s suspension and elongation of time fall apart. The narrator perfunctorily rushes to the end, requiring only a few pages to relay the years leading up to Melanctha’s death from consumption

In 1965, Michael Hoffman called “Melanctha” “monolithic” for proposing “such a static conception of personality” in which all characters “are fixed” (94-5). A good deal of scholarship after Hoffman refers to his book, *The Development of Abstraction*, and continues to lean on Stein’s personality type experiments to explain the repetitive “stasis” of the text. This line of thought claims that the traits of consciousness in “Melanctha” are determined at the outset of the novella and then never change. However, the repetitions communicate slow transformations, not stasis. For example, Jeff’s trajectory throughout the narrative outright disproves that reading. Jeff, who asserts at the start of his relationship, “I don’t change never,” turns from a rational and withdrawn thinker into the source for some of the most palpable feelings of the novella. As Jeff laments his decision to leave Melanctha, the narrator dips rhythmically into his mind, exclaiming “Oh! Oh! Oh! and the bitter water rose once more up in him” (426). The narrator embodies the insecure voice in Jeff’s head, obsessively questioning his actions: “What a fool he was to throw her from him. Did he know she did not really love him. Suppose Melanctha was now suffering through him. Suppose she really would be glad to see him. And did anything else he did, really mean anything now to him? What a fool he was to cast her from him” (426). Through his relationship, Jeff has been transformed. To call personality in “Melanctha” static is to overlook the many moments in which Stein thematizes the process by which people change and grow through social experience. In “Each One as She May,” Judith Ryan claims that “What Gertrude Stein shows most forcefully in “Melanctha” is that consciousnesses do in fact intertwine” (101).

Melantha's consciousness has indeed seeped into Jeff's irreversibly. By considering a Bergsonian framework for this novella and thus accepting that no experience is repeatable, one can come to understand that Stein's repetitions mark the slow process of psychological change, rather than Hoffman's "monolithic" stasis (94).

The durational problem of "Melantha"—the high level of endurance that Stein demands of her reader—is fundamentally linked to music and to rhythm. The novella's circular structure creates a troublesome tension because the narrative imitates the linear illusion of a life, but never tells anything straight. The refrains of alliteration draw attention to this futile movement, as sounds like the /w/ or /f/ sequences forecast the inevitable return of certain mental states. The reader of "Melantha" must then confront language in an unprecedented form. Even now, decades removed from the birth of modernism, the style of the story can provoke intense reactions; Stein's distortion of traditional literary forms leaves readers without the proper tools for engaging with her aesthetics.²⁵ However, the very experience of this confrontation becomes a technique for communicating the consciousnesses of Jeff and Melantha. To read "Melantha" is to endure cycles of exhausting, percussive rhythms, interspersed with moments of reprieve in which repetition lets up. The reader's aesthetic experience correlates—albeit in a general, tonal way—to the cycles of suffering and relief in the lives of Melantha and Jeff. Through manipulations of sound and rhythm, Stein creates systems of meaning where there were none before. Her reader must do a good deal of imaginative work to grapple with these private and psychologically intense, new ways of forming and complicating meaning. Stein's awareness of

²⁵ In the case of Stein's work, her experimental aesthetics provoke an exhaustion that seems practically timeless. The 1910 newspaper reviews of *Three Lives*, which criticized the tiresome form, reveal the same objections that one might hear from university students reading Stein today (at least in my experience).

the effects that rhythm and sonic repetition have on her reader, which she establishes in “Melanctha,” becomes something condensed, abstract, and even more intense in *Tender Buttons*.

ALLITERATIVE MELODIES IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Published 16 years after “Melanctha,” Woolf’s highly celebrated 1925 novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, proclaims the joys of sounds and of silences. The aesthetic experience of *Mrs. Dalloway* is consequently much more pleasant than that of “Melanctha”: Woolf cultivates harmony while Stein creates discord. Both stories have a similar investment in how sounds can shape a representation of a character’s consciousness, but they explore that investment in different terrains. Instead of uncovering personality types and presenting durational suffering, Woolf deals primarily in perception. While *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the movements of daily life in post-War England, it has a secondary investment in uncovering the immaterial process of perceiving the environments that make up that life. As the plot traverses a single, banal day in London, the narrator transitions between the consciousnesses of many characters as they ruminate individually and experience stimuli (primarily auditory and visual) collectively. On this day in the summer of 1923, Clarissa Dalloway prepares for a dinner party. Her old lover, Peter Walsh, returns to England from India just in time to reconnect with her before the festivities. Septimus Warren Smith, a traumatized soldier who serves as Clarissa’s double, endures psychosis and commits suicide, causing a stir in the high-society circles that gossip about the incident. These separate threads intertwine at crucial moments, allowing the narrator to pass from consciousness to consciousness. Across these transitions, sound serves as a powerful unifier, linking not only character to character but also character to reader.

Woolf actively draws attention to two forms of sound in *Mrs. Dalloway*. First, she

highlights the auditory stimuli of the world, as experienced in the characters' streams of thought. These diegetic noises—namely the bell tolls from Big Ben which divide the day into hours, the car backfire that draws public attention, and the ever-present murmur of London foot traffic—have been the focus of a good deal of scholarship on *Mrs. Dalloway*.²⁶ The second source of sound in this novel, however, has not been adequately explored. That source is Woolf's prose—and it offers a terrain for analysis even richer than the novel's diegetic sound. The prose of *Mrs. Dalloway* has the cohesion and the dramatic movement of a well-arranged musical composition; Woolf creates harmonies with alliteration, rhythms with sentence structures, and swells of intensity with leitmotifs. The auditory characteristics of Woolf's language demonstrate her ability to extract the music that is present in all language and to uncover "the message hidden in the beauty of words" (88). While the two sources of sound seem separate (as one pertains to the novel's content and the other to its form), Woolf skillfully connects them and thus establishes the most unique element of her approach to the stream of consciousness mode.

As Stein attempts in "Melanctha," Woolf, too, must confront the central issue of this mode—that is, this particular project demands that authors find a way to communicate the private, individual, and intangible contents of subjectivity to their readers. The power of Woolf's approach to the stream of consciousness mode comes from her ability to figuratively link two paths of perception: that of the character, perceiving the stimuli of the world, and that of the reader, perceiving the stimuli of the novel. For example, when a group of soldiers marches past Peter Walsh, "A patter like the patter of leaves in a wood came from behind, and with it a

²⁶ Angela Frattarola's "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce" (2009) understands the phenomenological power of sound, in that "the listening self is immersed in the perceived world" (137). However, this article does not discuss the sound of the prose itself in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

rustling, regular thudding sound.” Imitating the “regular thudding sound” of Peter’s perceptions, the prose immediately transitions to short, rhythmic fragments: “strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing. Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff” (51). This phenomenon—in which the reader encounters linguistic stimuli that imitate the concurrent diegetic stimuli—occurs in several other rare, but impactful moments. At these times, the sound of the prose (experienced by the reader) and the noises of the world (experienced by the characters) form two sides of an analogy that allow the real and fictional consciousnesses to meet; Woolf fosters an encounter that takes place in the Iserian “virtual dimension.”

Woolf’s perception-focused approach to representing the mind has a flavor distinct from the methods with which Stein activates psychological tension in “Melanctha.” In both authors’ approaches, the privileging of the sensory elements of language provides a direct experience for the reader; however, the experience of “Melanctha” and that of *Mrs. Dalloway* are not the same. “Melanctha” explores the gestalt of Melanctha’s consciousness—more or less her whole life. Thus, the sound of Stein’s prose generates an all-encompassing atmosphere that subsumes the reader and correlates to Melanctha’s headspace. *Mrs. Dalloway*, on the other hand, explores the daily processes of the consciousness. Woolf dips into memories to get a broader sense of her characters’ minds, but her focus is localized to one moment in time. Correspondingly, Woolf’s sonic patterns create distinct events. The respective approaches in “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway* appear disparate—and indeed, they are—but they also inform one another. We must look at these two texts together because, as we will see in my second chapter, Woolf and Stein ultimately swap their general approaches when they both move to abstraction. In *The Waves*, Woolf goes after the gestalt of life; in *Tender Buttons*, Stein goes after the single instances.

The main intrigue of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s approach to stream of consciousness fiction is perception, but the novel is not limited to that single cognitive process. Like Stein, Woolf has an awareness of the emotional dimension of sound. When *Mrs. Dalloway* gets some distance from sensory perceptions (particularly during the characters' moments of deep, internal reflection), the sound of the prose activates intentional, emotional responses in the reader. A brief example is a particularly loud alliteration that takes the reader by surprise just as Peter Walsh "is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind" (57). Sound, here, draws the reader into Peter's exaltation and emphasizes the second line, which summarizes the psycho-philosophical theory of the novel: subjectivity alone is existence. The effect is not exactly the same as Stein's sonic correlatives in "Melanctha," but it does exhibit a bit of technical overlap between the two works. The emotional—and thus the sonic—texture of *Mrs. Dalloway* is unique. The journeys of Clarissa, Peter, and Septimus are primarily introspective, sentimental ones; the musicality of the prose induces nostalgia and awe. Woolf posits that sound has a unique ability to affect human experience. As the narrator comments in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "so strange the power of sounds at certain moments" (32). Woolf then sets out to prove to her audience exactly what that strange power can do. The result is a profoundly moving, multidimensional portrait of many minds.

A reader of *Mrs. Dalloway* encounters Woolf's exaltation of sound early on in the novel. While all of the characters take note of the sounds around them at times, Septimus Warren Smith has an ear for the music of daily life that surpasses the likes of Clarissa and her coterie. As the narrative progresses, Woolf forms analogies between Septimus's auditory perceptions and the reader's perceptual engagement with her prose. At Regent's Park, a single sound—the disruptive

backfire of a nearby car—launches a crowd on Bond Street into a collective rumination about the identity of the figure hidden behind the window blinds. While the crowd chatters, Septimus stands frozen next to his wife, Lucrezia, and listens as a minor character hypothesizes that the noise came from “The Proime Minister’s kyar.” The narrator announces, “Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him” (14). This sentence aptly introduces Septimus, as he is the source of most of the auditory experience in the novel. Within his consciousness (which often troubled by frightening hallucinations), regular noises always have figurative meanings. To Septimus, “[t]he throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body” (15). Sounds—and the metaphorical connotations that they automatically create in a hallucination-prone mind—are the first contents to occupy Septimus’s stream of thought.

Through Septimus’s character, Woolf reminds her reader to keep in mind the music of language. Although Septimus exists only in the written world of the novel, his consistent attention to sound reminds Woolf’s reader that words also have an acoustic dimension. Shortly after the incident in Bond Street, the novel moves into its longest scene of collective sensory experience: a myriad of people in Regent’s Park look up to watch an airplane skywriting an advertisement for toffee. While this experience is uncomplicatedly visual for most characters, Septimus closes his eyes and reverts to audition—a sensation that is much more comfortable for him. He listens as a nursemaid on a nearby bench reads aloud each letter, “softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke.” As readers of *Mrs. Dalloway*, we learn from Septimus at this moment not to just look at words, but to hear them. The introduction of “waves of sound” transcends the simple diegesis of the scene. This image

becomes a crucial descriptor for a stylistic element of the prose when Woolf introduces a leitmotif (which subsequently appears all through the novel) only sentences later: the repetition of “rising and falling, rising and falling” (22). The “waves of sound” experienced by Septimus become palpable for the reader as the sound of the text takes on a wave-like movement.

In this manner, Woolf explores readerly phenomenology and character phenomenology at the same time. The sonic characteristics of the prose imitate traits of the stimulus heard by Septimus, creating an analogy of experience that unites reader and character. This perception-based technique is something that Stein never even considers doing in “Melanctha.” During the skywriting in Regent’s Park, the sound of the prose continues to build in intensity as Septimus enters a hallucinatory episode of listening:

The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sound made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. (22-3)

Here, Woolf navigates between four sets of consonant alliterations with impressive linguistic skill. She moves from the fricative /f/ alliteration (“fluttering...falling...fountains”), into two plosive alliterations (the voiceless “part of the pattern” and the voiced “blue, barred with black branches”), and finally back to a fricative alliteration with the sibilants of the second sentence (“sound...spaces...significant...sounds”). She ends this sonic description with two shorter sentences that mirror the quick interjections of two new sounds: a child’s cry and a car horn.

In the variance between fricatives and plosives, Woolf creates a wonderful crest of sound in her prose that mirrors the “waves of sound” that captivate Septimus. Through this inventive method, she narrows the gap between readerly consciousness and character consciousness. Even

as Septimus's irrational headspace creates problems for lucid communication, sound provides insight into his unique perspective. After Woolf vitalizes the language of this scene with her alliterations, the reader can understand Septimus's irrational yet "marvelous discovery" that "the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions...can quicken trees into life!" (22). Even for a reader who does not attempt to read phoneme by phoneme, the musicality of the prose affects the tone of the text. Woolf's linguistic music swells with melodicism, demanding sensitive audition from her audience in the same moments in which a character begins to listen closely. Whether it acts on the reader consciously or unconsciously, each sound has its influence.

As the prose demands we pay attention to sound, it also instructs exactly how we should do so. By absorbing the message that "the spaces between them [are] as significant as the sounds," the reader learns that she must listen to the prose of this novel in a comprehensive manner (22). Later in this scene at Regent's Park (which is particularly rich for sound analysis), Woolf impresses upon her reader the power of silences. While it is difficult to write a lack of sound, or even to grasp it, there are several moments in which Woolf makes visible "the spaces between...the sounds." Once the park settles "in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity," the formatting on the page begins to mirror the silence as it shifts from long block paragraphs to a more spacious layout:

The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly,
freely, like a skater—

"That's an E," said Mrs. Bletchley—
or a dancer—

"It's toffee," murmured Mr. Bowley—
(and the car went in at the gates and nobody looked at it)...(21)

One may imagine these noises and comments (which feel out of place right after “the whole world became perfectly silent”), but Woolf’s use of em dashes make her reader keenly aware that something is missing, like lingering comments too far to be heard (20). Iser’s “The Reading Process” spends a great deal of time discussing how the “unwritten part of a text stimulates the reader’s creative participation” (51).²⁷ Thus, the spaces—in both the plot and the form— of *Mrs. Dalloway* cannot be ignored. Even in Woolf’s silences, the visual dimension of the page determines the way the reader imagines the sounds of the language.

With that movement toward quietude, this protracted scene approaches its climax. The narrator announces, “There was no sound.” The skywriting plane departs for the first time and the diegetic environment has a temporary reprieve from the engine noise that “bored ominously into the ears of the crowd” (21, 20). As the plane dips behind the clouds, Rezia takes the opportunity to attempt to pull Septimus out of his episode. She anxiously begs her husband, “Look, look Septimus!,” a command which she continues to repeat across several pages (21). While Rezia believes that sight offers a normal and sane world of clarity, Septimus, who is pushed into hallucinatory episodes by overabundant sensations, cannot open his eyes. In fact, Septimus consciously affirms his choice as he thinks to himself, “Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind” (25). At this moment, the conflict between Rezia’s vision and Septimus’s audition speaks to the same sort of

²⁷ In fact, Iser even uses an example from Woolf’s criticism on the unwritten elements in *Jane Austen* to support his argument. He cites a section of Woolf’s anonymous 1913 essay, “Jane Austen,” in which she claims that “all the elements of Jane Austen’s greatness” reside “in this unfinished and in the main inferior story” (*The Common Reader* 139).

synesthetic work that Woolf's readers are asked to do when encountering this scene.²⁸ In order to convey the intensities of perception in the mind of a mentally unstable character, Woolf forces her reader to confront the abundant sensory dimensions of words—language must be seen and heard.

Mrs. Dalloway reveals Woolf's belief that one faculty, in particular, has the most power in the stream of consciousness mode—or perhaps, in Woolf's words, it best captures “life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing” (“Modern Fiction” 149). Repeatedly, Woolf chooses audition. Her choice of metaphor confirms that sound has more life to it than sight; at one point, a “cold stream of visual impressions” describes sight, whereas sound is “sunny, with hot breath, whispering” (164, 121). The vibrancy of sound defines the Regent's Park scene, which purposefully presents the reader with sentences as sonically impressive as:

the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each windowpane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye. (24)

Even as this melodic moment comes from Rezia's mind (and so ends on a return to visual perception), the emotional force of these thoughts stems from the auditory devices that decorate

²⁸ The struggle between audition and vision in Septimus's mind sometimes results in moments of full-blown synesthesia, like in the parenthetical: “(that music should be visible was a discovery)” (68). The regeneration of scientific interest in synesthesia did not occur until the 1980s, but the history of synesthesia begins to some degree with William James's *Principles of Psychology* (Holcombe 229). James claims that, for infants, “any number of impressions, from any number of sensory sources, falling simultaneously on a mind WHICH HAS NOT YET EXPERIENCED THEM SEPARATELY, will fuse into a single undivided object for that mind” [emphasis in the original] (*Principles Vol. 1* 488). Since *Principles of Psychology* inspired the stream of consciousness mode, it is possible that Woolf's depiction of synesthetic perceptions also draws from this text.

them. These awe-striking sounds refute one of the troublesome, false assumptions about reading prose—that written words are only visual marks on a page. Sound breathes life into *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is as if Woolf is pushing back against Henri Bergson's claim that reading is a non-complex and solely visual art. Just as he asserts the musicality of life, she asserts the musicality of reading.

For the most part, sensory perceptions govern Woolf's approach to stream of consciousness narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway*—this fact is especially true concerning Septimus. However, beyond the investment in perception, the novel engages with modern psychology while exploring contemplation. It is in these moments that Woolf's techniques for communicating a consciousness through sound resemble, to an extent, those of Stein. Sound, in these scenes, induces emotional conflict, as Woolf exploits her ability to create readerly empathy for her characters. Following the commotion at Regent's Park, the narrator shifts away from Septimus and returns to Clarissa Dalloway as she arrives home after shopping for her party. Clarissa then launches into a multi-page rumination on her life. During this period of contemplation, sound does not imitate an auditory stimulus; instead, it becomes a tool of activation, causing the reader to have emotional responses to Clarissa's reflections.

In the Dalloway house, the diegetic noises consist of the hum of party preparation. The interjections of sounds like her maids' voices or the doorbell occasionally interrupt Clarissa's stream of thought, but Woolf balances these present perceptions with her past memories. As in a good deal of stream of consciousness fiction, Clarissa's vivid flashbacks complicate the 18-hour frame of *Mrs. Dalloway* and allow the reader access to several temporalities. As Clarissa traces her current relationship with her husband, Richard, and her adolescent relationship with her

friend Sally Seton, the sound of the prose engages the reader in Clarissa's emotions. She repeats to herself the lines from William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*:

“Fear no more,” said Clarissa. Fear no more the heat o’ the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered. (30)

The phenomenological effect of this moment on the reader is complex, influenced by both rhyme and alliteration. First, Woolf imbeds the initial rhyme with “shiver” in the compound word, “river-bed.” The word “shock” calls back to the earlier clause and begins an alliteration of /ʃ/ (‘sh’) phonemes. Woolf returns to two forms of the word “shiver,” but between them, she interjects a near rhyme with “shock” with the phrase, “so she rocked.” At the same time, “rocked” calls back to the initial rhyme of this sentence as the word alliterates with “river.” Altogether, Woolf moves quickly through this litany of similar-sounding words: shiver, river(-bed), shock, shivers, rocked, shivered.

These devices help Woolf's reader figuratively move into Clarissa's consciousness. During her reflection, Clarissa feels shocked and uneasy as she thinks about Richard and Lady Bruton excluding her from their lunch. Rather than describe this feeling to her reader, Woolf's prose induces those very sensations. The quick oscillations between rhymes and similar sounds rock the text; thus, the reader experiences some abstract quality of unease. The reader's aesthetic experience is not exactly the same as Clarissa's emotional experience, but it complements the indirect interior monologue and helps induce reader identification. This moment demonstrates the phenomenological notion that in the virtual dimension of a novel, “the reader moves into the presence of the fictional world and so experiences the realities of the text as they happen” (Iser

61). Unsurprisingly, only a few paragraphs later in the same scene, Woolf reminds her reader to listen closely by dropping that impactful line: “(so strange the power of sounds at certain moments)” (32).

As the novel approaches Septimus’s suicide—one of the emotional climaxes of *Mrs. Dalloway*—Woolf employs the emotional power of repetition to structure the scene. As I have demonstrated with “Melanctha,” repetition can imitate patterns of thought and serve as a crucial formal element for depicting a mind. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the rhythm of thought is not overbearingly present, as Woolf’s style does not produce unrelenting patterns like those in “Melanctha.” Consequently, when the prose suddenly reiterates certain phrases multiple times, the stylistic shift disrupts the narrative. Redundant wording flashes a warning before Septimus enters another hallucinatory episode: “What always happened, then happened—what happened every night of their lives” (144). In this case, Woolf’s repetitions indicate Septimus’s deviation from sane thinking and his slippage into panic.

Before the narrator begins directly reporting Septimus’s final interior monologue, the evening promises hope for Septimus and Rezia. The couple spends time together at home while Septimus designs a hat for one of Rezia’s customers. He seems lucid and happy. His auditory imagination reflects this state as he listens mindlessly to Rezia talk until “her sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running” (144). Unfortunately, this state cannot be sustained and his contentedness disappears after a young girl comes to drop off the evening paper. Sentences double as Rezia jokingly copies Septimus to entertain the papergirl: “Surrey was all out, he read. There was a heat wave. Rezia repeated: Surrey was all out. There was a heat wave, making it part of the game she was playing with Mrs. Filmer’s grandchild.” The redundancy of the moment briefly prolongs time for the reader, right before accelerating into

Septimus's mental frenzy with four short sentences: "He was very tired. He was very happy. He would sleep. He shut his eyes." (145).

Audition, which was once safe for Septimus, now becomes threatening. His mind deforms the noises of the laughter and chatter coming from Rezia and the papergirl: "directly he saw nothing the sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of people seeking and not finding, and passing further and further away." The run-on sentence, riddled with multiple conjunctions, mimics the pace of nervous speech as his thoughts race toward the conclusion that "They had lost him!" (145).²⁹ His panic then intensifies when he remembers that his psychiatrists, Holmes and Bradshaw, are about to arrive at the house; the repetition intensifies as well. Septimus fixates on the word, 'must,' as he remembers, "Bradshaw said they must be separated" and desperately asks Rezia, "'Must,' 'must,' why 'must'? What power had Bradshaw over him? 'What right had Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?'" (147). For the first time, Woolf's prose feels so brisk and repetitive that words like "must" and "alone" turn to rhythmic accents.

In several more quick and rhythmic statements, Septimus demands Rezia bring him his papers and then launches into a flurry of creative but disturbing productivity. Woolf's prose causes her reader to experience something akin to Septimus's sensory overload:

Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings — were they? — on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences — the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the

²⁹ Bergson argues, "the rhythm of speech has...no other object than the reproduction of the rhythm of thought" (*Mind-Energy* 57).

map of the world. (147)

The erratic punctuation and choppy fragments give form to Septimus's frenetic energy. On a phonetic level, the multiple sibilants packed into small words and phrases—like “sixpences,” “suns and stars,” “zigzagging precipices,” and “sea pieces with little faces”—create an overwhelming and unpleasant hiss. The sonic effects are so loud that the reader must engage with the sensory materials of the prose. The language becomes more and more intense as Septimus reaches his breaking point. His mind turns to his close friend who died at war, thinking “Evans, Evans, Evans—his messages from the dead” and returning to thoughts from earlier in the novel like “do not cut down trees” and “Universal love: the meaning of the world” (148). Finally, in an act of defiance to his doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, Septimus jumps out of the window, crying “I'll give it to you!” (149).

In Septimus's last scene, the overwhelming repetitions do not indicate a typical rhythm of thought, as one might expect from Stein's systematic, Jamesian approach to rhythm. Instead, Woolf's repetitions serve as unexpected stutters in a relatively fluid style of narration. Since Woolf's main investment is in harmony, these repetitions create a bit of discord. For Septimus, repetitive thoughts signal his psychosis and expose his fixation on the figures that torment him throughout the novel: Holmes, Bradshaw, and Evans. For Woolf's reader, this maneuver has durational consequences as the repetitions prolong the scene, momentarily delaying Septimus's inevitable suicide and allowing time for a feeling of apprehension to gestate. As the text cannot follow Septimus's consciousness into death, the narration continues without pause or reflection after he falls “vigorously, violently down.” To facilitate the reader's separation from his consciousness, the chaotic scene unravels without internal monologue (“There was a great deal of running up and down stairs”). Then, the narrator slips into Rezia's mind as Holmes drugs her

into sleep. Her thoughts move from lucid perceptions—"The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was"—into her dreams: "She put on her hat, and ran through cornfields" with "rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among the dry corn, the caress of the sea...strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb" (150). The sibilant-heavy prose moves into fluid and sonorous "whisperings" and "stirrings". Compared to Septimus's nonsensical flood of ideas, Rezia's half-conscious imagery, which extends slowly over a few paragraphs, provides the reader with a bit of consolatory calmness. She falls asleep, and after the section break, the novel never re-enters her consciousness.

The narrator's frequent transitions from consciousness to consciousness often entail large changes in the novel's emotional atmosphere and consequently, they can be jolting. One of the most difficult shifts to follow is from Rezia's dreams after Septimus's death to Peter's musings about how the ambulance is "one of the triumphs of civilisation" (151). However, the musicality of the prose gives *Mrs. Dalloway* a unity that transcends its fragmented perspectives. This musical unity—and the sense of a single, collective consciousness that it produces—guides the formation of a gestalt: a phenomenological term that refers to the independent illusion of a text's wholeness, actively created by the reader.³⁰ The "configurative meaning" of this novel emerges under the influence of sound, as the novel's alliterative flourishes, leitmotifs, and repetitions offer ample ground on which to construct this gestalt (Iser 59). Music is the main tool that Woolf

³⁰ The term "gestalt" is borrowed from Kurt Koffka, an early 20th century German psychologist, and the Berlin School's theory of Gestalt psychology. Gestalt signifies that "The whole is other than the sum of the parts." Iser adopted this idea in "The Reading Process" to explain that readers must deal with many disparate elements to create a unified and independent illusion of a text as they work through it.

offers her reader to combat the novel's fragmentation.³¹ The many leitmotifs, which diffuse across the minds of all the characters, give *Mrs. Dalloway* a musical structure and, similarly, develop a musical analogy for thought.³² Woolf's repertoire includes both images (like the bells tolls marking each hour or the movement of a wave) and phrases (like "Fear no more the heat of the sun," "rising and falling," and "that is all"). Within the interior monologues, the repetitions of leitmotifs trace the patterns of characters' mentalities; emotional pressures force them always to return to their catchphrases. On a phenomenological level, these leitmotifs bring emotional pressures of their own that act upon the reader, accumulating more influence throughout the duration of the narrative.

While the concept of the leitmotif is borrowed from musical composition, its literary use is not necessarily sonic. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, the leitmotifs usually signal moments of peak musical intensity for each section. For example, Clarissa repeats the phrase, "fear no more the heat of the sun," to herself during already-musical passages. She says it twice, during the passage I examined earlier in this section concerning rhyme between forms of 'shiver' and 'river-bed' (30). Later, the phrase appears directly following two other leitmotifs (the image of waves and 'that is all') and anticipates an overabundance of sibilance: "Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows" (39-40). In another instance, the phrase appears before Septimus's suicide, this time disembodied from

³¹ Iser feels that modern texts in particular trouble the formation of a gestalt due to contradictions and ambiguities that "frustrate our desire to 'picture,' thus continually causing our imposed gestalt to disintegrate" (59). He understands that these frustrations only add to the richness of the modern novel by allowing the reader a substantial role in the creation of the text.

³² Building upon Dujardin's claim that "the incessant thrust of musical motifs" can represent the consciousness, Friedman (in his 1955 study) explores how French symbolists adopted Richard Wagner's leitmotif technique for the use of inner monologue (124).

Clarissa's consciousness and voiced by the narrator, or possibly by Septimus himself as he fixates on the heat wave. His thoughts intermix with those of Elizabeth Dalloway (Clarissa's 18-year-old daughter) as she boards the nearby Westminster omnibus. In anticipation of the upcoming iteration of the Shakespearian leitmotif, the melodies of the prose begin to crescendo. A variance between short phrases, like "the light and the shadow which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow" mimic the text's references to "rising and falling" and to the recurring wave (139). Thus, the adaptation of the leitmotif in *Mrs. Dalloway* produces auditory reverberations, even when the technique is semantic more than it is sonic.

While leitmotivic repetition draws attention to the music of the prose, it also helps enact emotional meaning and revelation. Since the leitmotifs appear consistently throughout the narrative, the reader develops an acute awareness of their presence by the end of the novel. Woolf, then, can exploit the full emotional force of her leitmotifs during the final climax of *Mrs. Dalloway*: from an upstairs window, Clarissa catches sight of her elderly neighbor going to bed while she meditates on Septimus's "attempt to communicate" with his death. This scene draws together multiple elements of the novel's musicality to form a single, simultaneous harmony. As Clarissa looks out the window to find a reflection of her future (her old neighbor going to bed), a variety of recognizable elements enters the text. For one, the sound of Big Ben dominates the auditory environment with several reminders that "The clock was striking" (186). Two other motifs slip into Clarissa's thoughts: the crucial, "Fear no more the heat of the sun," and a sound-image of "leaden circles dissolving in the air" (which has appeared in multiple minds, as if originating from the collective consciousness that permeates the novel) (186). The return of these sounds and phrases at this climactic moment finally induces the emotional response that Woolf

has been preparing since the outset of the novel.

Although the leitmotifs are the most overt components of this harmony, a subtler source—the aesthetics of the prose—also engages the reader in Clarissa’s experience of revelation. Just as Woolf revives notable images and phrases, she also reproduces intricate sounds from earlier in the novel, particularly those that define the style of *Mrs. Dalloway*. For example, Woolf unleashes sequences of three monosyllabic (and often onomatopoeic) vocalizations that feel familiar—from Septimus’s thought that Rezia’s “sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running” and a variety of other occasions (144). That form appears twice: first, as Clarissa imagines Septimus lying dead “with a thud, thud, thud, in his brain,” and second, as she hears “the clock striking the hour one, two, three, she did not pity him” (184, 186). Similarly, as Clarissa contemplates the essence of her life, the sound of the prose echoes her earlier rumination from the morning’s party preparations. Clarissa thinks, “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” (184). This particular blend of rhyme and repetition only appears a few other times in the novel. Consequently, the return of this precise auditory device implies a connection to when Clarissa felt “the moment in which she stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers” (30). These “invincible thread[s] of sound” complicate the temporality of the narrative; the reader’s present engagement with the prose is tangled up in the past, as Woolf’s unique music leaves her reader

with a lasting earworm of sorts.³³ At once, Woolf synthesizes her leitmotifs and her flourishes in musicality to create a single, complex experience for her reader.

For those scholars who understand literature as a spatial arrangement of temporality, it would likely be easy to overlook how sound, in this climax, transcends both the space and time of narrative. In Miller's linear model of reading, simultaneity is not possible—Woolf can gesture toward it, but not achieve it. Even Friedman, who appreciates the musical analogy for stream of consciousness writing, falls short of recognizing the extent to which this sort of scene functions musically. Like many other critics, Friedman asserts that the analogy between music and literature is only an analogy and that the two forms have insurmountable differences: “One cannot, as in music, write several sounds to be heard simultaneously” (125). However, in a reader's auditory imagination, the potential music materializes rather palpably, as the content is no longer restricted by the spatial or temporal limitations of the written word. In a single instant, the reader's creative faculty can realize both the cacophony of the striking clock and the rhythms and melodies of Woolf's prose. In the virtual dimension, the full music of *Mrs. Dalloway* can come into existence as a sort of musical gestalt, described from a character's perceptions but performed by the reader's mind.

The phenomenological experience of this music must be taken into account to understand exactly how Woolf communicates to her reader the contents of consciousness. After the final melodic pinnacle, the end of *Mrs. Dalloway* completes a sequence of several consciousnesses

³³ Involuntary Musical Imagery (IMI), or earworms, “refers to the conscious experience of music, familiar or novel that repeatedly goes over in one's mind during normal daytime awareness” (408). While most earworms are catchy songs, Liikkanen's 2008 publication, “Music in Everymind,” found that words/sentences make up the third most common type of earworm (37.3% of participants said they experienced it ‘often’). Peter Walsh wakes up with the phrase “The death of the soul” stuck in his head (Woolf 58).

running up against one another. Septimus, first, discovers “the message hidden in the beauty of words” (88). Then, with the wordless expression of his suicide, he passes this revelation onto Clarissa and, never having met her, “He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun” (186). Encompassing this character-to-character communication is the phenomenological achievement of *Mrs. Dalloway*: the musicality of the language impresses this same message upon the reader.

THE DISCONTENTS OF NARRATIVE & THE PATH “TO FERTILE GROUND”

In her essay “Modern Fiction,” Woolf voices a basic truth about the importance of form in determining the success of art: “certain paths seem to lead to fertile ground, others to the dust and the desert” (*The Common Reader* 146). Arguably, both “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway* lead to fertile ground. Even though there is some critical disagreement about how Stein and Woolf compare to a figure like James Joyce, both works are usually recognized as essential examples of the stream of consciousness mode. Stein’s and Woolf’s first attempts at rendering a mind in literature are not alike in content, but they both depend, in unique ways, upon the ability of sound to induce a readerly experience. Stein translates patterns of thought into the rhythms of prose and, in doing so, places her reader in a tense environment that correlates in a loose, but gratifying way to Jeff and Melanctha’s psychological frustrations. Woolf manipulates her prose to create highly complex analogies between her character’s sensory perceptions and her reader’s perceptual encounter with the sensory materials of her prose. While different, these techniques both demonstrate that sound can be used to integrate the reader into fictive psychological realities—and thus to give a vivid sense of a character’s consciousness. As this chapter has explored, sound—and its direct, perceptual effect on a reader—helps overcome the difficulty of communicating something that is nearly incommunicable. In spite of their innovations, however,

“Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway* exhibit certain discontents that quietly presage the fact that each author would ultimately abandon her initial approach to the rendering of the mind.

The concerns of Stein and Woolf both relate to the demands of narrative, to the issue of time, and to phenomenological questions about human experience. Since narrative typically chronicles events (public, personal, or other), fiction tends to demand an engagement with temporality. “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway*, in rendering the consciousness in narrative form, both run into difficulties with this fact. Stein openly proclaims her apprehension about temporality in an essay she delivered at Oxford and Cambridge in 1926: her playful and indirect “Composition as Explanation.”³⁴ Simply put, “The time in the composition is a thing that is very troublesome” (Stein 6). While strange distortions of time permeate the entirety of “Melanctha,” the “troublesome” thing that Stein refers to does not become a tangible problem until the end of the novella. In comparison with the story’s detailed and drawn-out evenings, the concluding pages feel sloppy and overly hasty. The denouement lacks substantial detail, almost as if Stein has lost interest in her protagonist ten pages too early. After Melanctha’s final breakup with Jeff and her falling-out with Rose Johnson, a new relationship commences between Melanctha and Jem Richards— “a man other men always [trust],” even though he is untrustworthy and addicted to horse betting (133). Their first dialogues tease the sort of endless conversations that Jeff and Melanctha had, but this relationship quickly slips from a happy engagement into nothing, and “Melanctha Herbert never again saw Jem Richards” (143).

After this breakup, the timeline of the narrative moves even faster, practically jumping to the “FINIS” without giving any detail. Melanctha’s biography loses its characteristic “sense of

³⁴ The Hogarth Press, the Woolf’s independent publishing house, published “Composition as Explanation” in November 1926—meaning that Woolf certainly read this essay (DuPlessis 100).

urgent life” (Stein and DeKoven 252). The narrator rattles off that “the Doctor told her [Melanctha] she had the consumption, and before long she would surely die. They sent her where she would be taken care of, a home for poor consumptives, and there Melanctha stayed until she died” (Stein 144). For a reader adjusted to Stein’s meticulous and endlessly prolonged storytelling, this ending is shockingly perfunctory. Stein, too, was aware and disappointed that the novella fell short of what the experiment had promised: “In the first book [*Three Lives*] there was a groping for a continuous present and for using everything by beginning again and again...Having naturally done this I naturally was a little troubled by it when I read it” (“CE” 4). Stein’s “Composition as Explanation,” like many of her essays, is intentionally convoluted and difficult to parse, but one thing is clear: in Stein’s view, *Three Lives* strives to replace linear time with a “continuous present,” but does not achieve it. The conclusion of “Melanctha” demonstrates Stein’s shortcoming: even though she achieves, more or less, a sense of the lived experience of time in the body of the novella, she cannot sustain it once the demands of narrative crop up. After staving off narration in favor of psychological exploration for the bulk of the novel, the narrator must accelerate suddenly to complete the story of Melanctha’s life within the frame of the last few pages. And once narrative is let back in, it floods in; it obliterates the suspended-in-the-moment, lived time (i.e. Bergson’s real duration) for which “Melanctha” grasps. The ending is little more than a narration of the succession of events; thus, “mechanical time” takes over and the “continuous present” is lost. This failure is especially problematic in the stream of consciousness mode. Even though Stein had successfully portrayed the internal lives of her characters in *Three Lives*, she had not sustained a sufficient representation of the consciousness, as it exists in time, for the duration of the work.

Mrs. Dalloway, too, houses several concerns about the stream of consciousness mode,

some ethical and some literary. For one, Woolf reveals an ethical anxiety about privacy. With Peter Walsh, for example, there are limits to what the third-person narrator can access. In the privacy of his own subjectivity, Peter goes by “not Peter, but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts”—the narrative stops short of exposing that name (53). In response, perhaps, to the boundaries of private subjectivity, Woolf would later abandon her invasive third-person narrator altogether. While Woolf’s later stream of consciousness writing responds to the issue of privacy, her approach did not change as a result of this ethical concern alone. As with Stein, Woolf’s most immediate problem with narrative concerns time. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), written just after *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf’s discontents with the temporality of narrative are most clear. The style of the stream of consciousness writing in *To the Lighthouse* closely resembles that in *Mrs. Dalloway*—a third-person narrator allows the reader access to the minds of the Ramsay family and their guests during two summer evenings spent on the coast of Scotland.

The temporal setup of *To the Lighthouse* is more complex than that of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel is in three parts, with two substantial narrative sections separated by a short interlude. The first part explores the characters’ consciousnesses on one evening in 1910; the second, an interlude called “Time Passes,” is a curious imagistic montage in which ten years go by in 20 pages; and the third, like the first, narrates roughly the same cast of characters’ thoughts on an evening in 1920. “Time Passes” poses for Woolf’s reader a unique temporal problem, loosely related to the one at the end of “Melanctha.” Stylistically, the writing approaches poetry and evokes the relentless, indifferent parade of time: “What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated” (144). On an

emotional level, however, the passage of ten years' time is an aggression on Woolf's part toward her reader. After over a hundred pages of developing and coloring the interiorities of her characters, the novel suddenly kills three of them in small parenthetical phrases and drastically changes tone. Woolf violates the closeness she fostered between the reader and Mrs. Ramsay, the principal character of part one, by announcing her death in a subordinate clause within a bracketed aside: Mr. Ramsay "stretched his arms out one dark morning, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before,...[his arms] remained empty" (143). The third section of the novel never recovers the warmth of tone and feeling of the first section. The unexpected passage of time has consequences here: by omitting a large portion of some characters' lives and actually killing others, Woolf calls into question the reader's relationship to those characters. One begins to wonder if it is even possible for a reader to realize a character's interiority while only receiving their thoughts at a few, specific instances in time.

Woolf's and Stein's concerns with time are slightly different in nature and extremely different in how they emerge to problematize "Melanctha" and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Still, the issue of time is, for both authors, an issue of how to represent the consciousness through narrative. For Stein, "Melanctha" elucidates a certain desire for a different type of temporality—one that more accurately reflects lived human experience. As Stein reveals in "Composition as Explanation," after completing *Three Lives*, she retrospectively recognized her tendency to grope for a continuous present. Stein notices that, though she "had been accustomed to past present and future," she naturally attempted to eradicate those concepts and retain only the present in *Three Lives* (3). However, she also recognizes that she did not achieve the desired temporality in those pieces: the end of "Melanctha" shows that a linear movement of time still dominates the novella, even though Stein's theory of mind requires a "continuous present."

Woolf's discontent with time arises not from *Mrs. Dalloway* itself, but from her continued attempts to narrate conscious thought. "Time Passes" seems to uncover a temporal problem that makes the stream of consciousness technique used in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and in section one of *To the Lighthouse* suddenly untenable. In those novels, Woolf explores the internal processes of her characters over the course of a single day; her narrator uses indirect interior monologue to reveal the perceptions, reflections, and flashbacks that unravel in daily life. Yet the experiment of "Time Passes" changes how Woolf understands the mind, and in her subsequent projects, those little moments of perception and reflection no longer define consciousness. The third part of the *To the Lighthouse* is still emotional, but it is not as communicative. The reader experiences a palpable sense of loss for what she has missed, as the characters' interiorities feel alien and distant. Essentially, "Time Passes" bifurcates the novel into fragments that reflect on each other like a past and a future, but do not add up to the whole of conscious experience. In spite of Woolf's engaging sonic analogies, the narrative situation of her early stream of consciousness novels does not communicate what Woolf wishes finally to communicate. "Time Passes" causes Woolf to adjust her theory of mind, as she realizes that consciousness cannot be reduced to specific narratable moments and experiences.

Despite the phenomenologically engaging nature of "Melantha" and *Mrs. Dalloway*, neither text represents or communicates consciousness in a way that fully adheres to Woolf's or Stein's theories of mind. Narrative simply falls short; it cannot reflect the complexities of lived experience. The last five pages of "Melantha" end the experiment for Stein, just as the 20 pages of "Time passes" in *To the Lighthouse* do for Woolf. If these early approaches to rendering the mind are not the proper paths "to fertile ground," then what might be?

Only five years after those first attempts at stream of consciousness fiction, Stein and

Woolf abandoned their approaches. Each published a work that proffered a radically different way of accessing the mind: for Stein, *Tender Buttons* in 1914 and for Woolf, *The Waves* in 1931. The rift between these books and the likes of *Three Lives* and *Mrs. Dalloway* is staggering. Stein's *Tender Buttons*, which only describes objects, food, and rooms, cannot be considered stream of consciousness fiction and does not have a narrative in any traditional sense. Nevertheless, these descriptions flow with a linguistic movement that resembles a strangely delocalized thought pattern, signaling that perhaps Stein has not after all given up her investment in the rendering of the mind. Woolf's *The Waves*, on the other hand, still engages with the stream of consciousness tradition, but it approaches the mode from an entirely different narrative perspective: Woolf no longer relying on a third-person narrator to mediate between reader and character. Spoken soliloquies (at least that's how they present themselves) are delivered directly from the characters and span the full gestalt of those characters' lives.

Even with these drastic shifts in approach, sonic experimentation and reader engagement both remain key—and become even more central—to these successor works. By tracing two parallel chronologies (from “Melanctha” to *Tender Buttons* and from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *The Waves*), I aim to explore how the sounds of language can represent the experiences of consciousness without recourse to the vagaries of stream of consciousness narrative. Analyzing only narrative representations of the mind (by which I mean, the narratives of stream of consciousness fiction) would not fully satisfy my investigation. In the pursuit of transforming the consciousness into art, narrative is an “ill-fitting vestment” (“Modern Fiction” 149). What, then, would be better suited for the rendering the consciousness? In both *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves*, in very different ways, *abstraction* provides a radical and effective answer.

CHAPTER 2
The Consciousness in Abstraction:

***Tender Buttons*, *The Waves*, or “no sense, that is to say music”**

The premises of *Tender Buttons* and of *The Waves* are so different as to actively resist comparative analysis. The former is a book of short prose poems that are highly abstract, without character or plot, and focused on the mundane; while the latter is a novel that is experimental in its own right, seemingly character-driven, and openly invested in questions of ontology and identity. The two works rarely appear together in literary criticism, save for one or two articles on the experimentation of queer women writers.³⁵ Yet this critical gap entails an overlooking of the connection between two integral moments in Stein’s and Woolf’s respective pursuits of representing the consciousness. *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* accomplish, to a greater extent, many of the goals that Stein and Woolf first elucidated in “Melanctha” and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Each of the later texts offers a unique response to the discontents of stream of consciousness narrative that, when taken together, demonstrate the possibility of a new mode. Both Stein and Woolf settle the question of how to write conscious experience in the same, general terrain—that of sound, of abstraction, of non-semantic communication.

The disparate premises of *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* are largely superficial differences that conceal important similarities between the works. For one, the sounds of

³⁵ Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s “WOOLFENSTEIN” (1989) deserves mention, as (according to my research) it is the only article that directly looks at both *The Waves* and *Tender Buttons*. For DuPlessis, the similarities of these works stem from the “otherness” of ‘feminine’ writing: “All the ‘objects’ and ‘food’ of *Tender Buttons* might be viewed like the characters of *The Waves*: as voicing their soliloquies of otherness, in the languages of ‘shoes’ or ‘roast beef’” (104).

language, instead of being byproducts or aesthetic effects of the narrative, in fact, propel the prose. While both *Mrs. Dalloway* and “Melanctha” are often poetic, they are not fully committed to prose-poetry in the way that *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* are. Sound overrides semantics at times in these texts and takes on an independent movement of its own: “It was a cress a crescent a cross and an unequal scream” (Stein, *Tender Buttons* 53). Rhythm and phonetic play are privileged far more than clarity in wonderful phrases like, “something sulphurous and sinister, bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost” (Woolf, *The Waves* 171). Furthermore, in these later works, Stein and Woolf both abandon the tradition of indirect interior monologue in exchange for something new and unique—something that *presupposes* the reader’s phenomenological encounter with the sonic material of the text.

By looking at these works side by side, I aim to delineate what I understand as two trajectories that are similar in motive, but distinct in the paths they take toward a more exacting mode for writing the consciousness. In the path from “Melanctha” to *Tender Buttons*, Stein explores the possibilities of abstraction as she reduces her life-spanning narrative of the consciousness into instances of perception that demand her reader’s participation. In the path from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *The Waves*, Woolf moves toward abstraction in a more subtle way: she presents her novel as if it were still fully committed to narrative, but the feeling ‘thing’ of the consciousness resides elsewhere. Woolf expands the daily movements of conscious thought into the gestalt of all experience.

These are bold revisions of the two author’s first attempts at the stream of consciousness mode. *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves* both announce themselves as avant-garde texts; they force their readers to confront highly experimental language (with Stein, near non-sense, and with

Woolf, excessive poetry) and both texts sometimes seem to be conscious of that confrontation.³⁶ It will take me many pages to fully articulate the result of this confrontation but, in short, a new approach to writing human experience manifests itself in these works. Sound serves as the formal foundation for *Tender Buttons* and *The Waves*: when referential language and narrative fall short, Woolf and Stein find their respective solutions to that shortcoming through a dissolution of the marriage between the sounds of language and their semantic or narrative contexts. Through this abstraction, Stein and Woolf both achieve, to varying degrees, a method of communicating what denotative language cannot say.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS MACHINE OF *TENDER BUTTONS*

In 1914, Gertrude Stein thrust upon the literary public something akin to a riddle: her playful, enigmatic, experimental, and troublesome little book, *Tender Buttons*. The structure of the book suggests a simple project. The three parts—"Objects," "Food," and "Rooms"—consist of dozens of small, descriptive segments that, taken together, imply a catalog of sorts. However, all notions of simplicity stop there. The contents of *Tender Buttons* are perplexing—so perplexing, in fact, that the text's impenetrability alone substantiates *Tender Buttons*' reputation as one of the most experimental and difficult literary works. What is a reader to do when encountering a segment like the disconcertingly succinct, "Roast potatoes for" ("ROAST

³⁶ In *The Waves*, characters speak in private but sometimes seem to speak directly to the reader or hint to the narrative situation. Louis even says, "The time approaches when these soliloquies shall be shared" (27). *Tender Buttons* seems to talk directly to its reader in the imperative with phrases like "Suppose there is a pigeon" or "Search a neglect" (38, 39).

POTATOES” 52)?³⁷ Where does interpretation even begin when words that feel like prattle—“A type oh oh new new not no not knealer knealer of old show beefsteak, neither neither”—masquerade as a definition of “ORANGE” [segment quoted in its entirety] (58)? As one 1914 reviewer comments, “The effect produced on first reading is something like terror. There are no known precedents to cling to. It is like a journey in unknown seas without a pilot” (Curnutt 160).

Over a century after the book’s publication, it is clear that the distance that Stein forged between *Tender Buttons* and the rest of literature has closed but little. Navigating these “unknown seas” is still a complicated undertaking and, consequently, the text often inspires curious criticism. In a majority of the scholarship on *Tender Buttons*, critics play part in a widespread phenomenon that involves cherry-picking moments of lucidity and mobilizing those moments to make definitive statements about the text. The very language that critics use as they grasp after meaning reflects this tendency. Lisa Ruddick, for example, calls the segments “nuts we are meant to crack” and then goes even further, claiming that “*Tender Buttons* can be unlocked, to a far greater extent than has been supposed” (190). Ruddick’s metaphors both suggest that some hidden meaning might reside somewhere, either within a shell or behind padlocked doors. Unfortunately, this search for “an infallible passkey” frequently causes readers to reduce the labyrinthine experience of engaging with *Tender Buttons* to something readily definable and more familiar (Bridgman). The gestalt, or the comprehensive whole, of Stein’s project often gets neglected.

A more productive way, I would argue, to approach *Tender Buttons* is to confront its most problematic elements, to respect the confusions it causes, and to contemplate the entirety of

³⁷ I will uphold Stein’s choice to have the segment titles in all caps in the 1914 original print, while Perlow’s 2014 edition switches them to small caps. The visual relationship between title and segment is an important element of *Tender Buttons*.

the phenomenological encounter one has with the text. The first issue of *Tender Buttons* that demands investigation is its place in Stein's greater oeuvre—an issue which most critics neglect altogether. At first glance, the project of *Tender Buttons* seems to have little in common with the psychological and narratological interests that commanded Stein's writing only five years earlier in *Three Lives*. The collection's central story, "Melanctha," while still an experimental text, is fully invested in storytelling. As I explored in my first chapter, the novella toys with, but ultimately relies upon traditional literary elements like character, narrator, and plot. Stein's next major publication, *Tender Buttons*, unexpectedly abandons all of those elements in favor of abstract writing and unfettered linguistic play.³⁸ Naturally, the easiest response to this deviation is to ignore it. Chani Anine Marchiselli in "Queer Sonorities," for example, does not thoroughly investigate this shift. Instead, Marchiselli explains away the perplexing differences between *Tender Buttons* and *Three Lives* using the strange claim that "Stein's early experiments...sometimes failed to solicit the participation of the reader" (81).

The question of tackling Stein's consecutive but disparate early publications is only further complicated when one looks to Stein's own reflections for answers. Her essay, "Portraits and Repetition," which Stein read as a lecture on her 1934 American tour, is a commonly cited repository of knowledge: Stein provides a perspective on the genesis of her work that is as mystifying as it is illuminating (*Lectures in America* 1935). She discusses her "portrait" writing and its relation to her realization that:³⁹

³⁸ Stein wrote *The Making of Americans* before and during the writing of *Three Lives*, but the book was not published until 1925. Similarly, Stein published *White Wines* in 1913, but the play did not capture broad literary attention.

³⁹ Stein does not clearly define which texts make up the body of work she calls her "portraits"; however, she does include *The Making of Americans* (1925), *Tender Buttons*, *Geography and Plays* (1922), and a variety of writings from *Portraits and Prayers* (1934).

[when] expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. (288)

Using convoluted logic and serpentine language, Stein ruminates on what is, essentially, an interpretation of Jamesian and Bergsonian concepts of the non-repeatability of experience. Beyond this discussion of repetition, however, Stein puts forth several troublesome statements about *Tender Buttons*. First, the term “portrait” itself is already somewhat problematic, as the intrinsic stillness of portraiture conflicts with Stein’s temporal interests and her emphasis on the “vitality of movement” (292). Furthermore, Stein gives a bizarre explanation of the book’s premise. Stein says she was motivated by the desire to *avoid* remembering, which is a form of repetition: “it was necessary for me nevertheless not to realize these things as remembering but to realize the one thing as existing and there they were and I was noticing” (294). Stein, then, calls *Tender Buttons* the achievement of “a thing being contained within itself” (305).

Stein’s statement about “a thing within itself” complicates not only *Tender Buttons* but also a majority of the “portrait” work that she refers to in the essay. For one, the language that Stein uses to describe her writing process (which involves “at the same time talking and listening” and looking at things directly) conflicts with her assertion that she can access and represent an objective reality (290). If *Tender Buttons* were about objects “as they [are],” it would not be the experimental text that we know; a segment on “A CUTLET” would not read (in its entirety) “A blind agitation is manly and uttermost” (“Portraits” 294, *TB* 23). In such instances, Stein’s subjectivity undoubtedly saturates the text. Furthermore, the objectivity that Stein claims to represent in her segments is antithetical to the type of reality that she establishes

in “Melantha.” The world of “Melantha” is one so deeply entrenched in subjectivity that the external world nearly disappears altogether: the town of Bridgepoint barely exists in the background of Melantha’s endless musings on her suffering. This literature is as far from objectivity as possible; it is so subjective as to induce claustrophobia. It seems unlikely that Stein would so suddenly abandon her integral philosophies, her beliefs in Jamesian and Bergsonian thought, and her interests in psychology.

If we took Stein’s statements in “Portraits and Repetition” at face value, it would be nearly impossible to reconcile the extreme subjectivity of *Three Lives* with the purported objectivity of *Tender Buttons*. However, the dichotomy that Stein (in calling *Tender Buttons* objective) fabricates between these two texts does not hold up to textual analysis. *Tender Buttons* does, in fact, belong to the lineage of Stein’s stream of consciousness writing. In my comparative analysis of Stein’s two earliest publications, I would like to argue that *Three Lives* and *Tender Buttons* are not diverging projects. On the contrary, they are complementary: “Melantha” explores subjective reality by looking inward to the minds of its characters, while *Tender Buttons* explores a more general subjective reality, looking outward to the relationship between mind and world.

To substantiate this reading, I first aim to demonstrate that *Tender Buttons* is populated with ample evidence of the act of perception. While Stein de-emphasizes sensory perception in “Melantha,” she privileges acts of perception in *Tender Buttons*. This shift responds to some of the temporal and emotional limitations that hinder her early stream of consciousness exercises—those in the concluding section of chapter one, on the discontents of narrative. By depicting perception, Stein can explore instantaneous and universal experiences of consciousness, instead of developing characters she abandons at random or writing narratives that trail off unexpectedly.

The investment in perception in *Tender Buttons*, while boldly unique, brings Stein's approach to the consciousness somewhat closer to that of Woolf in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*. Even the perplexing rhetoric of "Portraits and Repetition" is coded with language that signals Stein's unwavering interest in subjective experience, like the unremitting repetition of sensory verbs like "listening" and "looking" and other telling phrases like "I became conscious of these things" and "I began then to consciously listen" ("Portraits" 288, 289). The substratum beneath *Tender Buttons* is human perception, not the objects being perceived.

Next, I will explore the ways in which the sonic patterns of *Tender Buttons* retain something of Stein's use of sound in her narrative approach to the consciousness from "Melanctha." Both texts engage their readers by exploiting the sounds of language to a radical degree, with "Melanctha" serving as an early test of certain techniques. For example, the effectiveness with which Stein turns the proper noun, "Melanctha," into a rhythmic accent foretells the yet more extreme phonetic play of *Tender Buttons*. With sentences like, "Eel us eel us with no no pea no pea cool, no pea cool cooler with a land a land cost in," Stein insists that words are sounds before they are signifiers ("EATING" 57). This sonic experimentation, like that of "Melanctha," is a crucial tool in communicating something of the consciousness, though that experimentation is to somewhat different ends. What was first used to offer the reader a *correlative* to the consciousness of "Melanctha" becomes even more direct in *Tender Buttons*, as the experiences are no longer mediated through a character. The sound of *Tender Buttons* enacts the movements of a mind contemplating and constructing the world around it.

Finally, I will delve into the phenomenological experience of reading *Tender Buttons*—an investigation that demands that I narrate my own encounter with the book. The rewards of this analytical gambit are exemplified by Ellen Berry's *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering*,

which invokes Berry's personal responses to Stein's writing as a starting point for analysis. As Stein shifts from the narrative of "Melanctha" to the abstraction of *Tender Buttons*, the reader's phenomenological experience dramatically changes as well. The denial of character and narrative in *Tender Buttons* resolves the duration-based claustrophobia of "Melanctha"; however, new interpretive frustrations emerge to guide the text. The defamiliarized language of *Tender Buttons* (interspersed with suggestively lucid and seemingly communicative moments like "there is some venturing in refusing to believe nonsense") forces Stein's readers to question their own processes of meaning-making (*TB* 12). These frustrations not only allow Stein to expose the uniquely subjective ways in which consciousness creates reality; they also compel the reader to work through those very processes as they read the text. At the risk of adding to the already dense critical jargon surrounding Stein, I propose that the gestalt of *Tender Buttons* forms a sort of consciousness machine—or, in other words, the text induces certain thought processes in the mind of the reader, even while remaining entirely delocalized from character subjectivity.⁴⁰ Through segments that deceptively announce themselves as "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms," *Tender Buttons* simulates a mind's interaction with the external world and imitates patterns of logic, contemplation, and most importantly, mental association. Stein thus effectively abstracts the essential thing of the consciousness, without the hindrances of a character's personality or the narrative of a fictional life. Due to the deeply interactive nature of *Tender Buttons*, Stein's reader experiences the movements of this consciousness machine first hand.

Throughout *Tender Buttons*, the act of perception is present in some form; sometimes

⁴⁰ It will take a while for my analysis to return to my claim about the consciousness machine, as *Tender Buttons* is a multifarious text that requires ample investigation before it can be unpacked.

lingering beneath the surface, implied but not announced, and other times bubbling up to dominate the segments. Seeing, of all the senses, commands a majority of the text, but hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting all play their necessary roles in presenting a mind's experience of the sensorial world. In the description of *Tender Buttons* from "Portraits and Repetition," Stein mostly discusses external objects, but perception still plays a necessary role. In her words, her attempt was "to realize the one thing as existing and there they were and I was noticing" (294). Her emphasis is ultimately on the mind doing the noticing, which becomes even clearer when Stein asks perceptual and linguistic questions like "just what [did] one [see] when one looked at anything really looked at anything. Did one see sound, and what was the relation between color and sound, did it make itself by description by a word that meant it or did it make itself by a word in itself" (303). As these questions hint, perception—and the problem of its relation to language—serves as the integral foundation of *Tender Buttons*. The text's numerous traces of perception, both subtle and overt, are suggestive: they reveal the moving consciousness of *Tender Buttons*.

In the first section, "Objects," Stein writes of a myriad of things. If the titles of her segments are to be taken seriously, they inform the reader that those things include two boxes, several umbrellas, some concepts and emotions, a variety of clothing and furniture, and, literally, "MORE." The first segment, titled "A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS," draws attention to sight, or to the lack of it, in its title. While "blind glass" does not have any familiar connotations, the phrase at least implies that the carafe is neither looking glass nor eyeglass. The very first words of the text forewarn the reader that the sort of seeing that will be done in *Tender Buttons* does not involve any traditional apparatus for vision, like a mirror or eyeglasses. While the first segment only briefly refers to sight, other segments overtly depend upon sense verbs,

with particular emphasis on forms of “to see.” The first version of “A BOX,” for example, originates the wonderful phrase: to “see a fine substance strangely”—five words which eloquently sum up the premise of the book (13). Moving beyond sight only further confirms the hypothesis that *Tender Buttons* stems from acts of perception. As one would expect, the senses of smell and taste only enter the equation during the section on “Food.” “CELERY” reads “Celery tastes tastes where in curled lashes and little bits and mostly in remains,” whereas “MUTTON” is “Interleaved and successive and a sample of smell” (53, 41). These segments concern objects, but they demand the presence of a perceiver come into existence. As *Tender Buttons* has neither character nor narrator, the reader is the necessary agent in constructing these segments.

The many examples of sense verbs, however, while suggestive of Stein’s investment in sensation, do not alone indicate the extent to which perception guides *Tender Buttons*. Even segments that contain no sense verbs imply acts of perception, and oftentimes, these acts are the underlying assumptions that motivate the segments. “A FEATHER,” for example, uses the passive voice to evoke the sight of a feather as the intrusion of other sights and sounds obstructs the perception. In its entirety, the segment reads:

A feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive.
(27)

As is characteristic of *Tender Buttons*, this segment operates on the multiplicity of meanings that can be extracted from single words. The verb “trim” hovers between two definitions: it may mean to embellish or to cut back. At first, one may think of a decorative trim made of feathers or perhaps of the trimming of a captive bird’s flight feathers. However, in the broader context of

Tender Buttons, neither of these attempts to prescribe narrative action to these two sentences is rewarding. It is easy to lose sight of Stein's question of "just what one saw when one looked at anything" and consequently, to overlook the possibility that this segment evokes the perceiving of a feather in its environment ("Portraits" 303).

The segment starts by announcing the object, as an implicit perceiver beholds a feather; in this instance, the reader becomes that perceiver. The word "feather" induces a vision of a feather in the reader's mind. Stein then immediately complicates this perception by unveiling the rest of the feather's environment: "it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post." With this monosyllabic sentence, the regular rhythmic accents that fall on "light," "bug," and "post" initiate the reader into a perception that is developing successively through time. Similar to what Woolf does with perception in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Stein makes the sound of her text correlate to acts of perception. As the pacing of the segment slows with successively longer phrases, one can visualize a feather as it falls through the air. During this movement, the vision of the feather becomes obscured, or perhaps decorated, by the shifting sunlight, then by a passing bug, then by a post. The repetition of "it is trimmed" signals the progression of the perception; each time the reader encounters that phrase, something further complicates the once simple object of a feather. The "little leaning" conjures a vision of the movement of a feather upon the air; the tilting movement trims (cuts back) the vision of the feather by obscuring one side of it, or, it trims (embellishes) the greater scene with the beauty of its weightlessness.

Even though these segments are short, they present a complex understanding of perception as it occurs in time. Stein effectively slows down a moment that seems instantaneous to reveal the internal processes of the consciousness. In "Melanctha," Stein imagines memory according to Bergson's *durée réel*, like a snowball rolling upon the snow. In *Tender Buttons*,

which intentionally avoids “remembering,” Stein understands perception in a similar manner (“Portraits” 294). Compared to “Melanctha,” the temporalities of these segments are compressed and thus less taxing on the reader in terms of duration; the experience can be engaging without being exhausting or claustrophobic. However, *Tender Buttons* still induces its own interpretive frustrations. The intrusion of “all sorts of mounted reserves” suddenly complicates my reading. How can “mounted reserves” concern a vision of a feather? The troublesome thing about perception and cognition is that compulsory associations are personal, often without reason, and thus not easily explained. At certain points, the reader runs into the limitations on just how much of a private subjectivity can be shared. While the ethics of privacy are a more immediate concern for Woolf, they still affect Stein’s writing—and all writing that depicts subjectivity. As a retort to those who criticized the cryptic nature of *Tender Buttons*, Stein argued in an interview, “Nobody enters into the mind of someone else, not even a husband and wife. You may touch, but you do not enter into each other’s mind” (Bennett 34).

Within the limits of an intensely compressed duration, “A FEATHER” moves through perception, mental association, and contemplation. After Stein invokes the associated image of “mounted reserves,” the last trimming of the feather includes another perception: audition. When the feather is trimmed by “loud volumes,” the mind’s attention is drawn elsewhere, to some unknown noise, and the encounter ends. The second and last sentence of “A FEATHER” shifts toward contemplation. The segment’s final reflection—“It is surely cohesive”—draws a Jamesian conclusion about the scene. Stein seems to be still committed to James’s statement that “No one ever had a simple sensation by itself”; so the sight of the feather cannot be singular (224). The final statement that “It is surely cohesive” asserts that the preceding perceptions of the segment—the light, bug, post, leaning, volumes, etc.—should fuse to form a cohesive gestalt.

The environment, movement, and time must all factor into the seemingly instantaneous interaction between the mind and the feather.

Throughout *Tender Buttons*, Stein evokes the gestalt of a perception, not a single, isolatable aspect of it and not “a thing within itself.” Even though the book explores minute processes of the mind, the segments present those processes as complex and impossible to divorce from whatever context in which they unfold (i.e. the perceiving of a feather cannot be separated from the larger external scene or the resulting mental associations). Many telling phrases, similar to the last sentence of “A FEATHER,” appear throughout the book and remind the reader to always apprehend the whole. For example, the segment, “A PIECE OF COFFEE,” instructs that “A single image is not splendor” (*TB* 13). Furthermore, the only other reference to ‘trimming’ (like that in “A FEATHER”) emphasizes the importance of the whole. The end of a longer segment in “Objects” titled “A SUBSTANCE IN A CUSHION” delves into phonetic play that still manages to contain lucid statements about perception. Stein writes, “A sight a whole sight and a little groan grinding makes a trimming such a sweet singing trimming” (12). Sight, which Stein clarifies as “a whole sight,” combines with the sound of “a little groan grinding” to form “a sweet singing trimming.” The “trimming” here cannot easily be identified as a physical object, but when one keeps in mind the trimming from “A FEATHER,” the acts of perception become clearer. The sentence playfully interweaves alliterative sounds to create a “whole sight,” or a comprehensive perception. Stein’s language is often hard to parse, but it need not be fully resolved for a reader to grasp the emphasis on the cohesive and complementary nature of perceptions like sight and sound.

These moments of perception have not gone unnoticed in the scholarship. On the contrary, a good deal of criticism on *Tender Buttons* explores the presence of sensory perception

in the text. However, few listen to Stein's many comments that celebrate and emphasize the "whole." As a result, "The whole thing is not understood" (*TB* 36). Most critics stake their claims in a single type of sensation, resulting in criticism that fails to recognize the complexity with which multiple senses interact. For example, those who read the text as "tactile," like Chad Bennett in "Scratching the Surface," limit themselves to matters of touch. Bennett's conclusions concern lesbian eroticism and the "hardness" of modernism, but they ultimately reduce what even Bennett recognizes as "a diverse sensory experience" to a single sense (22). Even though *Tender Buttons* has ample evidence of sight, it is equally reductive to discuss only the text's visual aspects. That sort of reading (which has long been the predominant way of reading *Tender Buttons*) is obsessed with the purported Cubism of *Tender Buttons* and takes unnecessary pains to place Stein within her Parisian coterie.⁴¹ While all of these readings reveal interesting elements of the text, they fail to recognize the whole of *Tender Buttons*—or, in other words, they are insufficiently phenomenological. Moreover, even though my point of analysis concerns sound, I will resist reducing *Tender Buttons* to that single perception. The question, "which sense should we single out for analysis," has obscured the question of why the book is so heavily populated with sensory perception in the first place.

As I look to the multiplicity of sensory perceptions in *Tender Buttons*, something of the human consciousness emerges. Stein seems to suggest this possibility in "Rooms," the third section of *Tender Buttons* that consists of one long prose poem, not divided into segments. "Rooms" is more serious in tone than "Food" or "Objects"; the text seems to become self-aware,

⁴¹ The secondary literature that explores *Tender Buttons* as a Cubist work is extensive. Marjorie Perloff's *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), John Malcolm Brinnin's *The Third Rose* (1959), and Donald Sutherland's *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work* (1957) all play major roles in that critical conversation, with Sutherland being the trend-setter.

reflecting on and discussing itself. One significant reflection reads, “The whole arrangement is established. The end of which is that there is a suggestion, a suggestion that there can be a different whiteness to a wall. This was thought” (64). These sentences have a readily available surface narrative—there is a room with newly arranged décor and someone suggests a different wall color—but they also hold a rich secondary meaning. “This was thought” may read as a past tense, passive formulation of “to think,” but more excitingly, “thought” can be understood as a noun in this context. The “whole arrangement” suggests the numerous perceptions and things perceived that makeup *Tender Buttons*. The purpose of this arrangement is to reveal the subjective nature of reality, or, that “there can be a different whiteness to a wall.” “This was thought” then articulates that *Tender Buttons* itself is a representation of thought. Stein’s attitude toward perception might seem ambivalent at times; she writes “There is no use there is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual” (*TB* 37). However, she does confess that “there is use in the whole piece if one uses it” and the whole that encompasses *Tender Buttons* is human thought (12).

The criticism on *Tender Buttons* has been long plagued by a tendency to understand the segments as hermetic and material—as if they were physical products, not formed of language on a page. Within that tradition, *Tender Buttons* has been described as (to name just a few) definitions for objects, as the blueprints to a domestic space or the sounds of “domestic conversations,” as “still lifes” or “verbal collages,” as “representational textures,” and, of course, as nonsense writing (Marciselli 70, Hoffman 176, Hoffman 179, Bennett 32). Even the multiple sensory dimensions evoked by those descriptions demonstrate that the text is more complex than any reduction to a single sense can encompass. If we desire, however, a comprehensible definition of *Tender Buttons*, I would argue that the most fitting starting-point comes from

William James's definition of the human consciousness in *Principles of Psychology*. When we understand *Tender Buttons* as (to quote James) "a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations," we can better understand the book not *as a rejection* of Stein's early stream of consciousness writing, but *as an extension* of it along more radical lines (224). This definition allows for a broad framework through which readers can understand their dynamic, perceptual experiences with the text, rather than approach the book as a disposable, objective thought experiment. Both *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Melanctha" fictionalize moments in which the consciousnesses of multiple characters brush up against one another, like the influence of Melanctha's mind on Jeff's or the mystifying communication between Septimus and Clarissa. Without the intermediary of a fictive character, the consciousness of *Tender Buttons* provides for its readers this very sort of encounter.

Before approaching my concept of the consciousness machine, I would like to argue that the language of *Tender Buttons* simply *sounds* like thinking. This claim may seem unfounded, but this sort of intuitive feeling commands our engagement with literature more often than we admit. In the scholarship on "Melanctha," for example, many critics begin their analyses with intuited assumptions about language already in play. Most of the novella is presented as a dialogue between Jeff and Melanctha, but readers can immediately recognize that these dialogues actually concern the contents of those characters' minds. Some essential thing of the language tells us that "Melanctha" is stream of consciousness writing, despite the quotation marks that typically encase a conversation. It is true that the writing of "Melanctha," with all of its repetitions, linguistic obsessions, and exaggerated circularities, does not sound like talking; it sounds like thinking. Through my sonic analysis in the rest of this chapter, I hope to justify my

feeling that *Tender Buttons*, like “Melanctha,” sounds like thought, but in a unique way.

Even when distanced from sense or meaning, Stein’s language contains patterns of sound that imitate processes of reasoning, contemplation, and the more general movements of thought. The sound of her writing reflects her understanding of these processes, as influenced by James, Bergson, and her own work at Radcliffe. In both “Melanctha” and *Tender Buttons*, Stein presents the consciousness as something that is both determined by regular patterns and disturbed by spontaneous intrusions. The narrative structure of “Melanctha” shows a tension between these two forces. Jeff and Melanctha go through multiple iterations of their relationship, each neatly structured by Stein. Their patterns, however, are interrupted by their impulses: Melanctha’s desire to wander makes her “sudden and impulsive and unbounded” (342). Similarly, Jeff pulls away whenever his morality intrudes: “then it comes over me all sudden, I don’t know anything real about you Melanctha, dear one, and then it comes over me sudden, perhaps I certainly am wrong now” (397). These less predictable impulses ultimately form a secondary pattern, which vies with their more regular patterns for command of the narrative. The sound patterns of “Melanctha” imitate this tension by enacting circular repetitions that are randomly troubled by abrupt shifts of pacing. Thought in *Tender Buttons* also behaves in respect to these opposing forces. In each segment, Stein presents movements that seem sporadic and random, but which continually reveal underlying patterns.

The two forces of the consciousness—the regular and the impulsive—manifest themselves most clearly in the sound of “MILDRED’S UMBRELLA,” a segment near the beginning of “Objects.” The entire segment consists of a single run-on sentence:

A cause and no curve, a cause and loud enough, a cause and extra a loud clash and an extra wagon, a sign of extra, a sac a small sac and an established color and cunning, a

slender grey and no ribbon, this means a loss a great loss a restitution. (15)

In terms of subject, this segment seems to do little more than involving the reader in thinking about a borrowed umbrella; that simple contemplation results in a complex interaction between the perceptions of volume, shape, and color. “Mildred’s Umbrella” reveals that Stein grapples with questions like “Did one see sound, and what was the relation between color and sound” in uniquely sonic ways (“Portraits” 303). The first half of the segment imitates the sequencing of cause-and-effect reasoning; however, there are few lucid signifiers upon which to hinge this logic. Nonetheless, the pattern is present.⁴² The “cause” which necessitates the borrowing of Mildred’s umbrella is most likely a thunderstorm. The text even suggests a clap of thunder: “a cause and extra a loud clash.” Stein’s reader correspondingly experiences the intrusion of crackling sounds. Alliterative repetitions of /k/ sounds (“cause,” “curve,” “clash,” and so forth) combine with the /ks/ consonant cluster in “extra” to thunder loudly over the segment’s neat organization of reasoning. As a consciousness machine, the text produces a template for perception that the reader enacts and experiences quite literally.

According to Stein’s conception of the consciousness, patterns of thought and irregular mental intrusions tend to find some semblance of balance. In the second half of “Mildred’s Umbrella,” the systematic language of cause-and-effect reasoning gives way to a few seemingly random developments. The introduction of “an extra wagon” feels particularly inexplicable, perhaps because the /w/ sound does not pair well with the phonetics of any other word in the segment. This image (along with the adjective, “cunning”) feels like one of the many private and

⁴² Sound patterns that imitate logical thinking appear throughout *Tender Buttons*. In “A Box,” the logic of the segment acts according to sonic similarities, like /r/ alliterations and rhymes between words ending in “-ness” or “-tion”: “Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle” (13).

inexplicable intrusions that make their way into the consciousness of *Tender Buttons*. Despite these intrusions, or perhaps because of them, the reader actualizes the development of another underlying pattern as she receives more input about the color of the umbrella (“an established color,” “a slender grey”). The pattern develops in the rhythms of “Mildred’s Umbrella.” Even as the consciousness moves quickly and somewhat randomly (from reasoning to weather storms, to random associations, to visual perception), it moves according to a pattern of five-syllable phrases. Each five-syllable phrase has a distinct importance to the segment: “a cause and no curve,” “a sign of extra,” “a sac a small sac,” “a loss a great loss,” and lastly, “a restitution.” This pattern interacts with some of the more inexplicable parts of “Mildred’s Umbrella,” allowing emphasis to fall upon the lucid idea of “a restitution”; the reader figuratively returns the umbrella to Mildred and moves on without it.

In this segment and in the entirety of *Tender Buttons*, Stein’s theory of the consciousness comes into existence in the form of sound. “Melanctha” helped to uncover certain patterns that would then reappear in *Tender Buttons* in the abstract. Similar to the five-syllable phrasal pattern of “Mildred’s Umbrella,” “Melanctha” relies upon repetitive and rhythmic mental checkpoints to signal movements of the characters’ consciousnesses. During Jeff’s numerous contemplations of his relationship with Melanctha, Stein employs repetitions of short phrases like “All he knew was” and “Every day now” to delineate Jeff’s emotional progress (100, 394). Once these patterns are delocalized from character consciousness, they operate upon the reader more directly; they structure a thought process without also needing to structure a narrative. Michael Hoffman, in *The Development of Abstractionism*, overlooks some of these important structural elements, but

unlike most critics, he does discuss consciousness in relation to *Tender Buttons*.⁴³ Hoffman focuses on visual perception and arrives at a discussion of Cubism, which is disappointing after he teases the possibility of a broader perceptual or cognitive analysis. In regard to the consciousness, however, Hoffman argues that “The perceptions she [Stein] attempts to record are those that the mind registers before memory and perceptual conditioning reorder the elements of perceptions into the structure we know as reality” (180). His pre-semantic argument, which also appears in Ariane Mildenberg’s “Seeing Fine Substances Strangely,” provides an interesting possibility for my consideration of sound in *Tender Buttons*.⁴⁴ Perhaps to Stein, the sonic structures that naturally appear in language can be more communicative of human experience than “the structure we know as reality” (Hoffman 180). By denying narrative in *Tender Buttons*, and thus distancing a recognizable reality, Stein creates a depiction of the consciousness that comes to life as her readers experience sound independent of sense.

In my first chapter, particularly during my discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway*, I discuss the role of perceptual stimuli in stream of consciousness fiction: how Woolf forms analogies between the characters’ (primarily Septimus’s) experiences of auditory stimuli and the reader’s experience of

⁴³ It seems that part of the reason that Hoffman does not identify a greater structure in *Tender Buttons* is because he sees the book as, at least partially, the product of an automatic writing exercise. He claims that Stein “focuses directly on a particular subject” until she “follow[s] an association or report[s] something that has entered her consciousness” (195). This claim undercuts Stein’s own claims to agency and the intention with which she edited and reedited multiple manuscripts of the book, even making handwritten corrections after publication. See Perlow (77-87) for facsimile images that reveal Stein’s editing process.

⁴⁴ Based on my research, Michael Hoffman, Sara Ford, and Ariane Mildenberg are the only critics that relate *Tender Buttons* to consciousness. Similar to Hoffman, Mildenberg argues that “Stein leads us away from the particularities that are usually central to daily life... and back to the usually non-focal ‘fringe’ of perceptual experience, away from usual modes of expression and back to a pre-structural form of expression before the habits of grammar take over” (263).

the sound of the prose, allowing for the communication of a vivid consciousness. When I refer to the consciousness machine of *Tender Buttons*, I mean to suggest that Stein has eradicated the need for analogy or for correlatives in her approach to depicting the consciousness. Her text provides stimuli, in its images and in its sound, and implicates the reader into the acts of realizing and processing those stimuli as she reads. In my readings of “A FEATHER” and “MILDRED’S UMBRELLA,” the text serves as a consciousness machine in that it produces in the reader’s mind the sort of internal impressions that one has when perceiving those objects. In other segments, Stein’s consciousness machine does not work in such literal terms. *Tender Buttons* also enacts a consciousness by presenting the sonorities and rhythms of language. Stein pushes her readers to be aware that all literature enacts two types of perception simultaneously: that of the things words signify and that of the signifiers themselves.

In “COLD CLIMATE,” Stein creates an experience for her reader that is perceptually intense, but does not produce a singular, visual image of any kind; no ephemeral feather or rain-drenched umbrella comes to mind. Instead, Stein presents an abstract sort of imagery that stems from the sounds of her words. “COLD CLIMATE” is one of the shorter segments in “Objects,” reading: “A season in yellow sold extra strings makes lying places” (24). I experience these words as sibilants even before I think of them as units of meaning. Stein practically demands this response from her readers. The phonology of the segment offers a cohesive, fluid experience, while the logic of the sentence is disjunctive, particularly due to the compounded verb phrases in “sold extra strings makes lying places.” In *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*, Lisa Ruddick cites “COLD CLIMATE” as an example of a segment that is “internally so dense as to discourage interpretation” and subsequently, she makes no commentary on it (203). On the contrary, I would argue that segments like “COLD CLIMATE” actually invite interpretation. By

problematizing the reader's relationship to language, Stein demands that her readers investigate their own processes of meaning-making and engage with her literature in new, active ways.

The phenomenology of "COLD CLIMATE" unravels in an arena that pits semantic meaning against phonetic feeling. Even the title seems to combat the content of the segment. Hard /k/ stops characterize "COLD CLIMATE," while sonorous long vowels and sustained sibilants characterize "A season in yellow" (which also feels bright and warm in its imagery, unlike the title). A semantic resolution is still possible; perhaps the sentence simply says that autumn ("season in yellow") demanded that people buy more blankets ("sold extra strings") for their beds ("makes lying places) in preparation for winter. However, "COLD CLIMATE" has a more readily available, non-narrative action in the movement of its sibilants. In the sentence "A season in yellow sold extra strings makes lying places," the sibilants move from the start of words to the end of them. "Season" and "sold" are front-loaded with /s/ and /z/ sounds. Then, the sibilant position shifts at "extra strings," with /ks/ in the middle of "extra" and with /s/ and /z/ encompassing "strings." Lastly, "makes" and "places" both finish with sibilants. Stein makes the phonology of this single sentence feel distinctly temporal; a sense of movement is present even before a reader scrutinizes each word phoneme by phoneme. This temporal movement of sibilants is particularly interesting in the context of "COLD CLIMATE," a segment that already complicates temporality through the mixing of past and present verb tenses.

Even though Stein claims to avoid "suggesting remembering" in her writing, the reader's memory plays a significant role in the consciousness machine of *Tender Buttons*, as it does in the narrative structure of "Melanctha" ("Portraits" 301). Repetitions across the segments of *Tender Buttons* are not as obvious as they are in "Melanctha"; *Tender Buttons* demands something more like musical memory. Stein even mentions the idea in "CUPS": "A cup is readily shaded, it has

in between no sense that is to say music, memory, musical memory” (50). It is interesting that Stein draws together “no sense” and “musical memory,” since in *Tender Buttons* the semantic looseness of the writing necessitates that the reader has a musical memory.⁴⁵ At times, Stein’s writing may seem to exploit sounds arbitrarily, but in “Rooms,” there is, essentially, a musical reprise of “COLD CLIMATE.” Between two paragraphs that begin with “climate” (“Climate, climate is not southern...” and “A climate, a single climate, all the time there is a single climate...”), Stein includes a long, rhythmic paragraph that recalls the tension between /k/ stops and sustained sibilance from “COLD CLIMATE” (71, 72). I consider this paragraph to be one of the climaxes of *Tender Buttons*. The phonetic and rhythmic structures are striking:

a relying and a surface and a service in indecision and a creature and a question and a syllable in answer and more counting and no quarrel and a single scientific statement and no darkness and no question and an earned administration and a single set of sisters and an outline and no blisters and the section seeing yellow and the centre having spelling and no solitude and no quaintness and yet solid quite so solid and the single surface centred and the question in the placard and the singularity, is there a singularity, and the singularity, why is there a question and the singularity” (72)

The moment is impactful not only for its impressive construction but also for its ability to suggest a greater cohesion of the disparate parts of *Tender Buttons* through sound.

With this technique, Stein re-contextualizes the sonic themes that defined her emotional correlatives in “Melanctha,” like the violence of /f/ alliterations and the youthful wandering of

⁴⁵ William James also points out the inverse correlation between understanding and our awareness of the sounds of language: “Our own language would sound very different to us if we heard it without understanding, as we hear a foreign tongue. Rises and falls of voice, odd sibilants and other consonants, would fall on our ear in a way of which we can now form no notion” (*Principles Vol. 2* 80).

/w/ alliterations. In *Tender Buttons*, Stein employs sonic themes that have considerable emotional force, even though they are detached from narrative. Even in the abstract, Stein's writing solicits a reader's conscious or unconscious sense of musical memory. Later in this paragraph, the text directly asks the reader, "why is the surface outrageous, why is it beautiful why is it not when there is no doubt" (72). Stein must turn to her belief that "language... is the most immediate and problematic external experience that there is" in order to generate a bit of this necessary "doubt" (Ford 45).⁴⁶ The reader's doubt about meaning heightens the aesthetic qualities of language, and then becomes the birthplace for the delocalized consciousness of the text; Stein successfully forces words to morph from signifiers into raw artistic materials and into real perceptual experiences.

By inducing these perceptual experiences in her reader's mind, Stein communicates what she could not communicate in *Three Lives*: the consciousness as it exists in the continuous present. The durational sonic atmospheres of "Melanctha" explore a mind experiencing sustained psychological turmoil. However, as the last 20 pages show, the presence of narrative—and the demands that "Melanctha" be a story—nullifies all other manipulations of time. Stein evidently decided that she did not want a story of the consciousness, but the real experience of it. In *Tender Buttons*, the abstract language of phonetic and linguistic play provides the necessary distance from narrative to return to an experiential terrain. As Iser hypothesizes in "The Reading Process," those pieces of literature which "[leave] the shelter of the familiar" allow for the most complex phenomenological interactions between reader and text (64). *Tender Buttons*, as a

⁴⁶ In *Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens: The Performance of a Modern Consciousness* (2002), Sara Ford understands *Tender Buttons* as "the performance of a consciousness that is at once determined and determining," but unfortunately, she excludes the reader entirely from that consciousness (43). Her observations better serve the text when applied in a phenomenological framework.

mercilessly abstract work, throws us into its “unknown seas,” but then presents us with unforeseen sonic stimuli and, quite literally, makes us think.

THE ALMOST SENSELESS SONG OF *THE WAVES*

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf’s attitude toward language is uncertain. On one hand, language is a source of genuine beauty and discovery: voice has the power to “wrap [humanity] all about and carry them” through history, and Septimus uncovers “the message hidden in the beauty of words” (138, 88). On the other hand, language is an object of suspicion. *Mrs. Dalloway* posits that there are those for whom “the enormous resources of the English language” fail and emphasizes the necessity of non-verbal communication (178). These uncertainties do not totally disturb the narrative, but they do complicate the stream of consciousness mode. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, language cannot express certain details of private subjectivity (like Peter Walsh’s private name), nor can it adequately represent lived temporal experience. Still, *Mrs. Dalloway* largely evades those problems. Woolf marries together the sound of her prose and the contents of her narrative; she puts them to work toward the same goal of communicating the consciousness and, for the most part, she succeeds. However, as we saw at the end of my first chapter, that success is finally unsatisfying for Woolf. *Mrs. Dalloway* tackles the daily processes of the consciousness, yet neglects broader temporal experience and harbors apprehensions about the narrator’s intrusion into the private world of subjectivity. *To the Lighthouse* then attempts to deal with the passage of time, but in doing so, adversely disrupts the novel’s representations of the consciousness. These early projects reveal that Woolf’s evolving understanding of the mind may not be fit for narrative. By the time of *The Waves* (1931), Woolf’s dissatisfaction with the ability of language to represent human experience has clearly increased, yet Woolf continues the

pursuit. Her new approach, however, reflects the central character's defiant exclamation at the end of the novel: "I have done with phrases" (213). The consciousness manifests itself through different means.

The Waves, as Woolf's most ambitious work, pushes the stream of consciousness mode into new terrain. The scope of the novel is immense: Woolf sets out to trace the consciousnesses of six characters—all friends from day school—from early childhood until death. It is as if Stein and Woolf progress in opposite directions from their first stream of consciousness narratives. Stein begins with the childhood-to-death model in "Melanctha," then reduces that model until she is left only with the instantaneous bursts of consciousness that make up *Tender Buttons*. Woolf, on the other hand, explores only 18 hours of consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*, then explodes her temporal confines, expanding them exponentially until she achieves the life-spanning narrative of *The Waves*. The expansiveness of this timeline is tempered (and complicated) by the presence of the novel's interludes: a series of nine prose poems that introduce each major section of the characters' lives by tracking the movement of the sun in a single day across an impersonal, yet emotionally charged landscape.

In this progression from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *The Waves*, Woolf also radically changes her narrative technique: she develops a complicated and highly contested fusion of direct interior monologue and uninhibited prose-poetry. The consciousnesses of *The Waves* are communicated through soliloquies that are apparently spoken by the six main characters: Bernard, Susan, Neville, Jinny, Louis, and Rhoda. After a childhood spent together, these six characters narrate their movements through life as individuals. They fully reunite only twice: for the departure of their friend, Percival, to India and for a reunion late in life at Hampton Court. When they meet around Percival—the largely absent "hero" of the novel, who serves as the nucleus of the

group—the soliloquies of the six characters integrate to form one, central consciousness: “a six-sided flower; made of six lives” (164). Shortly after Percival’s departure, however, he dies when he falls from a horse, at which point the texture of the novel dramatically changes. His death means that “The lights of the world have gone out” (106). In the darkness that he leaves behind, the characters must confront their deepest ontological questions, concerns about identity, and uncertainties about the capabilities of language.

The status of language—as a tool for interpersonal communication, as a method for describing life, and as a source of personal identity—becomes increasingly unstable as the novel approaches Percival’s death, and then entirely unreliable afterward. The characters’ soliloquies impress upon the reader a mounting sense of dissatisfaction with language, in both their content and their form. For one, many of the characters (especially Neville, the poet, and Bernard, the novelist) exhibit an overt lack of faith in linguistic communication. What was a minor aside in *Mrs. Dalloway*—a moment in which Clarissa comments that “she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that”—swells into a full-blown panic in *The Waves* (*Mrs. Dalloway* 9). Neville, whose poetry only ever imitates other great writers, denounces language in his internal soliloquy during the dinner with Percival:

‘Yet these roaring waters,’ said Neville, ‘upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, “I am this; I am that!”

Speech is false.’ (*The Waves* 97)

In reducing speech to nothing more than “weak and inconsequent cries,” Neville presents, through his personal anxieties, a central problem of the novel. His statement that “Speech is false” neatly corresponds to the largest critical issue of *The Waves*: can constructed, spoken

soliloquies really communicate the stream of thought?

Woolf introduces the consciousnesses of her characters using the formula “said Neville,” “said Bernard,” “said Rhoda,” and so on. It is surely conflicting for the reader when a moment introduced with “said Neville” immediately precedes the anxious declaration that “Speech is false.” Yet, as in Stein’s “Melanctha,” purported speech in *The Waves* does not function as actual speech, but as an avenue for exploring interiority. Thus, the “said” in “said Neville” has to be taken with some suspicion. Still, critics often interpret these spoken soliloquies as an artificial gambit at best or an over-stylized failure at worst. In *The World Without A Self* (1973), for example, James Naremore calls the soliloquies “an expression of consciousness, albeit a highly artificial one” (159). Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, in “Voice and Presence in Music and Literature,” similarly claims: “The narration is fluent, and yet it appears artificial in its continued pinpointing of the narrative situation” (126). I would argue that this artificiality is not, in itself, something unfavorable, but in the context of stream of consciousness fiction, many readers (Naremore included) distrust the “artificial.” Woolf troubles some hidden assumption that the consciousness must feel organic when it appears in literature.

Further complicating the soliloquies is the presence of Woolf’s poetic voice, which consistently overshadows the voices of her characters. In Neville’s outburst, the internal rhyme between “the wild, the weak and insequent cries” and “we utter when, trying to speak, we rise” disrupts the soliloquy. The evidence of Woolf’s hand—of her close attention to meter and rhyme—regularly suspends the illusion of a narration of consciousness; at least, it does if we bring to the text the expectation that it should conform to what we know as interior monologue. According to Pedersen, “We are not invited inside the minds of the characters speaking; our attention is repeatedly drawn to the fact that the presented universe is fictive and that the

narrative construction is very apparent” (125). Woolf’s poetics do indeed tend to call attention to the novel’s construction and to her unique style. This tendency is actually the central experiment of *The Waves*: sound is *detaching* from narrative and thus becoming something problematic.⁴⁷

For example, sound takes on a life of its own when Rhoda says, in one of her first childhood soliloquies, “That is my ship. It sails into icy caverns where the sea-bear barks and stalactites swing green chains. The waves rise; their crests curl; look at the lights on the mastheads” (11). Rhoda’s manipulation of sibilance is impressively musical, but obtrusive at the same time. This level of poetry cannot be attributed to the mind of a young girl. Woolf has clearly dissolved the marriage between sound and character consciousness that she forged in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The presence of sound independent from narrative and independent from character consciousness—or, more simply, Woolf’s overbearing poetry—complicates the novel’s place in the stream of consciousness canon. In Robert Humphrey’s prominent 1954 study, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, Humphrey calls *The Waves* Woolf’s “most uncommunicative work,” due to the overloading of technique (14).⁴⁸ In an even more direct attack on Woolf’s sound, Naremore calls the novel a failure because, while “Certain passages in *The Waves* are extraordinarily beautiful...the prose is rather stifling in effect—the reader almost drowns in the language” (189). At times, it does feel as if Woolf has left her reader out to drown in the novel’s white waters of poetry. When a young Jinny lets loose an overwhelming sequence

⁴⁷ A 1931 reviewer expresses how unrelenting poetics interrupt the narrative. He writes, “the incessant chanting effect grows monotonous, and I found my attention distracted or exhausted as I read, even though, a moment before, I had been conscious of magic” (*Evening News*). This reviewer happens to Frank Swinnerton, a novelist and the publisher for H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett—the very writers that Woolf attacks in “Modern Fiction.”

⁴⁸ James Hafley also criticizes the stylization of the soliloquies in his book from the same year, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (1954). He claims that “the perfect order of these soliloquies and the duologue form they sometimes assume, as well as the inner order of each, show that they are not to be considered as stream-of-consciousness monologues” (108).

of alliterative pairs—“a speck of sun perhaps on a picture, or the donkey drawing the mowing-machine across the lawn; or a sail that passes between the laurel leaves”—an inattentive reader may feel that Woolf has overstated her presence and destabilized the soliloquy (38). However, these moments do not make the work “uncommunicative,” as Humphrey and many others suggest; they captivate and they challenge the reader, but they also communicate.

The bubbling up of poetry in *The Waves* is not a mistake, nor an accidental drowning of the reader. Woolf has already shown her ability to balance poetry and narrative, in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Her shift to the near-excessive style of *The Waves* develops from those earlier projects and from the evolution of Woolf’s theory of mind—something which she explores overtly through Bernard’s final soliloquy before death. As shown in the soliloquy, Woolf has taken the psychologies of James and Bergson and merged them with her own literary pursuits to form a theory of all human experience—one which can only be expressed through “a howl; a cry” or “Nothing neat” (213). The narrative situation of the last soliloquy is unique: Bernard sits with someone on a train and tells the unnamed listener the story of his life (resulting in a metanarrative account of the novel’s first eight parts). At this point, Bernard no longer believes that stories or language can represent life, but he still attempts to communicate with his listener. He remarks, “If it were possible, I would hand it to you entire...But to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story—and there are so many and so many...and none of them are true” (170-1). In attempting to narrate his life despite the impossibility of the task, Bernard (in a position that is just like that of Woolf) voices the theory of human experience that informs *The Waves*.

Woolf’s theory can be expressed in poetic terms: there is a rhythm and then something abstract beneath it. The one constant of human experience is the rhythm of life; something

mundane and daily, powered by a “must, must, must” impulse to act, and the source of “the universal determination to go on living” (211, 191). Of the voices in the novel, Louis, the character who worships order, focuses most on this rhythm because he feels excluded from it. This rhythm, in its thematic and formal appearances, has already received a good deal of critical attention. Patricia Oudek Laurence’s *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (1991) figures this rhythm in terms of gaps and spaces. She understands that rhythm as a consistent part of Woolf’s theory of experience: “There is in *The Waves* a simultaneity and harmony in the cyclical rhythms of the stages of life, in life and death, in the seven voices, in the rising and the setting of the sun, and in the movements of the waves” (179). It is indeed true that these rhythms are cohesive and incredibly affecting (they bubble up in the sound of the prose, too), but I would argue that the stakes of the Woolf’s approach reside more in the other, underlying part of human experience.⁴⁹

Beneath the “central rhythm,” Woolf imagines an abstract, unutterable, and universal “thing.” In episodes of intense emotional pain or dissociation, several of the characters experience rare moments that suspend the rhythm, peel back all illusion, and bring them face to face with that “thing.” Rhoda (Louis’s double, another outsider) experiences this “thing” more than any other character and, ultimately, she commits suicide. Woolf’s turn to the abstraction of sounds is a response to the question that this theory poses: how does one use literature to represent some invisible, unnamable thing that underscores all human experience, but is only sensed in strange and highly dispersed moments? Woolf seems to tell her reader where to look

⁴⁹ When Louis is in London, the rhythm of life keeps manifesting itself in his soliloquies. Woolf even uses chiasmus to give a wave-like motion to the rhythm: “People go on passing... They pass the window of this eating-shop incessantly. Motor-cars, vans, motor-omnibuses; and again motor-omnibuses, vans, motor-cars—they pass the window” (65).

for her answer when Bernard, in the last soliloquy, says he hears the distinct melodies of life but is “also drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song” (176). As readers, we must pay attention to this second manifestation of universal human experience; thus, we must pay attention when sound becomes senseless, wordless, and abstract. *The Waves* does not simply tell the consciousness through phrases; it evokes it through non-semantic and non-narrative communication.

The Waves is, in Woolf’s own terms, “a playpoem.”⁵⁰ Woolf’s audacious play with poetry is what makes the novel so difficult (yet so absorbing) and what casts it to the fringe of the stream of consciousness mode. In my analysis, I hope to approach Woolf’s poetics with some of her advice in mind—advice that she suggestively posits in one of Neville’s soliloquies. Several years after the epochal death of Percival, Neville stands alone in front of his bookcase contemplating a tattered poem, yet he seems to address the reader of his soliloquy directly. He instructs: “To read this poem one must have myriad eyes...One must put aside antipathies and jealousies and not interrupt. One must have patience and infinite care and let the light sound.” He then adds, “Also sometimes weep” (142). My analysis seeks to highlight the complex sort of reader engagement demanded by Woolf and appreciated by Neville. To “let the light sound” as a reader of *The Waves* requires careful attention to the abstract, sonic quality of Woolf’s prose and to its manifold effects on the reader: challenging, pleasing, distracting, and provoking emotion, sometimes all at once. In short, we are back in the world of phenomenology. Consciousness in *The Waves* is as much a product of the reader’s experience of those independent, abstract sounds as it is of the narrative content of the soliloquies.

⁵⁰ “Playpoem” is a commonly cited term that originates from Woolf’s 1927 and 1928 diaries (she refers to *The Waves* as *The Moths*, until 1930). I first encountered the term “playpoem” in Laurence’s *The Reading of Silence* (92).

The problem of Woolf's approach to the stream of consciousness mode presents itself in the first section of *The Waves*. When the six voices of the story are young children, the stylization of the soliloquies presents a unique difficulty for the reader. The initial prelude describes dawn with intensely sonorous imagery:

The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually. [all interludes are italicized in the original] (3)

Woolf introduces this intense prose-poetry, and then, without warning, tosses her reader directly into the imaginative minds of children. In the first lines of soliloquy, the reader encounters a stylistic phenomenon that upsets expectations about direct interior monologue and feels artificial to critics like Naremore, Hafley, Humphrey, and Pedersen. It is unclear if the soliloquies occur only in the private, isolated minds of the characters, or if they occasionally communicate their thoughts to each other. They experience sensations and perceptions, which inspire creative associations and images that are characteristic of a child's mind. However, a surprising amount of poetry emerges—and it is a poetry far beyond the capabilities of a child:

'I see a ring,' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'

'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.' (6).

In these first two lines of soliloquy, the reader experiences a bizarre tension between sound and narrative. Most immediately, the meter of the lines performs something like a lullaby. In terms of atmosphere, the rhythm facilitates the reader's entrance into the minds of children. In terms of

stream of consciousness writing, however, the sound is disruptive. How could children possibly construct the pairs of assonant-rhyming, iambic feet that end Bernard and Susan's first "spoken" thoughts: "a loop of light" and "a purple stripe" (6)?⁵¹

This moment, along with countless others throughout *The Waves*, is characteristic of an Iserian "defamiliarization"; Woolf boldly upsets her reader's expectations about stream of consciousness writing with the intrusion of her poetic construction (Iser 65). While a good deal of criticism interprets Woolf's intrusion as an artificial move that hampers the novel's communication of consciousness, I propose that, as Iserian phenomenology posits, the defamiliarizing presence of the artificial is intentional and highly productive. Woolf problematizes her reader's relationship to the language of soliloquy because narrative is not the primary mode of communicating the consciousness in *The Waves*. Having abandoned the narrative-focused and relatively plot-heavy projects of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf now gropes after "the roar of almost senseless merriment, sentiment, triumph, desire": the non-semantic sounds of conscious experience (200). Thus, she continually disrupts her narrative with the intrusion of poetry, directing her reader away from referential language (which she views as fundamentally unable to communicate human experience) and toward abstraction. This general trajectory is, in short, like that of Stein, although—as we have seen in the previous section—almost to the opposite effect.

The Waves presents for its reader many perplexing interpretive issues, but it also offers

⁵¹ Compare this example to, say, James Joyce's childhood section at the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). The indirect interior monologue upholds the simplicity of a child's thought process: "When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father" (6). Early critics (Humphrey included) were much more sympathetic to Joyce's ostensibly more organic method.

suggestions about how to approach those issues. The psychological and philosophical underpinnings of the novel surface through the voice of Bernard—who is, like Woolf perhaps, a writer in search of “the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer” (133). I would argue that Woolf presents her theory of the mind—that which demands her turn toward abstraction—even before Bernard’s final soliloquy in the fifth section of the novel. It is in this section that the first interruption of the rhythm of life occurs. The fifth section unfolds just after the peak of noon in the timeline of the landscape interludes and during the peak of adult life in the timeline of the soliloquies. This section is entirely about grief: Percival has just died and the pain is so intense for Bernard and Rhoda that it incites a dissociative return to a state of child-like experience. Bernard and Rhoda’s soliloquies are integral tools for understanding Woolf’s technique of stream of consciousness in *The Waves*. In exploring two experiences of art, in which Bernard goes to a gallery and Rhoda to an opera, Woolf justifies her turn away from referential language. It is as if Woolf speaks through Bernard and Rhoda to signal for her reader the importance of those challenging occasions in which “poetics overrides hermeneutics” (Chun 64).

Other than Neville’s brief soliloquy, which announces Percival’s death, Bernard and Rhoda are the only two voices of the fifth section. While Bernard and Rhoda are not physically together, they have parallel experiences as they respond to the grief of Percival’s death in meaningfully similar ways: Bernard turns to visual art and Rhoda to music. Both experience a moment of total abstraction—of a return to pure sensation—that alters the rest of the narrative, as well as the reader’s relationship to the novel. Denotative language here fails; something new emerges.

Rhythm and time suspension are integral to Bernard’s experience. He wanders the street

distraught but ends up at an art gallery: a space for him to resist “the usual order” of life or to fight against what Louis consistently refers to as the “central rhythm” from which he feels excluded (110, 65). Percival’s death demands that the incessant rhythm of life briefly pause; this need appears stylistically in Bernard’s soliloquy as a repetitive insistence. Bernard asserts, “I will not let myself be made yet to accept the sequence of things. I will walk; I will not change the rhythm of my mind by stopping, by looking; I will walk” (110). Neville, too, desires to disrupt the rhythm of life in the first soliloquy of section five, but he only achieves a brief moment of hesitation. He declares, “I will not lift my foot to climb the stair. I will stand for one moment,” but his one moment is fleeting and unsuccessful.⁵² Even the language of Neville’s soliloquy retains a quick, monosyllabic movement with lamentations like “I press you to me. Come, pain, feed on me” and “Tear me asunder. I sob, I sob” (108).

For Bernard, however, the rhythm of life suspends completely, allowing for a pivotal revelation in which he sees “something universal beneath” the paintings in the gallery. This moment defines the nature of experience in *The Waves*, as Woolf attempts to articulate that underlying “something” while also recognizing that referential language cannot evoke it. Bernard sees pictures of gardens and madonnas and saints, but does not receive them as images: “Mercifully these pictures make no reference; they do not nudge; they do not point” (110). Art leads him back to pure, sensorial experience. The face of a blue Madonna offers him “no conclusions only violent sensations, each separate” until he returns to a sensory memory from early childhood. When Bernard exclaims, “Arrows of sensation strike from my spine but without order,” the reader feels an echo of the first, intense sensory experience of the novel. The

⁵² Woolf here leans on T.S. Elliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915). However, readers speculate that it is actually Louis who is based on Elliot, not Neville.

language of this scene imitates what Bernard felt as a young child during a bath: “Water pours down the runnel of my spine. Bright arrows of sensation shoot on either side” (111). Bernard leaves the gallery numb, exhausted, and “glutted with sensations,” as he has just run up against an experience that phrases cannot properly communicate (112). This experience is especially crucial for Bernard—the character who had most trusted language as a source of identity, dreamed of being a great novelist, and built his reality on the backs of phrases.⁵³ After this moment, he admits, “Nothing that has been said meets our case” (111).

Rhoda’s experience has a slightly different texture: hers is of listening and of momentary solace from her troubled psyche. Unlike Bernard, who has largely trusted reality, Rhoda has experienced the world in illogical, unconnected elements since youth. Her early soliloquies complain, “I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate... I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life” (92). Because of these issues, Rhoda endures a painful episode of dissociation while contemplating the news of Percival’s death, even before she enters the opera. In the street, she complains that “All palpable forms have failed [her]” and she “[hears] the rush of the great grindstone within an inch of [her] head” (112). With the failure of “All palpable forms,” Rhoda is already in a space of abstraction. The sound of the grindstone manifests itself in the sound of her soliloquy as poetic cacophony. Rhoda fixates on the blurring of faces as her speech becomes phonetically harsher and visually more abstract. She remarks, “I like the passing of face and face and face, deformed, indifferent,”

⁵³ As a child, Bernard trusts language so much as to think it solid. When parting from his family for school, phrases are his defense: “I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry” (20).

but the perception shifts into “faces and faces, served out like soup-plates by scullions; coarse, greedy, casual,” and finally, she sees only “envy, jealousy, hatred, and spite scuttle like crabs over the sand” (113). The sound of the soliloquy, at this moment, does not pull the reader out of the scene or distract with its artificiality. On the contrary, the sound of this brief passage functions as it does in *Mrs. Dalloway*, manifesting Rhoda’s panic for the reader in sensorial terms and imitating via linguistic analogy her visual perception of passing faces. This scene has a similar feeling to Septimus’s hallucinatory episode at Regent’s Park.

Rhoda’s grief leads her to the opera. As she is already prone to dissociation, Rhoda does not seek art to escape the “usual order,” like Bernard, but instead to “recover beauty, and impose order upon [her] raked...disheveled soul” (114). Although she enters the opera with a different hope from Bernard, Rhoda experiences through music a similar revelatory encounter with the abstract thing of human experience. Again, Woolf sets the stage for this encounter in the opening lines of childhood soliloquy. Nearly all the characters, Bernard included, first register visual impressions. Rhoda (along with Louis) registers an aural perception; her first words of soliloquy are, “I hear a sound” (6). At the opera twenty years after those first impressions, Rhoda hears the music, at which point her soliloquy delves into abstraction so quickly that the reader is nearly left behind. The opera singer’s cries of “Ah!” “Ah, ah!” punctuate Rhoda’s thoughts, but otherwise, the images are difficult to locate within the opera scene. Within a single paragraph, Rhoda imagines an apple pierced by an arrow, then an ax in a tree, then lovers in Venice, then “beetle-shaped men,” then “the dance of olive trees,” then “a seafarer, biting a twig between his lips.” Yet all these images fail completely and Rhoda cries out, “‘Like’ and ‘like’ and ‘like’—but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?” (115). The sudden renunciation of referential and metaphoric language leads Rhoda toward a purer abstraction. Like Bernard in the

gallery, Rhoda only refers to the revelation with semantically ambiguous words (“something,” “thing”), as there is no proper word for it: “Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing” (115).

Despite her renunciation of metaphoric language, Rhoda still attempts to describe the “thing” in images. The “something universal beneath” reality for her is an abstract, geometric art that suddenly becomes visible in the music: “There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong” (115). It is a bizarre sort of revelation, but Rhoda interprets these abstract forms as “triumph” and “consolation,” because “The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated” (116). What is strangely abstract to the reader is wonderfully clear for Rhoda. Like Bernard, she returns to pure, sensory experience. Rhoda seems to be aware, somehow, of Bernard’s early childhood experience in the bath; perhaps their unified consciousness is at work.⁵⁴ Rhoda says, “The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind and liberates understanding” (116).

The novel is rocked by this rhetoric that attempts to describe something beyond knowledge and reference: for Rhoda, it is something that “liberates understanding,” and for Bernard, it is things that “do not point.” The reader is rocked, too; her positioning vis-à-vis the text must change and she must scrutinize her dependence on narrative. This communal experience between Bernard, Rhoda, and reader in the fifth section sheds light upon the poetic passages of *The Waves* that detract from and problematize the content of the soliloquies. The

⁵⁴ To clarify: the six characters seem to tap into one another’s memories at times, which corresponds to Bernard’s philosophy: “I do not believe in separation. We are not single” (47). This unity is a pervasive critical interest. Naremore points out the “superficial diversity” of characters and “the sameness of things in the book,” but feels they create a “static atmosphere” (152). Chun argues that this unity presents a consciousness that is “physicalized, depersonalized, and finally, non-subjective” (54).

revelations suggest a possible reason why Woolf may wish to disrupt the soliloquies: she seeks to provoke a response in her reader that leads back to sensation, something similar to what Bernard and Rhoda feel in their encounters with abstraction.⁵⁵ By drowning her readers in the sounds of her language, Woolf distances us from narrative and guides us to emotional, sensory experiences that are only possible in abstraction. The very same thing could be said of Stein in *Tender Buttons*. By abstracting language from narrative, Woolf is clearly doing something similar to Stein—and with the same motive of dissatisfaction with narrative representations of the consciousness. And yet, the ends are opposite. The abstraction of sound—and the resulting readerly defamiliarization—leads Stein to her instantaneous bits of conscious experience; it leads Woolf to the gestalt of life.

As Woolf undermines her narrative with rhymes, alliterations, and random onomatopoeias (Jinny's "Jug, jug, jug," Neville's "cheep, cheep"), the hegemony of referential language begins to diminish (126, 142). The presence of the "something universal beneath" the text makes itself known and operates on the reader's senses. Maureen Chun's "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of *The Waves*" (2012) is one of the few articles that explores the atmosphere of the novel as a product of sensory aspects of language, not just of images and symbols. Chun claims that the characters of *The Waves* have a unique relationship to language: they "perceive words as sensuous, synesthetically evocative phenomena or things rather than basic units of verbal representation" (55). For Chun, the moments in which "we see

⁵⁵ Woolf is clearly engaging with Walter Pater and his theory of aestheticism put forth in the conclusion to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873). He proposes that art should lead back to experience for the sake of experience alone: "For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."

the non-semantic, purely perceptual aura of...words and phrases fluctuate and pass through separate minds” are those when the characters are actively engaging with language (55). Chun focuses on two scenes: when the children personify “white words,” “yellow words,” and “fiery words,” and when Bernard turns the phrase, “a waste of waters,” while on a mid-life trip to Rome (61, 62). Chun’s analysis elucidates the characters’ encounters with the sensory texture of language, but it overstates the characters’ involvement in a function of the prose and then stops short of figuring the reader into the process. Even when the characters are not thinking of language, Woolf’s stylization of their soliloquies continues to enact this phenomenon for her reader—for reasons that will require several pages to explain. The “purely perceptual aura” of language that characters appreciate transfers from the text to the reader, sometimes as something entirely abstracted from the narrative.

The process by which the sound of language detaches from narrative and becomes a readerly phenomenon unravels slowly across the entire novel, as *The Waves* deals with the full gestalt of human experience, not individual instances of it. One of the most obtrusive aspects of Woolf’s prose is the sheer amount of alliteration that spreads from the impersonal narrator of the interludes to the characters’ voices in the soliloquies. When speaking of the novel’s rhythm, Laurence comments, “One is almost tempted, at times, to score Woolf’s text” (177). Her alliterations inspire that same temptation; one can trace the patterns of phonemes as if they were musical notes. Alliteration, however, is not a particularly subtle technique, especially since it is both visual and aural whenever a grapheme also repeats.⁵⁶ In *Mrs. Dalloway*, these loud patterns only appear at rare junctures—those scenes of revelation for Septimus or Clarissa. In *The Waves*,

⁵⁶ Consider the difference in impact of an /f/ alliteration with the orthography of ⟨f⟩ and ⟨f⟩ versus one with ⟨f⟩ and ⟨ph⟩, for example.

this technique never lets up. Woolf exceeds the threshold for what most readers are prepared for in prose writing.

Even though the presence of certain sounds may feel excessive or superficial, it gestures toward the integral, inexpressible thing of conscious experience after which Woolf chases. The interludes create a space that is explicitly distinct from human consciousness; thus, the presence of poetry is not as problematic in the interludes as in the soliloquies. Without the pretenses of narrative or speech, the language is only responsible for sonority, color, texture. In these lyrical interludes, Woolf trains her reader to be sensible of certain sound patterns that eventually bleed out into the soliloquies. The prelude—the dawn scene—announces simple, but distinctive, alliterative pairs: “*white water*,” “*burning bonfire*,” and “*glass green*” (3). Over the course of the novel, the sounds of these phrases develop into the sensory experience of the consciousness; they become things that “do not point,” things that “liberate understanding.” For reasons of space, I will look at only one example of something that permeates the novel. The /g/ alliterative pair is one example of the book’s seemingly infinite sonic patterns, but it has a particularly dynamic trajectory. In the dawn prelude, the reader hears this sound in a metaphor describing the emerging light: “*the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine bottle had sunk and left the glass green*” (3). The image repeats several times throughout the interludes, but the alliterative sound eventually becomes independent of the original context.

The childhood soliloquies of the first two sections echo the /g/ alliterative pair, but the stunningly effective visual image under which the reader first encountered “*glass green*” begins to slip away. First, as Rhoda drifts off to sleep after the children’s day of play outside, she dreams of floating above the earth. The landscape that she hovers above is mystically similar to the portions of the interludes that look in on the kitchen of a house. In Rhoda’s dreams, “Walls

and cupboards whiten and bend their yellow squares on top of which a pale glass gleams” (18). The sonic and imagistic connection between the interludes and the soliloquies is just beginning to emerge. When the children go off to school and struggle to exist as individuals, the alliterative pair returns, this time in Jinny’s speech. She scrutinizes her face in a looking-glass and feels a sudden envy for Susan’s “grass-green eyes which poets will love” (28). The reader may not immediately think of the “*glass green*” bottle, or of any greater unity. At this point, Woolf is simply collecting alliterated words that will eventually echo into euphony once they accumulate (Bergson’s snowball of experience rolls on).

The /g/ alliteration arrives in a variety of semantic contexts, but the sound stays constant; it becomes an evocative phenomenon ever-present on the fringes of the reader’s mind. Bernard’s soliloquy plays into the /g/ pattern during times when Bernard attempts to define his identity. When Bernard realizes for the first time that he “[needs] the stimulus of other people” to write, he tries to overcome his writer’s block through visualization: “I like views of spires across grey fields. I like glimpses between people’s shoulders” (56). The next time Bernard contemplates his interdependence with others, the same sound of a /g/ alliteration crops up, even though many years have passed: “Over us all broods a splendid unanimity. We are enlarged and solemnized and brushed into uniformity as with the grey wing of some enormous goose” (78). Louis’s attempts to affirm his identity in midlife also create echoes of the /g/ alliteration. When writing his name on his letters in search of a confident “I, I, I,” Louis imagines the ink as “water running down gutters, green depths flecked with dahlias or zinnias” (118). In *The World Without A Self*, Naremore calls out images (like Louis’s) that seem too complex and too sonorous to be attributed to their speaker. Louis’s speech feels particularly problematic; perhaps readers suppose that Louis’s shame of his Australian accent, and the fact that he is not a writer, might betoken an

unconfident voice. While this poetic image may “sound more like Virginia Woolf at her most literary than like Louis,” it creates a necessary tension (Naremore 156). The discord between the text’s construction and its narrative situation point the reader’s attention to sonic effects that may be otherwise imperceptible in prose; we notice the alliterated /g/ sound even more.

These patterns are especially interesting in retrospect, or in multiple readings of the text, but one may wonder just how much Woolf expects her reader to notice. In Woolf’s theory of mind, as articulated by Bernard, the phenomenology of listening is subtle and nearly unconscious. Bernard’s retrospective speech on his life delves into the important events of his past, but also into another type of memory: “the fringe of my intelligence floating unattached caught those distant sensations which after a time the mind draws in and works upon; the chime of bells; general murmurs; vanishing figures...” (179). Woolf’s alliterative pairs function like “those distant sensations.” To help point her reader to these fringe materials, Woolf relies on the poetic interludes. There, she can exploit these sounds to a near excessive degree with sonically intense phrases, like “*to the sandhills their innumerable glitter, to the wild grasses their glancing green*” (104). The alliterations are overwhelming, but Woolf needs these sounds to stay lodged in the fringes of her reader’s memory; the interludes have this ability to draw attention, whereas the soliloquies may not. This process is similar to what Harvena Richter, in *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, points out concerning the repetition of symbols. Richter calls the effect “a mode of memory release, not in the mind of the character, but *in the mind of the reader*” (166). Sounds, like symbols, initiate a readerly memory. But with sound, that memory is more sensory than it is semantic.

After encountering such extensive setup of sound patterning, the reader must ask at some point: to what ends does this poetry move? For many, the effects seem simply decorative, like

pretentious embellishments on an otherwise thin narrative; one 1931 reviewer even calls the novel “a pretty lampshade.”⁵⁷ The payoff of the sound structures in *The Waves* is not as overt as in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the earlier novel, sound coincides neatly with the narrative: as we saw in chapter one, the leitmotivic repetition of phrases enacts the climax of the novel when multiple motifs reappear in accumulation during Clarissa’s last contemplations when alone in her bedroom. *The Waves* cannot have this sort of culmination because the central revelation cannot be explained using referential language. However, during the final soliloquy, the echoes of sound briefly align with Bernard’s meaning, resulting in a temporary harmony that dissolves the tension of the hyper-stylized voices. The project of telling the story of life “as a complete thing” to the unnamed listener (the project of the ninth soliloquy) forces Bernard to recover forgotten experiences, dreams, shadows, and phantoms (208). The main thing that he recovers is the “savage...whose speech is guttural, visceral.” This man is a part of Bernard’s identity: Bernard says, “well, he is here. He squats in me.” Woolf, then, conjures the /g/ alliteration in a highly condensed form. Bernard says of that phantom: “He has given a greener glow to green things” (209). This simple phrase inspires a moment of harmony. Bernard tries to convey that the “guttural, visceral” pre-speech part of his consciousness has enriched his life. At the same time, the reader recalls the visceral, almost senseless sounds that have colored the entirety of the narrative. A web of words are present at once: green, glass, gleams, grass, grey, glimpses, glancing, and so on. These textual memories leave behind only the aura (to use Chun’s term) of

⁵⁷ Gerald Sykes in a review for the *Nation* says that lampshade is “well-educated...smart, original, advanced.” But his concluding remarks are disparaging. He blames imagism: “There is beauty—one has the sensation of being smothered in beauty—but it is synthetic...we see what happens to an amiable talent that lacks an inner drive; we see virtuosity that has finally become disconnected from inspiration, virtuosity therefore that has lost its original charm and turned into a formula; we see a torrent of imagery because the imagist tap has been left running” (Mujumdar, Robin, and Allen McLaurin, eds).

the abstracted /g/ sound. Auras like the “greener glow” /g/ sounds are the subjacent materials of all the soliloquies; they form the perceptual gestalt of the novel and thus suggest to the reader an underlying impulse that ties together all human experience.

The consciousness of *The Waves* cannot be localized in this one example, but rather emerges from a multitude of sonic effects that act in harmony to suggest the foundational “thing” definitive of Woolf’s theory of human experience. Due to the space constraints of this project, it is impossible to analyze a substantial fraction of those effects at length; still, there are several which must be signaled, if only briefly. One such example makes itself known when the visual impression of “a fin in a waste of waters” pops randomly into Bernard’s mind when vacationing in Rome late in life (135).⁵⁸ The alliterative phrase “waste of waters” lingers in Bernard’s consciousness for the rest of the novel; he even calls it “a meaningless observation, but to me, solemn, slate-coloured, with a fatal sound of ruining worlds and waters falling to destruction” (135). When Bernard (alliterating again) prescribes a private, emotional connotation to the sound of “waste of waters,” it feels like Woolf is directly telling her reader to listen to this sound. If one does listen, the “fatal sound” of this phrase appears countless times in the novel. The random intrusion of “waste of waters” in Bernard’s head is actually just one iteration of a novel-long phonetic trajectory: a simple alliterative pair from the prelude—“*white water*”—slips through various semantic meanings until finally appearing as a figurative “waxen waistcoat” that Bernard sheds in his final soliloquy (3, 177). One can speculate that the phrase, “waste of waters,” randomly intrudes in his head *because of* the sounds that have been lingering on the fringes of consciousness throughout the soliloquies and interludes.

⁵⁸ As I mentioned earlier, Chun explores this moment in “Between Sensation and Sign.” For her, the word “fin” is most important, because it demonstrates the way a “word itself is mysteriously, irrationally tied to an inarticulable synesthetic sensation” (62).

The /w/ alliteration is pervasive, but only in moments that warrant it. It crops up when Louis tries to affirm his identity during the late reunion of the six friends at Hampton Court: “I beg you to notice...I wear a white waistcoat now” (157). Years later, when Bernard reflects on the destruction caused by the separation of the six friends, the sonic memory of the “waste of waters” still lingers, although Woolf makes no semantic reference. Bernard laments, “The wax—the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us” (173). The sound of the /w/ pair must still sound like “ruining worlds” to Bernard because the sound underscores their suffering: “Our white wax was streaked and stained by each of [life’s events] differently...We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies” (173). The “waste of waters” is at once absent (a textual memory from two sections back, possibly forgotten in the reader’s mind) and spectrally present (the emotional meanings lingers in the sounds even when the words are different).⁵⁹

These elusive, but ever-present sensory effects allow Woolf to present her dilemma and her solution in one breath: she overtly acknowledges that she cannot describe the universal “thing” beneath conscious experience, but then also finds a way for her reader to sense the existence of that “thing.” This approach is not exactly stream of consciousness writing, but a new way of representing the consciousness as a universal experience, instead of as something that can be subjected to narrative. When the rhythm of life bubbles up into a soliloquy, the reader feels the impulse that Woolf envisions behind daily life and the will to survive:

⁵⁹ One other noteworthy moment when a /w/ sequence crops up is during Bernard’s final soliloquy, while he discusses the moment of fusion at Hampton Court: “half-way through dinner, we felt enlarge itself round us the huge blackness of what is outside us, of what we are not. The wind, the rush of wheels became the roar of time, and we rushed--where? And who were we?” (200). Note that this moment also deals with the subject of group identity versus individual identity.

Muscles, nerves, intestines, blood-vessels, all that makes the coil and spring of our being, the unconscious hum of the engine, as well as the dart and flicker of the tongue, functioned superbly. Opening, shutting; shutting, opening; eating, drinking; sometimes speaking—the whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mainspring of a clock. Toast and butter, coffee and bacon, *The Times* and letters... (Bernard 187)

When alliterations and internal rhymes become as apparent as to draw the reader's attention away from the soliloquy itself and to the novel's poetic construction, the reader feels Woolf redirecting away from narrative and to something else:

With dispassionate despair, with entire disillusionment, I surveyed the dust dance; my life, my friends' lives, and those fabulous presences, men with brooms, women writing, the willow tree by the river—clouds and phantoms made of dust too, of dust that changed, as clouds lose and gain and take gold or red and lose their summits and billow this way and that, mutable, vain. (Bernard 204-5)

In *The Waves*, sound does not only surface in Woolf's prose at climactic moments, but it dwells beneath the narrative at all times, detached from semantics and grounded in emotional, sensory feeling. In her own way, Woolf has constructed a consciousness machine, too—only it is the whole novel. What happens dozens of times in *Tender Buttons*, within each segment, happens gradually throughout *The Waves*. Stein's consonant clusters can make a thunderstorm crash in her reader's ear within the two lines of "MILDRED'S UMBRELLA." But *The Waves* entails a slow, immaterial encounter: the misty perception of Woolf's "universal something" materializes in her reader's mind, but only in glimpses. As I experienced with "Melanctha," the project of pinning down the consciousness of *The Waves*, of subjecting it to analysis, ran me headlong into an issue that sounds something like Woolf's own artistic obstacle: how does one represent the

full gestalt of an experience in words? The way that *The Waves* resists this treatment further suggests that Woolf has succeeded in her project of presenting the whole of conscious experience. The journey that began with *Mrs. Dalloway* ends here. Woolf has extracted “the invincible thread of sound” that she uncovered in *Mrs. Dalloway*; and with that thread, she stitches together a readerly experience of consciousness.

* * *

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology (Éléments De Sémiologie)*. Translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, Communications, 1964.
- Bennett, Chad. "Scratching the Surface: Tender Buttons and the Textures of Modernism." *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 1, Spring 2017, pp. 21-49.
- Bergson, Henri. *Mind-Energy*. Henry Holt and Company. 1920.
- . *Creative Evolution*. Henry Holt and Company. 1907.
- . *La Pensée et le mouvant*. Alcan: Paris, 1934.
- Berry, Ellen E. *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Binnin, John Malcolm. *The Third Rose; Gertrude Stein and Her World*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1959.
- Brown, Calvin S. "The Relations between Music and Literature as a Field of Study." 1970.
- Chevallier, Flore. "'Grammar. In a Breath': Breathing in Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons." *Literature Compass*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 448-460.
- Chun, Maureen. "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of *The Waves*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012.
- Clements, Elicia. "Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*." *Narrative*, vol. 13, no. 2, May 2005, pp. 160-181.
- Curnutt, Kirk. *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*. Greenwood, 2000.
- Delville, Michel. "Gertrude Stein's Melodies: In Anticipation of the Loop." *Texas Studies in Literature & Language*, vol. 55, no. 1, Spring 2013, pp. 73-83.

- Derrida, Jacques and Gayatri Chakravorty, 1942, tr. Spivak. *Of Grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Dujardin, Edouard. *Le monologue intérieur: son apparition, ses origines, sa place dans l'œuvre de James Joyce et dans le roman contemporain*. Paris : Albert Messein, 1931.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "WOOLFENSTEIN." *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 99–114.
- Ford, Sara J. *Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens: The Performance of a Modern Consciousness*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Frattarola, Angela. "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 33, no. 1, Fall2009, p. 132.
- Friedman, Melvin J. *Stream of Consciousness: a Study in Literary Method*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1955.
- Hafley, James Robert. *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist*. University of California Press, 1954.
- Hoffman, Michael J. *The Development of Abstractionism in the Writings of Gertrude Stein*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966.
- Holcombe, Alex O., et al. "A Developmental Theory of Synaesthesia, with Long Historical Roots: A Comment on Hochel & Milán (2008)." *Cognitive Neuropsychology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2009, pp. 227–229.
- Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1954.

Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. MacMillian and Company, 1890.

---. *The Principles of Psychology Volume 2*. MacMillian and Company, 1890.

James, Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916.

Kaufmann, Michael Edward. "Gertrude Stein's Re-Vision of Language and Print in *Tender Buttons*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 15, no. 4, Spring89, p. 447. EBSCOhost.

Kumar, Shiv. *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*. New York University Press, 1963.

Liikkanen, Laissi A. "Music in Everymind: Commonality of Involuntary Musical Imagery." In *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of Music Perception and Cognition*. Sapporo, Japan. 2008.

Laurence, Patricia Oudek. *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford University Press, 1991.

Marchiselli, Chani Anine. "Queer Sonorities: Sound as Persuasion in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*." *Women's Studies in Communication*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2016, pp. 69-85.

Mildenberg, Ariane. "Seeing Fine Substances Strangely: Phenomenology in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*." *Studia Phaenomenologica*, vol. 8, 2008, pp. 259-282.

Miller, J. Hillis. "Time in Literature." *Daedalus*, vol. 132, no. 2. 2003.

Mix, Deborah M. *A Vocabulary of Thinking: Gertrude Stein and Contemporary North American Women's Innovative Writing*. Iowa City, University Of Iowa Press, 2007.

Mujumdar, Robin, and Allen McLaurin, eds. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

Myers-Schulz, Blake et al., “Inherent Emotional Quality of Human Speech Sounds.” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp. 1105–1113. 2013.

Naremore, James. *The World Without Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel*. Yale University Press, 1973.

Pedersen, Birgitte Stougaard. “Voice and Presence in Music and Literature: Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*.” *On Voice*, Rodopi, pp. 117–128. *Word and Music Studies*. 2014.

Perloff, Marjorie, and Craig Douglas. Dworkin. *The Sound of Poetry: The Poetry of Sound*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2009.

Richter, Harvena. *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

Ruddick, Lisa. *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*. Ithaca, Cornell UP. 1990.

Ryan, Judith. “Each One as She May: Melanctha, Tonka, Nadja.” *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism*. Columbia University Press, 1989.

Stein, Gertrude. *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*. Ed. Carl Van Vechten. Vintage Books, 1990.

---, and Seth Perlow. *Tender Buttons*. 1914. San Francisco: City Lights, 2014.

---, and Marianne DeKoven. *Three Lives; and, Q.E.D.: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. 1st ed., New York, W.W. Norton, 2006.

---. “Composition as Explanation.” Hogarth Press, 1926. EPC Digital Library.

http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Stein_Composition-as-Explanation.html

---. “Portraits and Repetition.” *Lectures in America*. Beacon Press, 1935.

Sutherland, Donald. *Gertrude Stein: a Biography of Her Work*. Yale University Press, 1951.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader*. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. 1925. New York: Harcourt Inc, 1984.

---. *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1925. London: The Hogarth Press, 1968. Print.

---. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Hogarth Press, 1927. Print.

---. *The Waves*. 1931: Hogarth Press, London. Print.

Vandivere, Julie. "Waves and Fragments: Linguistic Construction as Subject Formation in Virginia Woolf." *Twentieth Century Literature (Twentieth Century Literature)*, vol. 42, no. 2, Summer 1996, p. 221. EBSCOhost.